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REVIEWS

MACKIE HR824 AND HR624 STUDIO MONITORS

BATMAN & ROBIN



HR824

HR624

by **Rusty Cutchin**

Mackie made the home recording revolution possible in the early '90s, then disappeared from the radar screens of the budget-conscious for a few years while wowing pros with its Digital 8-Bus console and a spate of live sound products. In the last year, however, all that has changed as the company has reasserted its dominance in the project studio market with three 24-track digital hard disk recorders. A new line of budget mixers is on the way, and Mackie is heavily vested in the PC audio recording via Soundscape's products and its distribution of the Universal Audio UAD-1.

But perhaps the most far-reaching conquests have come from the company's line of monitors, spearheaded by the HR824 High Resolution Studio Monitor. Jumping to the front of another revolution, the adoption of active bi-amped monitors, the HR824s have also become the upstart champions in pro studios willing to add active monitoring to the passive obligatory stalwarts from Yamaha, KRK, and Genelec.

Mackie has now added the HR624s to the line, substituting 6" drivers for the 8s and coming in at a couple of hundred bucks less. For the studio owner who wants deeper bass or to use the entire line in a 5.1 mix environment or home theater, Mackie also offers the new HRS120, a 12" active subwoofer, and, like the others in the HRS series, THX-approved (so George Lucas himself can know the force was with you on that *Star Wars* remix).

SPEAKING UP

Setting up active monitors is easy, compared with the process of wiring up and troubleshooting a power amp/passive speaker combo. Mackie's documentation is some of the best in the business at facilitating setup, explaining functions, and being entertaining in the process. A quick-start guide in the

manuals of the 824s and 624s was true to form. After positioning the monitors in your studio, you simply connect the power cable and a line level signal from your mixer or audio interface output via XLR, balanced 1/4-inch, or unbalanced phono (RCA) cables. Plugs are inserted vertically into the monitor's rear panel, which allows closer placement to a rear wall. Once connected, the monitors can be adjusted to fit almost any room environment with the aid of several switches on the rear panel. An Acoustic Space switch provides slight EQ adjustments to compensate for corner, open space, and close-to-wall positioning. A High Freq. switch supplies 2 dB of cut or gain at 10 KHz to use if your mixes translate dull or bright, respectively. The Low Freq. switch attenuates frequencies below 80 Hz for use with a subwoofer or to simulate a small speaker. The 47 Hz setting provides normal low frequency response. On the HR824, the 37 Hz (Normal) setting supplies extended low frequency response. On both monitor styles, Mackie achieves extra low end by the inclusion of an elliptical passive radiator built into the rear of the cabinet. It radiates backward, using cabinet air to create more low bass and in the process obviating the need

for ports. The documentation urges careful placement and fine tuning of settings, as some rooms may reproduce too much bass, even from the 624s—a testament to Mackie's engineering. Both monitors boast twin amplifiers, supplying 150 watts to the woofer and 100 watts to the tweeter (HR824) and 100 watts/woofer, 40 watts/tweeter (HR 624).

Both monitors feature attenuation pots (infinity to 0 attenuation) and a handy Auto On mode that puts the amplifiers into a standby mode until signal is present at their inputs. Front panel LEDs indicate if the monitor is off, receiving signal (green), or in Standby (red).

DYNAMIC DUO

Mackie's HR series manuals and Web site are full of useful detailed information about the HR824 and HR624, but a glance at the frequency response graph for each monitor tells the tale. Passive monitors just don't achieve results that flat, and connecting and listening to these monitors bears out Mackie's claims of accuracy and extended lows.

After installing the HR824s and 624s, we initiated a series of listening tests, relying solely on CDs of different styles and periods

of music. After adjusting the Acoustic Space switch to the B position to reflect our studio's placement of monitors at the corners of a workstation and close to the (treated) rear wall, we began pumping music through them. After years of working with monitors in various pro studios, and becoming familiar with the often amazing sound of models from JBL, Genelec, and KRK as well as the studio standards set by Yamaha, Urei, and Auratone, I have not heard a monitor that exceeds the accuracy and richness of the HR824s—certainly not a passive speaker and certainly not in this price range. The tight and transparent reproduction of ample bass from this monitor, the evenness of its entire frequency range at low and high volumes, and the crispness and authority of the smooth highs point to one of the best monitors I've ever heard.

The HR624s are also a very fine achievement, though you will spend more time finding the optimum setting for them if they're your main monitors and you desire the kind of rich bass the 824s naturally provide. Or, you could beef them up with an HRS120 and have all the bass you need. Clearly Mackie has decided there are several revolutions to be won. Don't bet against them. ■■■■

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