

# the ear

## HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

hardware review



### PMC twenty5.23i

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About ten years ago when I was working in the retail side of the audio industry, the original PMC Twenty series was launched and we sold a good few of them. They seemed especially well suited to Naim amplification and we sold that combination regularly. Indeed, I liked them so much that when the shop decided to sell off its demonstration stock I snapped up the small twenty.21s for myself and they did service in my system for some time. I enjoyed their speed, their midband accuracy and the amount of tuneful bass which they offered from the diminutive cabinets.

Fast forward to the third decade of the century, and PMC have brought out the twenty5i range, which are successors to the series which I so admired. There are now six loudspeakers in the line-up, along with a centre speaker for those who wish to use the twenty5is in a surround sound environment. I asked for a pair of the smallest of the three floor standing models, the twenty5.23i, which seemed the ideal size for my 16'x12' lounge.

Unboxing them, the first thing that struck me was the quality of the cabinets; the walnut veneer is impeccable. They seem significantly better finished than I remember from the original series. The finishes available are walnut, oak, diamond black and white silk. If the others are as well finished as the walnut pair sent for review, buyers will be more than happy I am sure. PMC has put a lot of thought into the foot arrangements for the twenty5i floorstanders. Each loudspeaker sits on a pair of stainless steel bars that screw into receiving holes on the underside of the cabinet. Two specially formulated spacers are placed on either side of the stability bar to eliminate any possibility of vibrations escaping into the floor and compromising the sound. Finally a substantial spike is screwed through either end of the bar, giving a very stable footing.

These loudspeaker are 90.7cm high and 33cm deep without the grilles, which add a mere 9mm to the depth. In the room, the twenty5.23is met with full approval from Mrs Kelly, which is always a good thing, they look elegant, although I realise that that is a matter of taste. A pair of high quality binding posts are sited near the bottom of a stainless steel rear panel with the crossover behind this on the inside. At the front the arrangement is classic: a 19mm ferrofluid cooled soft dome tweeter, made for PMC by SEAS, protected with a mesh grille, and below that a 140mm long throw main drive unit. The cone is made of PMC's patented g-weave material and sits within a cast alloy chassis. Towards the bottom of the front baffle are the twin rectangular outlets for the Advanced Transmission Line (ATL) bass system, which has an effective length of 2.4m that is folded within the cabinet. PMC has put a lot of effort into ensuring that

this vent produces only the lowest frequencies and that these are in phase with the output from the driver. For the twenty5i series these vents are fitted with PMC's trademarked Laminair system in order to reduce turbulence in the air flow for faster and more accurate bass performance. Does it work? Read on.

The final part of the set-up is to position the speakers in the room. On the advice of PMC, I angled them in towards the listening position so that the sound, if visible, would be seen



to meet just behind my head (meaning I could see a little of the inside face of each speaker when sitting). I made sure the cabinets were equidistant from the rear and side walls, with the corner nearest to the wall 50cm from the rear. Full length grilles are supplied with the loudspeakers, and attach magnetically to the fascia. I started with the grilles attached but after a few days took them off – not for sonic reasons, as I could hear only the faintest difference with and without them, but because I just love the look of these loudspeakers with the drive units in full view.

Two amplifiers were used during the review period, a Copland CSA150 integrated and when that was returned, my own Lyngdorf TDAI3400 took over. Sources used were my Linn Sondek LP12 with Dynavector XX2 cartridge, Gold Note PH10 phono stage, Lyngdorf CD2 player and a McIntosh MCD 85 SACD/CD player. When the Lyngdorf joined in, I also used Tidal and streamed from my Naim UnitServe.



