

Paradigm Shift Series A2 Powered Loudspeaker Reviewed

By: [Andrew Robinson](#), July 30, 2012

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Moving on, I chose something a bit more complicated for the A2s to chew on: Nelly Furtado's "Say It Right" off her album Loose (Geffen). The opening of "Say It Right" features some driver-busting bass that will get most bass drivers to bottom out at even moderate volumes. Via the A2, the bass was composed, though it didn't plunge as deep as, say, a subwoofer would. At the same time, the modest five-and-a-half-inch driver on each A2 didn't bottom out, either. While not chest-pounding, the bass via the A2s was completely satisfying and musical. The track on the whole isn't as well-mastered as it could have been, so I used it to test bass only, though it should be noted that even in the face of a rather crap recording, the A2s were still enjoyable. In other words, the A2 doesn't seem too critical of source material.



Next up was Peter Cincotti's "Witch's Brew" off his third album East of Angel Town (Warner Bros. Records). About two minutes and thirty seconds into the track, there is a musical interlude, complete with organ, strings and harpsichord. The harpsichord sounded positively brilliant via the A2 and, if I'm honest, rather lifelike in its scale when I turned things up to eleven (100dB peaks). The accompanying orchestra sounded full and natural and sat neatly back in the soundstage, so that the harpsichord could reign supreme. Out of the musical interlude is a groundswell of dynamics, which the A2 handled brilliantly, building layer upon layer, rather than smacking you in the face with sheer volume. Everything about the A2's performance was textural and true to the instrument, venue and performance as a whole - not bad for a roughly \$300 loudspeaker aimed at the youth market. Cincotti's vocals via the A2 retained their trademark swagger and East Coast charm in the face of the onslaught of orchestral fireworks heading into the climax of the song. On the whole, for a track clearly mixed for a bigger setup and venue, the A2 pulled off the larger-than-life performance very well indeed.

I ended with a Blu-ray demo, albeit in stereo, just to see how well the A2 performed as a home theater speaker. I cued up *Transformers: Dark of the Moon* (Paramount) and skipped ahead to the freeway chase between the Autobots and the Decepticon baddies. The little dialogue in this particular scene is recorded a bit "hot," meaning that instead of doing post-production dubbing, the filmmakers kept a lot of the audio track from the set, flaws and all. The A2 did little to mask the inconsistencies in the dialogue, so it didn't smooth over moments when certain phrases clearly clip. This is not a fault to be held against the A2, but rather a testament to its sonic accuracy, for many speakers sometimes gloss over these imperfections during playback. Even in the face of sustained volumes in the 95dB-plus range, the A2s held their own and kept their composure. Motion right to left and left to right was phenomenal and at times made for a nearly three-dimensional sound experience. Scale and impact was surprising. Again, given the speaker's smaller stature, the bass, in near field, was spot on.

When I replayed this same demo in my reference room, the sheer volume of the space itself proved to be too much for the A2s to overcome at all but moderate levels. Pushed too hard, the A2s simply ran out of steam, though for casual TV viewing, the A2s in my reference room were leaps and bounds superior to my Panny plasma's built-in speakers.

Moving the A2s to a slightly smaller venue, my bedroom system, and replaying the same demo proved to be eye-opening, for in both a near-field and in a more traditional setup, the A2s simply excelled. Though the A2s in my bedroom system would have definitely benefited from a sub, I don't want to detract from their stellar bass performance. In the smaller venue that is my bedroom, the A2s could charge the room with copious volume and still retain much of their exceptional detail retrieval and nuance, though it was clear where and when the room began to be a factor, compared to listening to the A2s in near field. Still, in direct comparison to a few soundbars I had laying around, some costing double what a pair of A2s sell for, I'd choose the A2s for cinema duty any day of the week. I also really liked being able to connect them directly to my Samsung HDTV, which meant I only needed a Blu-ray player for two-channel movie enjoyment. Not bad. When I brought my **DuneHD Max player** into the mix, complete with its digital volume control, I had an all-in-one streaming and physical media solution at my disposal for roughly \$1,000 all-in, including the pair of A2s. As a secondary or even a primary system in a smaller room, the DuneHD/Paradigm Shift A2 combo was simply bitchin'. **Throw in an HDTV** of your choosing and you may have all the hi-fi you really need.



