

Monitor Audio Silver RX8 Speaker System

PRICE: \$4,400 **AT A GLANCE:** Unique design with proprietary components • Seamless top-to-bottom coherence • Wide dynamic contrast • See-through transparency and clarity

Bringing Home the Silver

One benefit that comes from the development of flagship products like Monitor Audio's

Platinum PL300-based home theater speaker package (*HT*, October 2009) is that the technology often filters down into less expensive models in the manufacturer's line. Of course, it won't surprise you to hear that the ribbon tweeters, sculpted cabinets, and leather trim found in that \$25,000-plus Platinum set haven't made it into the \$4,400 Silver RX8 system under review here. But refinement, elegance, and most importantly, high value and superb performance are still very much part of the package.

Silvered Cones and Golden Domes

Like all of Monitor Audio's speakers, the Silver RX models are engineered in Monitor Audio's facilities in the U.K. and manufactured at the company's plant in China. The gorgeous Rosenut veneer on our samples is the best simulation of genuine rosewood I've ever seen. Magnets buried beneath the veneer hold the grilles in place, so there's no visible grille-attachment hardware.

Looks are important, but more importantly, the Silver RX's high-tech genes are evident from the first look at their front baffles. The cones in all of the woofers and midrange drivers are made of C-CAM and use Monitor Audio's Rigid Surface Technology (RST) cone profiles. With variations, Monitor has used C-CAM in all of its premium speakers over the past few years. It was first developed for turbine blades in jet engines. C-CAM is an alloy of aluminum and magnesium

coated under high temperature with a thin layer of pure ceramic (alumina). The result is a strong, rigid, low-mass structure half the thickness a human hair. The cones also have small, golf-ball-like dimples in their surfaces for additional stiffness. The silver-bullet dust caps at the drivers' centers resemble phase plugs, but they move with the cone. True phase plugs are fixed to the pole piece at the center of the voice coil and remain stationary while the cone moves around them.

The tweeter diaphragms are also made of C-CAM. They have a golden appearance but are not made of real gold. (Gold would be too heavy and soft for a tweeter, I would think, even in a thin coating.) Instead, it's simply a color that Monitor applies during the anodizing process. A touch of golden color on the tweeters is a trademark of Monitor Audio speakers. The company has only broken this chain with the ribbon tweeters in the Platinum line.

Whereas most speakers use screws or bolts to hold the drivers in place from the front, the RX series uses threaded rods that screw into threaded holes at the back of each woofer and midrange driver. These rods extend to the rear of the cabinet, where connector bolts firmly fasten them. You can see the bolt heads on the back panel. The rods and bolts securely anchor the drivers to the cabinet. At the same time, they act as braces to increase the cabinet's rigidity.

Two sets of terminals on the

back of each full-range speaker let you biwire or biamp the speaker. The plinth at the bottom of the RX8 provides stability for the narrow cabinet. Its feet come with either spikes or soft protective pads. These pads are removable and fell off easily as I moved the speaker around and into position. It's easy to put them back on, provided you don't lose them. Monitor Audio might want to consider packing a few extra pads with each speaker.

Apart from the RX Centre and the RXW-12 subwoofer, the Silver RX speakers all are ported. According to Monitor Audio, the three-way RX8's drivers are specified to cross over at 300 hertz and 2.2 kilohertz, while the RX1's woofer-to-tweeter transition is at 3 kHz. The RX Centre is a 2.5-way design, and both of its woofers operate up to 500 Hz. One of them rolls off above this, while the other continues on to meet the

tweeter at 2.2 kHz.

The Silver RXW-12 subwoofer is a small but impressive beast with a 12-inch C-CAM-coned



SPECS

SPEAKER:	RX8	RX CENTRE	RX1
TYPE:	Three-way, floorstander	2.5-way, center	Two-way, surround
TWEETER:	1, C-CAM dome	1, C-CAM dome	1, C-CAM dome
MIDRANGE (SIZE IN INCHES, TYPE):	6, RDT/C-CAM	6, RDT/C-CAM	None
WOOFER (SIZE IN INCHES, TYPE):	2 x 6, RDT/C-CAM	6, RDT/C-CAM	6, RDT
NOMINAL IMPEDANCE (OHMS):	4	6	6
RECOMMENDED AMP POWER (WATTS):	50-175	40-125	25-80
AVAILABLE FINISHES (ALL):	Black Oak, Walnut, Natural Oak, Rosanut, Black Lacquer, White Lacquer		
DIMENSIONS (W X H X D, INCHES):	10.9 x 37.9 x 15.25	19.7 x 7.4 x 7.9	7.32 x 12.32 x 9.43
WEIGHT (POUNDS):	47.9	21.1	15
PRICE (VENEERS):	\$1,750/pair	\$675 each	\$675/pair
PRICE (BLACK OR WHITE LACQUER):	\$2,000/pair	\$800 each	\$800/pair

driver and a 500-watt RMS (1,000 watts peak) Class D amplifier. It offers all of the usual features: Phase, Power Mode (On/Off/Auto), Frequency (low pass from 40 Hz to 120 Hz, defeatable via a

