

Interview: Producer/Engineer Elliot Scheiner on speakers, headphones, formats and Auro-3D

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FadeOut

Love Your Monitoring System

Guest Editorial by Carl Tatz

As a former long-time commercial studio owner and current studio designer, speaker manufacturer and monitoring expert, I have a few answers to questions about what makes for a great monitoring system.

When it comes to monitoring, all professional monitor manufacturers and studio designers, Carl Tatz Design included, have the same high goal: to provide the most accurate, best-sounding monitoring possible. However, the craft of creating and installing monitors that exhibit the mythical so-called “flat/accurate” anechoic chamber frequency response (if that’s even desirable) in a mix room environment, or relying on the acoustic sciences of studio design as a solution to that goal, is more than a little bit arbitrary, otherwise all speakers and mix rooms would sound exactly the same.

Yes, of course, your monitors, whether two-channel or Atmos, need to be accurate (that goes without saying), and there are several pathways to that nowadays. But does your system thrill you each time you sit down to work? If it doesn’t, even though you can still do good work, you’re missing out on one of the true pleasures of our profession.

Get Emotional

So, what is the pathway for each distinguished system to deliver the aforementioned goal of accuracy and great sound? Cutting to the chase: emotional impact. You can have accuracy without emotion and, alternately, emotion without accuracy. Can you do good work with either? Absolutely!

Case in point: I ran across a successful engineer who simply grabbed some analyzing software and a two-channel EQ to make his monitors sound the way he wanted. The resulting frequency response curve was totally bizarre. Still, it had the emotional impact he was looking for, and it worked for him despite the major inaccuracy. There is no perfect formula, and luck is no stranger to this type of approach. You can win GRAMMYS mixing in an empty swimming pool

because your “mind/ear” will eventually figure it out, (often referred to as “learning” your room/monitors). Although the above example is a gross exaggeration, most engineers do this every day with monitors that have not been truly “tuned” into their environment.

Are You Inspired?

Unfortunately, at some point, most engineers make peace with their monitoring—“learning” what the system is doing in their mix room and making it work. It’s a workable solution, but does their monitoring truly inspire them? Does it have the accuracy and emotional impact when called for? Are they often blown away by what they hear in a mix? Probably not.

I’m reminded of a client of ours who, over the course of his career, had amassed multiple GRAMMYS and platinum records. After hiring us and experiencing what he could have in one of our systems, stated, “I’m doing this now because I deserve it.” He was obviously doing fine with what he had but decided he wanted to enjoy his work more. In other words, he could finally hear what he always dreamed his monitoring system could sound like.

It’s Ok to Have Help

You can also decide that your goal is an accurate monitoring system that packs an emotional response. If so, before even choosing monitors, your best first choice is to find a qualified expert who has successfully installed many monitors in many different rooms. If you can, try to experience one of these rooms and the monitors in person because that will go a long way in inspiring you to move ahead, and learn what you want.

By the way, this is most often achieved with near-field monitor systems that include a well-integrated subwoofer. Of course, you can use larger monitors that don’t necessarily need a sub, but overall, monitor style and choice will determine that, not just the chosen size. (Most of this goes beyond the scope of our discussion). Once you decide, an expert will come to your studio after gathering lots of data about your room and perform the installation in ways you probably don’t have the expertise to do yourself—at least in a timely and effective manner—and that’s what you’re paying them for.

Alternatively, there are several effective room-tuning products available and lots of online advice to wade through if you are not budgeted for hiring an expert. Take a look around, and if you are committed, you will find something to bump up your game in a satisfying way. ➔

Carl Tatz is a 35+ year audio veteran as a multiple award-winning studio designer, monitoring expert, speaker designer, musician, artist, engineer and producer. His PhantomFocus™ Monitor System has revolutionized near-field monitoring. Learn more at carltatzdesign.com and phantomfocus.com.