



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
5.1-channel
speaker package

POSITIONING:
Entry-level range,
below Platinum,
Gold and Silver

PEERS:
B&W 683 Theatre;
Acoustic Energy
1-Series

At 16.5cm wide, the Bronze 5 floorstanders should be easy to accommodate



Danny Phillips goes hunting for audio thrills with Monitor Audio's well-priced 5.1 package

Worthy of a podium finish

DESCRIBED BY MONITOR Audio as its most 'democratically priced' speaker range, Bronze represents the bottom rung on the company's floorstanding speaker ladder. Yet like any good affordable package it absorbs the best bits of tech from its upper-tier siblings while driving down costs in other areas.

While above it sit MA's Silver, Gold and Platinum Series, this line has traditionally been one of Monitor Audio's biggest sellers. The company can't afford to rest on its laurels, though. Brands like Q Acoustics, Wharfedale and Tannoy have been shaking up the sub/sat market to such an extent that some will be wondering if an affordable floorstanding package is worth the bother.

Things get off to a good start with news that this new entry-level lineup – the successor to 2010's Bronze BX range – boasts driver and cabinet upgrades all designed to take its performance up a notch.

The most significant of these is the new dished C-CAM (Ceramic-Coated Aluminium/Magnesium) driver, which uses the entire surface of the cone to radiate sound and removes the hole in the middle – previously occupied by a phase plug on the Bronze BX speakers – to keep the cone as stiff as possible and stop it losing the plot when driven hard. The voice coil is thermally coupled to the back of the cone, drawing away heat and improving power handling.

Meet the team

The new Bronze Series consists of seven models, including two standmounts (the Bronze 1 and the larger Bronze 2); two floorstanders (Bronze 5 and 6); a centre enclosure (Bronze Centre); a dipole/bipole surround (Bronze FX); and the all-important W10 subwoofer, which has been engineered specifically for this range.

The system here includes a pair of Bronze 5s, which use two midbass drivers compared

with three on the Bronze 6. They're joined by the Centre, a pair of Bronze FX and the W10.

All of the speakers come in a choice of Black Oak, Walnut, Rosemah and White Ash finishes. Here you'll find a concession to the system's entry-level status – the vinyl veneer is much less impressive than the sumptuous lacquers adorning the step-up Gold series, and there's no upgrade option.

But this cheaper finish doesn't stop the Bronze 5 being a stunning floorstander. I've long felt that Monitor Audio simply doesn't know the meaning of the word ugly. You get a slender, elegant cabinet that stands a surprisingly manageable 850mm high. It's adorned with subtly curved edges and a magnetic cloth grille that keeps the drivers hidden – great if you like the minimal look, but for my money they're prettier naked.

The two 5.5in C-CAM cones (one midbass, the other a dedicated bass unit) have been engineered in steel grey for the first time and add a flash of shiny glamour to the otherwise refined cabinet.

Caged behind a solid metal mesh at the top of the front baffle is a 1in C-CAM gold dome tweeter. Tweaks here include structural improvements to dome geometry and the drive mechanism, which work towards better accuracy at the top-end of the frequency range. Meanwhile, a new venting system reduces distortion by moving air past the magnet system into a rear loading chamber.

The sealed centre speaker is on the large side but is styled with equal panache.

The Bronze FX have dual tweeters mounted in angled baffles, with a single



Bi-amping the front L/R speakers is an option

forward-firing midbass driver. They can be fixed flush to a side or rear wall. Running a 7.1 array? Grab an extra pair of these for £280.

What's great about the Bronze system is that it caters for different listening tastes. For example, the Bronze FX speakers can be used in dipole mode for those who prefer a more diffuse sound, while those who like it directional can go for bipole. Choosing is as easy as flicking a switch.

The W10 subwoofer (which features a 10in driver, 10in passive bass radiator and 200W amp) offers similar flexibility. There are Music,

'A tremendous entry-level system that backs up its rousing, insightful sound with superb build quality'

Movie and Impact EQ DSP modes tailored to different bass tastes, plus separate mono LFE and stereo line inputs for movie and music use respectively.

If this all sounds familiar, it will be because these feature tricks are the same as offered on Monitor Audio's Gold Series, reviewed recently in *HCC* #251. The Bronze package is very much cut from the same design cloth – albeit with smaller enclosures/drivers and an accepted drop in performance.