Low Pass Filter switch), a 12-volt trigger, and line-level stereo inputs and outputs. The latter are passthrough only. The sub doesn't have high-pass filters; that's a job for your A/V receiver or surround processor. The Level control is conveniently located on top, along with two EQ options: EQ1 and EQ2. Monitor says that EQ1 provides response to 27 Hz at an unspecified down point. EQ2 is similarly specified to reach 21 Hz.

Setup

I positioned the RX8s about 9 feet apart to the left and right of my projection screen. I toed them in toward the main listening position in my 26-by-15.5-by-8-foot home theater studio. When just music was on the program, I retracted the projection screen. I placed the RX Centre on a low stand below the screen and set up the RX1 surrounds on stands in the back of the room. I located the subwoofer behind the center speaker. All of the front speakers were 2 feet or more (mostly more) from any adjoining walls, and they fired down the long dimension of the room. The seating position was about 10 feet from the plane of

the speakers.

Small changes to toe-in and tilt resulted in subtle but meaningful changes in the RX8's overall balance. I got the best results with a small tilt back (just enough that I couldn't see the top of the speaker from my center listening seat) and enough toe-in so that I could just see the far sides of the left and right enclosures.

I didn't biamp the speakers or use spikes, and I removed the grilles. My review system also included a Parasound Halo A51 power amp, Integra DTC-9.8 surround processor, Pioneer BDP-320 (for Blu-ray) and Pioneer Elite DV-79AVi (for CD) players, and vintage cables from Monster Cable, Cardas, and Kimber.

Listening: Two-Channel Music

My in-room measurements indicated that the RX8s exhibited an abrupt peak in their response from about 80 Hz to 100 Hz and dropped off rapidly below about 60 Hz. With the RXW-12 sub crossed over at 80 Hz, this upper-bass peak was a bit less aggressive, but it was still prominent. With the sub dialed in and set to EQ2, the low end extended down to a clean 25 Hz. Although the response was clearly well into its bottom-end rolloff by that point, I heard no sign of doubling. Doubling is second-harmonic distortion where an overdriven driver produces twice the input frequency. This doubled frequency is often high enough in level to mask the fundamental.

I generally avoid equalization in speaker reviews. However, in this case, I used the equalization from the Audyssey system in my Integra surround processor. It compensated for the RX system's midbass emphasis in my room, with or without the sub. Monitor

provides foam plugs to block the front ports, but in my room, that made matters a little worse overall. However, many surround processors offer crossover settings that you can adjust separately for each full-range channel, plus the subwoofer. I chose a 120-Hz high pass for the main front speakers and an 80-Hz low pass for the subwoofer. The midbass problem was still present, but its level was significantly reduced.

Despite the RX8's midbass peak in my room, I spent many enjoyable hours listening to two-channel music with them, without the subwoofer. The bass from these speakers, au natural, was sometimes overly ripe. Organ could sound a little smeared, and bass transients were a bit soft. But the ear adjusts, and on most program sources, the RX8's bottom end was impressively powerful and, dare I say, majestic. It may not extend super deep under measurement, and I definitely recommend a sub for full home theater chores. Still, with most bass-heavy music, the ear says that it goes further down, with more power, than any speaker of its size with two 6-inch bass drivers has a right to. As a bonus, the pressure from the front ports will ruffle your trousers.

At the time of this writing, our audio tech editor hadn't conducted the tests for the "HT Labs Measures" sidebar. That will tell you how the RX8's bass measures when it's free of room influences. I switched on the sub in my room, configured it as described above, and level-set it for the best balance with a wide range of bass-rich music. In this setup, the RX8 and RXW-12 really came into their own. Bass lines tightened up dramatically. True awesomeness on sub-base-ment organ frequencies and maximum impact on the most powerful soundtracks is still the province of much larger super-subs. Still, the bass from the Monitor system was as impressive as any I've heard in my listening room.

