

AV INFO

PRODUCT:
5.1-channel
floorstanding
speaker system

POSITION:
Paradigm's premier
loudspeaker series

PEERS:
KEF The Reference

**1. The 3F floorstanders
are the smallest in
the Persona range**

Meet the biggest and best speakers to ever grace **Steve Withers'** home cinema

Persona of interest

When it comes to speakers, size does matter. You can chuck all the rare earth elements you like at the problem, but at the end of the day if you've got large drivers then the speakers will probably sound good. A fairly sizeable budget doesn't hurt either, because build quality is also a factor.

Paradigm's Persona Series ticks all these boxes and more, producing an uncompromising range of speakers and one enormous subwoofer. While looks are often subjective, these speakers are also beautiful. In fact, they're so pretty they don't even have traditional grilles, preferring to keep the design front and centre (literally), although there are metal grilles over the tweeters and midbass drivers.

While appearances don't really matter in a home cinema environment, where darkness reigns and the colour black dominates, it's hard not to love the elegant design and meticulous craftsmanship of these Canadian cabinets. The elliptically tapered rear and sloped top plate of the floorstanders immediately catch the eye, even if you'd struggle to put upward-firing Dolby Atmos cabinets on them.

The system reviewed here is comprised of the Persona 3F floorstanders (£10,700 per pair), the Persona C centre speaker (£7,200), the Persona B standmounts (£7,800 p/p), and the Persona SUB (£6,900). If you've done the maths in your head you'll realise the combined cost is £32,600, and that's using the 3F, which is the smallest and most affordable floorstander in the Persona range. There are three more available: the 5F (£16,000 p/p), 7F (£23,500 p/p) and 9H (£33,800 p/p).

Presumably the 'H' on that flagship model stands for 'How much?'...

Taking the stand

The price tag isn't the only thing that's big, these are the largest and heaviest speakers I've ever reviewed. In fact, the centre speaker, which is designed to complement all the floorstanders in the Persona range, is almost as big as the 3F and actually weighs more. I needed two speaker stands to install it, although there are mounts on the bottom for an optional dedicated stand.

As I said at the outset, a big and heavy speaker is never a bad thing, and Paradigm's build quality is exceptional. However, budget aside, these aren't the kind of speakers

you'd choose on a whim, and to get the best out of them you need a largescale room. The Persona B is laughingly classified as a bookshelf speaker, but it would take one hell of a bookshelf to support it.

On the plus side, there's no doubting where your hard-earned readies have gone. These speakers boast an unprecedented level of engineering and construction with hand-made non-resonant cabinets, machined aluminium matte grey baffles and premium finishes. Our review sample is metallic-gloss Sonic Silver, but you can also choose metallic-gloss Aria Blue or high-gloss Harmony White, Vanta Black and Carbon Black. And they all look as cool as their names suggest.

These oversized cabinets are required to accommodate some epic-sized drivers, with the system primarily built around woofers and midbass units that are all seven inches in diameter. There's a midbass and 1in tweeter in the standmount, two woofers, a midbass and a tweeter in the floorstander, and four woofers, a 4in midbass and a tweeter in the centre speaker.

And everywhere you look there are expensive components to justify the cost. Specifically beryllium, a rare chemical element with low mass, high tensile strength and extreme thermal stability.

The Persona tweeters and midbass drivers all use Truextent Pure Beryllium foil, which has been cooked up to be stiffer and significantly lighter than other premium diaphragm materials. Even the metal grilles I mentioned earlier aren't simply decorative, their patterns actually form a Perforated-Phase Aligning (PPA) lens that is designed to cancel any out-of-phase aberrations.

The result is a range of rear-ported speakers with dual binding posts, a claimed impedance of 8 ohms and some fairly impressive specifications. The 3F has a claimed sensitivity of 92dB and frequency response of 48Hz to 45kHz; the C hits 93dB and 43Hz to 45kHz; while the B delivers 92dB and 60Hz to 45kHz. With numbers like these, you almost don't need a subwoofer... almost. >





**HOME
CINEMA**
Choice
REFERENCE STATUS

Which brings us to the Persona SUB, and believe me those capitals are justified. This bass beast is designed to match the aesthetic of the Persona Series, while delivering monstrous amounts of low-end action. It uses a total of six 8in woofers in a six-sided cabinet (which works to cancel vibrations, I'm told) and packs 1,700W of amplification (with dynamic peaks up to 3,400W).

