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Hot House PRM 165



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has a month-long run with Hot House's latest product offerings, the PRM 165 nearfield monitors and the Model Six Hundred amplifier, a part Hot House's newly-redesigned amp line.

PASSIVE REFERENCE MONITORS & SIX HUNDRED AMPLIFIER

The PRM 165 is the first closefield monitor released by Hot House Professional Audio, a company perhaps best known for their large, extremely high-powered main monitors. The PRM 165 is a passive speaker, and the review pair was delivered with a Hot House Model Six Hundred High-Resolution Control Room Amplifier, a lovely piece of gear which I will cover later in this review. At 25 pounds (11.3kg), a PRM 165 is a fairly hefty package despite the lack of an internal power amp. The cabinet is rear ported, heavily braced and uses a six-and-a-half-inch woofer and one-inch dome tweeter. It measures 12.5 by 8.5 by 13 inches (HxWxD), and it has a nominal impedance of 8Ω.

According to Hot House, the PRM 165 was optimized for the "flattest, most accurate presentation possible in real-world studio environments." Accordingly, the frequency response measurements cited are typical half-space response measurements. This means that the speakers were measured with a wall behind them, which changes the low-frequency response of the cabinets (the difference between half-space and free-field measurements would typically impact mostly the low end). In any case, the published measurements are ±1dB from 300 to 15kHz and ±1.75dB from 60 to 19kHz. The low-end response of the PRM 165 is -3dB at 50Hz and -10dB at 40Hz. This isn't as dire as it sounds, of course; in a typical quarter-field environment (i.e. if the PRM 165 is pre placed in or near a

corner), the bass response could increase by up to 10dB. In addition, a subwoofer such as Hot House's ASB 112 subwoofer can be added to the system.

Monitor Set Up

The main control room at Java Jive is 18 feet wide and 22 feet long, and the monitor stands are approximately three feet from the (heavily treated) front wall. I mention this mostly to point out two issues: First, monitors don't get much help from proximity to a nearby wall, and second, it's a fairly large room for a pair of closefield speakers to fill. I initially placed the PRM 165s on monitor stands, which form an equilateral triangle with the mix position, but found that they provided better imaging in my room when moved farther apart — more like a right triangle. The Hot House power amp was placed on the floor between the two speakers, and all cable runs were as short as was feasible. I used the PRM 165s for over a month on a wide range of projects.

The PRM 165 In Use

There seems to be a bit of a tendency among designers of closefield monitors these days to emphasize the top and bottom frequencies, in some cases to the point that it seems as though there's a "smiley face" EQ built in to the speaker. Thankfully, the PRM 165 doesn't follow that trend.

THE REVIEWER

Dave Martin is an engineer and musician in Nashville. He owns and operates Java Jive, a recording studio that can be viewed at www.javajivestudio.com. Before opening his facility in 2001, Dave claims that he used to have a lot more money and time than he does these days.

Low end is present, but doesn't seem to get "blocky" in the way that some front-ported monitors do. While the PRM 165 doesn't have the low-frequency extension that larger closefield (and midfield) speakers do, what is there is very workable. In the same manner, the top end doesn't seem hyped at all. This takes a bit of getting used to, and on first listening can make the PRM 165s seem a bit dark compared to some other speakers. But after a couple of days with them I got used to that, and mixes done with the Hot House monitors translated quite well into other listening environments. Of more concern to me with the PRM 165 is the upper mids, around the crossover point. I found that certain instruments — such as shakers, tambourine, mandolin and banjo — changed pretty dramatically depending on whether I listened to them on the PRM 165s or on one of my regular pairs of monitors. As to whether this discrepancy means that there are issues with the Hot House monitors or with my other speakers, I don't know.

When swapping between the Hot House speakers and an old pair of Tannoy 6.5s with both using the Hot House amplifier, the PRM 165s appeared to be a couple of dB quieter. Because of the volume differences between the Hot House monitors and the others in the studio, and the fact that the PRM 165's highs and lows are smooth rather than emphasized, I would characterize them as sounding a bit "distant" in comparison to my usual speakers.

