

REL R-218

by Jason Kennedy

The R-218 is a fairly compact not quite cuboid subwoofer that stands 13.6 inches high on its aluminium feet. It has a down firing ten inch paper drive unit and a class D amplifier designed in-house by Bill Herman for grip with green credentials. The cabinet itself is more complex than it appears with an MDF exterior bonded to a marine ply inner box in order to increase stiffness. The feet are also higher than they were on the preceding Series R to allow for a longer throw driver which in turn should mean greater power.

The controls drive high, LFE and low level inputs with the former being recommended for stereo 2.1 systems and connected by a Neutrik Speakon plug that is supplied with acres of cable. I have one complaint about this cable and that's that you need to look at the manual to establish that the yellow core is positive on the right channel, black is negative and red positive on the left channel. Labelling would be great here. Placement and set-up are more complex than with regular speakers. REL recommends a corner on either side of the speakers and gives comprehensive notes and material suggestions for the process. It took a while but in the end I had managed to augment the bottom end of PMC Fact.8 floorstanders with the R-218 in an integrated and coherent fashion. However by the next day there was too much bass so I turned down both level and crossover by a couple of degrees.

And a lot of fun it is too, but not in quite the way I was expecting. For a start the 218 does not extend the bass dramatically further than the Fact.8. It does however unearth plenty of low notes that are beyond the speaker's reach and that is the point after all, I suspect that if I want to feel an anvil hitting the deck one of the bigger subs will be required. What I heard however was more

than enough to make the R-218 seem quite a useful addition to the system. Oddly it has a similar effect to a super tweeter, expanding the scale of the soundstage significantly on pretty much everything you play, regardless of whether there are serious low notes in the mix. You can hear what the air was doing during the recording, which seems odd but it's another way of saying that the reverberant characteristics are better presented so that the scale of the environment is clearer. Kraftwerk's *Tour De France* has some nice low notes on it, not least on 'Elektrokardiogram', which can be uncomfortable with ▶



► some full range speakers. Here however it made more sense, you could feel the depth but the REL exerts sufficient control to stop it becoming distorted.

One effect that will suit some better than others is a slight smoothing of the midrange. I enjoyed the relaxation that the R-218 brings to the presentation, but can imagine that those looking for a more intense presentation might not. It's hard to understand why this should occur but one possibility is that the sonic picture is less black and white, you can hear more of the harmonics and so transients are not so clear cut. One benefit is that you can play at higher volume levels without discomfort; on James Blake's 'Limit to Your Love' the bass drum really connects to the room, so much so that a door started to rattle, but there's no getting away from its visceral appeal.

I also like the way that the REL digs out low notes that had previously been only hinted at, on Laura Marling's 'Breathe' for instance the bass drum has far more depth and reverb on it than previously encountered. It's also important to point out that timing is not affected by the presence of this sub, the leading edges still take charge in this respect and the sub provides the back up but does not blur.

I also used the R-218 with Q-Acoustics' remarkable Concept 20 standmount, which is not only a more appropriate size but also available in the same finish. Here the extension was rather more marked and thus the

benefit greater, in all other respects the effects were the same. More finesse through the mids and highs, greater spaciousness in the image and a generally wider angle view of the music.

I suspect that a bigger sub would be more fun but the R-218 is a very effective and room friendly device in rather dashing attire. Having got used to it I realise that it's going to be difficult to let go, but such is the reviewer's lot (cue violins!). Actually violin sounds superb, somehow more natural because of the extra dimension that the sub brings out of the venue and because it gets rid of the grain in digital formats that instruments like this can reveal. It's a world of adventure with a sub like this I can tell you. +



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Down firing active woofer

Active Drive Unit: 10 in., 250mm long throw, steel chassis

Lower Frequency Response in Room: 25Hz at -6 dB

Input Connectors: Hi Level Neutrik Speakon, Lo Level single phono, LFE phono

Gain Control Range: 80 dB

Power Output: 250 watts (RMS)

Phase Switch: Yes, 0 or 180 degrees

Amplifier Type: Class D

Protection System Fully Electronic with SET SAFE: Dimensions (WHD), Including Feet: 12 x 13.6 x 12.5 in., (305 x 346 x 318 mm)

Net Weight: 29 lbs. (13.2 kg)

Finish: Gloss Piano Black or White Lacquer
Supplied Accessories Mains Lead, Neutrik Speakon Interconnect 10 Meters Nominal

Price: £850

Manufacturer: REL Acoustics

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