The SUB claims a low-frequency reach down to a frightening 12Hz (19Hz in the bypass mode). It's also built like the proverbial tank, weighing in at a back-breaking 53.6kg. It's definitely a two-man lift, and you might want a third on standby.

'Paradigm's system sounds utterly awesome, and commanding in a way that mere words can't describe'

When you look at the rear panel, it initially seems rather bland. There are level, crossover and phase knobs; LFE phono and balanced XLR inputs; stereo phono inputs; a 12V trigger; and an auto/on/off switch.

However, inspect closer and you'll see a mini-USB port – that's because the Persona SUB includes Anthem Room Correction (also known as ARC; Anthem is Paradigm's brand stablemate), and there's a calibrated microphone, cables and stand included in the box. Once you've installed the free software on a laptop, you can take up to ten measurements in different locations, and use ARC to optimise the response curve of the SUB, overcoming negative aspects of your room.

With everything set up, and after a quick visit to the physio, I put the Persona 5.1 system through its paces. I've always wondered what a system would sound like if a company took a cost-no-object approach to design and construction, and now I know. This system sounds utterly awesome, and commanding in a way that mere words can't describe. But since this is a written review, I'll try.

All my troubles seemed so far away

This system might look gorgeous, but when it comes to its acoustic signature the component speakers manage the nearly impossible feat of invisibility. The sense that the audio is actually emanating from a box vanishes, and instead all that's left is the sound itself.

Danny Boyle's *Yesterday* on 4K Blu-ray allows the array to reveal its remarkable musicality. The transparency is exceptional and when combined with superb detail retrieval you can hear every breath and guitar string as Himesh Patel performs the title song. The same goes for his piano-based rendition of *Hey Jude*; it's as though you are actually sat in the front room with his parents.

The film's finale takes place during an Ed Sheeran gig at Wembley Stadium, and the scale of this ensemble rises to the occasion. You're put in a vast space surrounded by thousands of people. The voluminous surround speakers pick out individual voices with breathtaking clarity, and the centre speaker ensures the vocals are delivered with cohesion and focus. The front three create an immense wall of sound as Patel runs through a medley of Beatles songs, and the subwoofer effortlessly weaves in the bass.

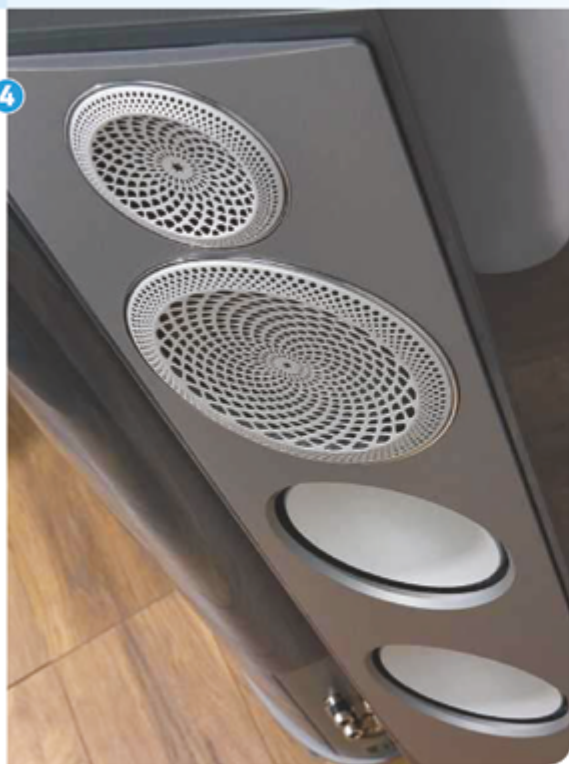
Speakers this special require a suitably epic film, and they don't come much bigger than Marvel's

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Avengers: Endgame (4K Blu-ray). The early part of the film is dominated by dramatic character moments, which are handled with skill. The dialogue is clear, and the surround channels merge with the front speakers to engender a rich bubble of sound.

However, once we get to that monumental conclusion the entire performance steps up a gear, delivering an expansive soundfield that is filled with frenetic effects. The Personas have an ability to move from the intimate to the massive in a heartbeat, delivering incredible transients and immaculately timed LF hits. The EQ'd sub integrates with the other speakers, and is free of the limitations of the room. It's a showcase of timing, speed and control, and low-end effects that have real slam. From missiles raining down on the Avengers' base to spaceships exploding in the sky, every beat is brought to bear without the system breaking a sweat.