PRM 165 Summary

It's not an easy task, choosing the right monitors. Not only must they fit the room dimensions and layout, they must also fit with the preferences and prejudices of the people using them. These preferences go far beyond a desire for accuracy (after all, one of the most widely used closefields of the last 15 years was anything but accurate), and into the murky waters of personal taste. The Hot House PRM 165s, while eminently useable (I completed a couple of projects using them as the main monitors, with others brought into service only to check and compare relative balances), are ultimately not the best choice for my room. I suspect that the room is a bit large and the wall nearest the monitors too

distant for them to show their best side. In addition, because of the size and positioning of my console, the PRM 165s may have been a bit farther away than their optimal distance. Lastly, I prefer the sound of a monitor that sounds a bit more "forward" than the Hot House for day-to-day use.

On the plus side, even when working for long periods (14-16 hour days) with them, they never caused ear fatigue. Mixes done using the Hot House monitors translated quite well to other listening environments. Those working in a more compact environment, like a typical DAW set-up, may well see the PRM 165s as ideal for their workspace. There are two versions of the PRM 165 — basic shielded and "hyper-shielded." There should be no problems setting up the hyper-shielded PRM 165 in close proximity to computer monitors, and given a healthy amount of power (admirably supplied by The Six Hundred Amplifier), they may be the perfect monitoring solution for smaller control rooms.

The Model Six Hundred

While some folks, especially "audiophile types", can rattle on for pages about the tonal characteristics of their favorite amplifiers — the "sweetness" of the top end, its "massive bass response," the "sparkling clarity of the mid-range" and so on, these phrases actually hide the simple fact that well-designed amplifiers should have none of these things. A power amp should make audio signals passing through it louder, and that's all that it should do. It should neither add any character of its own, nor should it mask any of the signal passing through it. That being said, the Model Six Hundred Amplifier, a new product from Hot House, is a well-designed amp.

Those who enjoy comparing specifications will find that the Model Six Hundred is no weakling in that department — THD+N ratings are below 0.005%, rise time is 1.5 microseconds, the damping factor at 1kHz is greater than 300, SN is greater than 105dB and the frequency response is 3Hz - 180kHz. The Model Six Hundred is rated at 200 watts RMS per channel at 8 Ohms, and 275 at 4 Ohms. The inputs to the Model Six Hundred are Neutrik combo XLR/TRS jacks, and the speaker connections are via Cliff five-way binding posts. The Model Six Hundred is three rack spaces

(5.25 inches) high and just over 11 inches deep.

The Model Six Hundred is fully differential from input to output, and utilizes a split-dual toroidal power supply. It uses "intelligent output device technology" rather than power transistors to increase the amp's reliability and stability. According to the manufacturer, use of these intelligent output devices allows the amp to have "all of the benefits of pure Class-A zero-feedback operation without any of the drawbacks".

Using The Six Hundred

The real test of a power amp, though, doesn't come from reading specs or manufacturer's descriptions — it comes from listening to it. The Model Six Hundred passed that test with flying colors. Over the course of a few weeks, I used the amp with several different pairs of speakers — the aforementioned Hot House Model 165s, my trusty pair of Tannoy 6.5 IIs (as well as a pair of the original 6.5s), some Dynaudio BM15s, and even an ancient but still reliable pair of Radio Shack Minimus 7s. Though some may feel that a 200 watt amp may be a bit underpowered for their closefields, I never noticed any lack of headroom with the Model Six Hundred, even when listening at fairly outrageous levels. However, for those who want more power than the Model Six Hundred offers, Hot House offers a 300 watt per channel (into 8 ohms) Model One Thousand.

Model Six Hundred Summary

Quite simply, what went into the power amp passed transparently through it to the speakers with no coloration, distortion or other artifacts. I was very happy with the sound of the Hot House Model Six Hundred — it did exactly what a power amp is supposed to do, and as I said at the outset, that's the hallmark of a well designed power amp. □

I N F O R M A T I O N

- \$ Hot House PRM 165 \$1,299; \$1,399 (hyper-shielded)**
- Hot House Six Hundred \$2,499; \$2698 (with mirror-finished front panel)**
- A 275 Martin Ave., Highland NY 12528**
- T 845 691 6077**
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