I'm serious when I say the versatility of the A2 is off the charts in terms of just where and how you can apply and enjoy its feature set and audible capability. Toss in the optional Bluetooth Receiver or the like and - well, you get the idea. Regardless of your source material, ancillary equipment or even room (within reason), the A2 from Paradigm Shift is a phenomenal loudspeaker that manages to be both functional and enjoyable in ways few other speakers can match.

The Downside

There is little that I find fault with when it comes to the A2's performance or ergonomics. If I had to nitpick (and I'm really nitpicking here), I would say that in order to reach the lowest octaves, one must use a subwoofer and, currently, Paradigm doesn't offer one in the Shift Series of products. It is to be hoped this is something the Canadian company will rectify, but as it stands today, you'll have to look elsewhere in Paradigm's lineup of subwoofers, which is kind of like being forced to buy a really nice sports car in lieu of another really nice sports car - it's all good.

The A2 has a bottom-mounting receptacle for use with the optional table stands. I kind of wish Paradigm had instead come to market with some articulating wall mounts for the A2. I hope they will, for I would view such a mount as far more versatile and useful than the \$35 metal table stands, which are more for looks than anything else. Likewise, I'd love to see matching 24-inch stands offered down the road, too.

Lastly, and this is only because I feel the A2 has pro-audio potential, I'd love to see Paradigm include a Speakon-style connector in future iterations.

Competition and Comparison

As much as I'd like to compare the A2 to other manufacturers' desktop or computer speakers, I can't, for the A2 is more than that. It's basically a pro-audio monitor in a slightly more consumer-friendly package. I say slightly more, because Paradigm didn't skimp on connection and configuration options. Instead, it dressed up what could've easily been a totally pro monitor loudspeaker. Because the A2 seems to have a bit of pro-audio DNA, I feel it fair to compare it to others with similar attributes. Emotiva's newly released lineup of pro-audio speakers comes to mind, as do other offerings from Yamaha, M-Audio, Behringer and even **JBL**. Higher-end pro-audio speakers from, say, **Genelec** or **Focal** may not be fair comparisons, but definitely sub-\$500 monitor-style, powered speakers should be wary of the A2.

Also, even some of Paradigm's own speakers should watch out, for I'd take a pair of A2s over their lauded Atom and **Mini Monitor speakers** in a heartbeat, which may or may not be what Paradigm is after. I'd take a pair of A2s over almost any sub-\$1,000 per pair of bookshelf speakers for that matter, due to their sheer versatility and value, never mind their incredible sound. These suckers rock and can potentially save listeners a lot of money, provided the rooms and setups are on the more modest side of the equation.

For more on bookshelf loudspeakers like the A2, please visit [Home Theater Review's Bookshelf Speaker page](#).

Conclusion

The more I think of the name Paradigm Shift, the more I feel there is some truth left in advertising, for when it comes to the A2 loudspeaker, shift is exactly what it will do to both your expectations and your body. Simply put, the A2 is a fun, fun, fun mother *&!!! loudspeaker that just so happens to also sound fantastic. As a desktop speaker, I'm not sure there is better to be had. As a pro-style monitor, the A2 can more than hold its own against industry stalwarts such as Yamaha and company. As an on-the-go, portable music-friendly speaker, the A2 is also phenomenal. As an audiophile or home theater speaker in small to medium spaces, get out of here. The value proposition on top of it all only cements things in my eyes, for its internal amplifiers, connection options and included kit make it among the most versatile loudspeakers I've ever encountered. The A2's build quality is superb, its finish is flawless and, with the help of a few more mounting accessories, its reach, I feel, could be almost endless. Provided you don't ask it to do too much, i.e., fill too large a room with ear-splitting sound, the A2 is a fantastic achievement of loudspeaker design and worth every penny of its modest asking price. Pound for pound, the A2 is one of the best, if not the best, audiophile or home theater products I've encountered this year.



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