Endgame has some big moments, especially during that third-act battle, but *Aquaman* (UHD Blu-ray) has a soundtrack that's almost entirely composed of big

'These move from the intimate to the massive in a heartbeat, delivering incredible transients'

moments. Bass is applied liberally throughout. Even the smallest punch feels like being hit with a sledgehammer.

The sequence where Aquaman rescues a submarine from modern-day pirates is a great example. There's a sense of tremendous force as he breaks through the top hatch, and smashes his way along corridors using the hatch as a shield. Bullets ricochet around the soundstage, and the speakers' rarefied tweeters expertly disgorge each high-frequency ping without a hint of strain.

The subwoofer gives every punch added weight and impact, and when Aquaman throws the hatch into a group of pirates, I was ducking for cover as it slammed into the

SPECIFICATIONS

Paradigm Persona 3F

DRIVE UNITS: 2 x 7in X-PAL woofers; 1 x 7in Truextent beryllium midbass driver; 1 x 1in Truextent beryllium dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 48Hz-45kHz (+/-2dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 92dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 15W-200W **DIMENSIONS:** 241(w) x 1,126(h) x 427(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 34kg

Paradigm Persona C

DRIVE UNITS: 4 x 7in X-PAL woofers; 1 x 4in Truextent beryllium midbass driver; 1 x 1in Truextent beryllium dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 43Hz-45kHz (+/-2dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 93dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 15W-250W **DIMENSIONS:** 914(w) x 263(h) x 415(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 38kg

Paradigm Persona B

DRIVE UNITS: 1 x 7in Truextent beryllium midbass driver; 1 x 1in Truextent beryllium dome tweeter **ENCLOSURE:** Ported **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 60Hz-45kHz (+/-2dB) **SENSITIVITY (CLAIMED):** 92dB **POWER HANDLING (CLAIMED):** 15W-150W **DIMENSIONS:** 225(w) x 435(h) x 330(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 14kg

Paradigm Persona SUB (Subwoofer)

DRIVE UNITS: 6 x 8in woofers **ENCLOSURE:** Sealed six-sided cabinet **FREQUENCY RESPONSE (CLAIMED):** 19Hz-220Hz (+/-2dB) **ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 1,700W RMS **REMOTE CONTROL:** No **DIMENSIONS:** 512(w) x 525(h) x 480(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 53.6kg **FEATURES:** LFE phono and balanced XLR inputs; stereo phono inputs; level, crossover and phase controls; 12V trigger; auto on/off; mini-USB port; Anthem Room Correction (ARC) with calibrated microphone and stand

PARTNER WITH



ANTHEM AVM 60: Compatible with Anthem's new ARC Genesis software, this 11-channel processor decodes Atmos and DTS:X and fiddles audio through AKM AK4458 32-bit/768kHz DACs. Price is £4,000 – just add some potent power amps...

hull with a brutal crunch. At the end of scene he lifts the submarine to the surface. Here the soundmix layers on bass energy to the point where you can almost feel its weight. At least, with this system you can.

The descent into the Trench later in the movie is a bit different, with its swirling mass of creatures requiring sonic accuracy. This system throws them from speaker to speaker with no discernible change in tone. It's superbly balanced from front to back.

Oh, I believe...

The Paradigm Persona Series is beyond the reach of most people, myself included. But it's refreshing to discover you really do get what you pay for sometimes. These speakers not only sound convincing in a way few can, but – in conjunction with that over-engineered subwoofer – produce a soundstage with a scale and transparency that is hard to believe. It's an undoubted perk of my job that I get to spend time with such an accomplished set of speakers. The downside is that at some point they have to go back ■

HCC VERDICT



Paradigm Persona 5.1

→ £32,600 → www.paradigm.com

WESAY: They ain't small and they ain't cheap, but these Canadian-crafted beauties are truly exceptional with a soundstage that's nothing short of epic.

2. The Persona SUB's performance can be fine-tuned with ARC Genesis Room EQ

3. All the speakers have rear ports and dual binding posts

4. The tweeter and midbass drivers are mounted behind 'Perforated Phase-Aligning' lenses