Rich and refined

I said 'drop', but I doubt many buyers of the Bronze array will care. For the price tag demanded, this sextet of cabinets proves rather spectacular. It's rich in power and

dynamics but with the overarching sense of refinement that characterises all of the company's output.

After loading *Snow White and the Huntsman* into my Oppo Blu-ray deck, and with the speakers plumbed into my Onkyo AVR, they impress right from the off. Chris Hemsworth's opening narration has fabulous depth and presence through the Bronze Centre, with a gruff, grainy texture and nuances making it utterly realistic.

The C-CAM tweeters used across the system claim a high frequency response up to 30kHz. In practice, this means none of the movie's top-end detail goes awry. The quiet that precedes *Snow White's* encounter with the troll is bristling with subtle ambience like trickling water and rustling leaves. The clarity is entrancing.

There's an organic feel to these details that not every speaker system can achieve, but appears to be second nature here. Treble effects are voiced with no hardness or straining even when driven at high volumes.

The system's presentation is poised and organised even in the face of a sonic onslaught. When the angry troll starts smashing up the scenery, the MA set makes sense of every effect no matter how small, from splintering wood to splashing water.

This lucid, natural approach lets you lose yourself in the story without even realising there are speakers in the room. That's the measure of a great system.

The soundfield is well-built. The Bronze Centre and 5s construct a focused, muscular front stage with deep bass, making the troll's roar sound massive. The Bronze FXs play their part too, filling the back of my room with rich, three-dimensional sonics. In the midst of the shouty battle with *Ravenna's* glass soldiers, these wall-huggers render the shattering glass and metallic swordplay clearly.

The surrounds offer plenty of detail and decent (but not remarkable) bass depth. I experimented with both dipole and bipole modes and found the positional accuracy of the latter slightly more satisfying, but this will come down to personal preference.

The subwoofer is a real powerhouse too, helping the system make a massive impact. Bass notes are big and visceral, with admirable agility and slam.

Occasionally I yearned for a little more edge, just to lift the excitement levels even further. This array's smooth character and ability to remain calm is a virtue in most cases – and pays dividends when playing music – but if you like a little more grit there are more forceful, forward-sounding systems out there.

On the whole, though, this is a tremendous entry-level offering, backing up its rousing, insightful sound with top-drawer design and build quality. It looks and sounds like it should cost a lot more than it does ■

SPECIFICATIONS

BRONZE 5

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5.5in C-CAM bass driver; 1 x 5.5in C-CAM mid-bass driver; 1 x in gold dome C-CAM tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Dual-chamber bass reflex with front and rear HiVe II ports
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 37Hz-30kHz
SENSITIVITY: 90dB
POWER HANDLING: 120W
DIMENSIONS: 850(h) x 165(w) x 248(d)mm
WEIGHT: 11kg

BRONZE CENTRE

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 5.5in C-CAM mid-bass drivers; 1 x 1in gold dome C-CAM tweeter
ENCLOSURE: Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 60Hz-30kHz
SENSITIVITY: Not given
POWER HANDLING: 120W
DIMENSIONS: 165(w) x 460(h) x 165(d)mm
WEIGHT: 5.6kg

BRONZE FX

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 5.5in C-CAM mid-bass driver; 2 x 1in gold dome C-CAM tweeters
ENCLOSURE: Sealed
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 65Hz-30kHz
SENSITIVITY: 88dB
POWER HANDLING: 80W
DIMENSIONS: 274(w) x 276(h) x 105(d)mm
WEIGHT: 3.2kg

W10 (SUBWOOFER)

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 10in long-throw bass driver; 1 x 10in flat panel ABR
ENCLOSURE: Bass reflex
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 30Hz-120Hz
ON BOARD POWER: 220W
REMOTE CONTROL: No
DIMENSIONS: 320(w) x 320(h) x 330(d)mm
WEIGHT: 12.9kg
CONNECTIONS: LFE input; stereo line input

HCC VERDICT



Monitor Audio Bronze B5 AV

→ £1,500 approx → www.monitoraudio.co.uk
 → Tel: 01268 740580
HIGHS: Robust build quality; elegant design; muscular bass; immersive soundstage; impressive detail and insight
LOWS: Could be more attacking and forward-sounding; vinyl veneer finish with no lacquer option

Performance ★★★★★
 Design ★★★★★
 Features ★★★★★
Overall ★★★★★