### Listening

I started out with some of my favourite music on vinyl, with the Mobile Fidelity pressings of Bob Dylan's *Blood on the Tracks*, *Loves Forever Changes* and Dire Straits' *Brothers in Arms* leading the way. From the first few bars of *Tangled Up in Blue* I was drawn in by the PMCs. The acoustic guitar sound was spot on and Dylan's voice was projected well into the room. In fact the soundstage created by these loudspeakers was never less than exceptional and with well recorded material it could verge on the holographic. The bass is extremely well judged. It is fast, deep and tuneful. PMC claim a frequency range for these loudspeakers of 28Hz to 25kHz, and I have no reason to doubt that claim. The all-important frequency range of the human voice is portrayed with terrific accuracy but manages to convey emotion supremely well. This was particularly true of the spoken word on television. Everything was clear and easy to hear, even when watching material that can sometimes be challenging, such as the Kentucky-accented dialogue in *Justified* (Netflix, highly recommended if you are not already saturated with binge-watching).

During the next phase I listened to a lot of SACDs and CDs on the MCD85. These came through the PMCs sounding terrific. *Wish You Were Here* and the inevitable *Dark Side of the Moon* were conveyed in full sonic glory. Roger Waters' bass guitar was especially well



served by the ATL system, coming through with power and subtlety, as required. The music soared into the room and throughout the review period I never became fatigued by the sound. When I had the house to myself during the day the temptation to ramp up the volume was overwhelming, and the twenty5.23is did not harden up at all, even at levels which I found physically uncomfortable.

Do not take away from this that these are for rock fans only. I played jazz, choral and classical music and all it came across really well. On big orchestral pieces (I do love a bit of Beethoven) there was a really good sense of scale, and more realism than one could reasonably expect from loudspeakers of such comparatively modest size. Ever since my older son started to learn the double bass back in the early '90s I have had a soft spot for the music produced by the biggest of the string family, and these PMCs reproduced such music with terrific realism. My gold CD of Gary Karr's *Adagio d'Albinoni* (Cisco GCD8003) came through with all the emotion and weight you could want. The sound of the bow on strings, the sense of the size of the instrument and Harmon Lewis's organ supporting the bass were as good as I have heard.

In due time the Copland had to be sent back to the distributor and my Lyngdorf TDAI3400 took over amplification duties. I ran the RoomPerfect software suite through the PMCs and with all the room acoustic anomalies removed I could hear the PMCs as their designer had intended, and if anything they impressed even more. Nothing seems to upset them, and the music pours forth.

**Conclusion**

By now you will have gleaned that I thoroughly enjoyed my time with the PMC twenty5.23i floorstanders. These are definitely loudspeakers with which I could live happily ever after. Pair them with a high quality amplifier and a good source and you will never regret your purchase. They also come with a 20 year warranty, which one hopes would never need to be called upon of course, but which gives peace of mind and confidence that PMC are four-square behind their products. The only slight caveat is that at their current list price the twenty5.23i is up against some very capable loudspeakers from some well respected brands. Ultimately, the prospective purchaser will need to audition carefully, and preferably at home, to ensure that the PMC



formula is the right one for them. I would also not sell them short on amplification. These loudspeakers responded very well to both the Copland and the Lyngdorf, which fall into the £5-£6k territory. I suspect that just as their forebears did they will give a terrific account of themselves when teamed with Naim amplifiers— unfortunately I could not try that combination this time, but I am confident that it will still be a match made in audio heaven.

If you are in the market for a new pair of loudspeakers, the PMC twenty5i series has a huge amount to recommend it. Build quality is outstanding, the aesthetics very strong and the sound produced is musically engrossing. As an investment in your audio future I believe that the PMCs will deliver strong returns for many happy years to come.

**Specifications**

Type: transmission line two-way floorstanding loudspeaker

Crossover frequency: 1.7kHz

Drive units:

Mid/bass – 140mm long-throw g-weave cone

Tweeter – 19mm Sonomex fabric soft dome, ferrofluid cooled, with 34mm surround and dispersion grille

Nominal frequency response: +/-3dB 28 – 25,000 Hz

Nominal impedance: 8 Ohms

Connectors: single wire binding posts

Sensitivity: 86.5dB

Dimensions HxWxD: 907 x 162 x 330mm

Weight: 15kg

Finishes: walnut, oak, diamond black and white silk

Warranty: 20 years