There's more to music playback than bass, and the RX8 is also a champ elsewhere. Depth is good if it's present in the program source. Imaging is precise, including the locked-in center images that are a consistent



HT Labs
Measures

Visit our Website for a detailed explanation of our testing regimen, plus a list of our reference gear.

on the web



SPECS
RXW-12 SUBWOOFER ENCLOSURE TYPE: Sealed
WOOFER (SIZE IN INCHES, TYPE): 12, C-CAM
RATED POWER (WATTS): 500 RMS (100 peak)
CONNECTIONS: Line-level in/out **CROSSOVER BYPASS:** Yes **AVAILABLE FINISHES:** Black Oak, Walnut, Natural Oak, Rosenuit wood veneer, Black Lacquer, White Lacquer **DIMENSIONS (W X H X D, INCHES):** 13.4 x 13.4 x 16.13 **WEIGHT (POUNDS):** 49.6 **PRICE:** \$1,300 (Lacquer Finish: \$1,550)

characteristic of my room and setup. The RX8's neutral midrange lacks any identifiable coloration, and its high end sparkles with detail. It's a lively, arresting sound, with no false emphasis anywhere. Close in, my on-axis in-room measurements indicate that the RX8's response increases progressively at the top end, beginning at about 6 kHz. However, from my listening position, the response through the midrange and highs was admirably smooth to at least 10 kHz, with a gentle rolloff above that point. The speakers still sounded a little too enthusiastic in

the treble with bright recordings at high (but not unreasonable) playback levels. The speaker isn't a shrinking violet, and it won't hide the flaws of substandard amps, sources, or program material. But with good recordings, the speaker's clean, open sound knocked me out.

Listening to Movies—and More
 Funny thing about symphonic music. Most speakers, including the RX8, don't do as well with this type of source material in two-channel playback than they do with smaller instrumental

ensembles. But with the Silver RX speakers and sub, firing on all cylinders, orchestral soundtrack scores sounded spectacular. The system produces a big, generous soundstage on big, generous film scores, including Randy Newman's Coplandesque music for *The Natural*, John Powell's quirky work on *Horton Hears a Who!* (don't miss the spectacular "We Are Here" demo-worthy sequence in chapter 28), and Howard Shore's monumental effort for the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

The Silver RX system also left little to be desired with smaller-scale multichannel concert video discs. *Legends of Jazz with Ramsey Lewis: Showcase* is a beautifully recorded and varied recording of small-scale ensembles. From vocals to drum kit to piano and instrumental shadings of all varieties in between, the sound through the Monitor system was luscious.

If I have any issue with the system, it is with the RX Centre. Like all horizontally arrayed woofer-tweeter-woofer centers, its off-axis performance can be uneven. True, the speaker was no worse than average in this respect, and the problem isn't likely to bother most listeners. But I wish that Monitor—and more than a few other high-end speaker makers—would offer more three-way center designs. That is, center speakers with two woofers flanking a vertically oriented mid/tweeter array. A fully horizontal array of drivers is always a compromise.

When I turned the RX Centre 90 degrees so that it sat vertically, the system as a whole snapped into better focus. In particular, dialogue reproduction was more consistent. But you'll need to make certain that the fuller-range woofer in this 2.5-way design is nearest to the screen. (Hint: As you face the front of the

speaker in its usual horizontal orientation, it's the driver on the left.) I know—a vertical arrangement is awkward. But it's easier to arrange in today's flat-panel world than it was in the era of RPTV behemoths.

Once I solved my center-channel concerns and optimized the subwoofer and main-channel response as I described earlier, the Silver RX setup really came together. No single piece of material I auditioned blew me away more than the opening 15 minutes of *Star Trek* (2009). Music, effects, dialogue, and bass all came together in a spectacular way. Even at the highest playback level I could stand, the sound was highly detailed and never grating.

Conclusions
 I spent many long listening sessions with the Silver RX8 system, both with and without the RXW-12 sub. I always found it difficult to shut it off and drag myself back to the word processor—or off to bed. On more than one occasion, I went into the listening room intending to sample a little music and then move on to movies, but I ended up spending the entire session with music—either with the sub or without. When movie time came, the system the same can't-drag-myself-away experience. I won't say that the Silver RX system will kill sales of the glorious Monitor Audio Platinum setup I reviewed last year. But I can say that for less than half the price of a pair of PL300s alone, this Silver RX system is a very special value—and an incredible ride. 🍷

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