

When Are Monitors So Bad They're Good? Check Out Page 72

# RECORDING

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## MONITORING: HEAR THE TRUTH

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# 18

## Monitoring Products On Review!

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# REVIEW



Last year in our March 2015 issue, we took our first look at Amphion with the One18 passive studio monitor. This time we are looking at the One18's big brother, the flagship of the Amphion line—the Two18.

Amphion is headquartered in Kuopio, Finland, and run by Anssi Hyvönen. The company has an 18-year history of building hi-fi speakers for the audiophile market. Just over a year and a half ago, Amphion entered into the pro studio world with monitor models that had been developed over a 5-year period by a team of speaker professionals.

## Amphion Two18 Passive Monitors (and Amp500 Power Amplifier)

The pinnacle of the Amphion line offers serious sound for the serious engineer

The Amphion pro line currently consists of the One12, One15, One18, Two15, and Two18. The firm also offers two custom built power amps, the Amp100 and Amp500, and as of the 2015 AES show has added a unique bass extension setup called the BaseOne25.

### And a One and a Two

Each model has a similar design, build and components. They all use the same 1" titanium tweeter recessed into a large white Corian waveguide and aluminum-coned bass drivers. The One series have 4.5", 5.25", and 6.5" drivers respectively. The Two series models double the fun with a pair of 5.25" woofers on the Two15 and a pair of 6.5" on the Two18.

Amphion cabinets eschew the trend of moulded sculptural enclosures with contoured edges. Instead, each model makes use of a traditional rectangular MDF cabinet. They're sealed designs, with passive radiators on the back of the cabinet for low-end dispersion rather than bass ports or venting.

According to Anssi, each cabinet's sonic signature is created through old school physical design and not through onboard DSP. These are totally passive monitors, with zero onboard EQ, level control or filtering of any kind.

### Two18

The Two18 is for all intents and purposes a One18 with a second added low frequency driver. Although it has

three speakers, it is not a 3-way design. At 7.5" wide and 12.4" deep, the cabinet is the same width and depth as the One18, but it stands 21.65" tall vs. the One18 which is 15" tall. The tweeter sits in the middle of the cabinet with the matching woofers symmetrically above and below.

Around the back, the Two18 uses a pair of simple screw-style Argento Audio 3-way binding posts in the center, with the matching aluminum passive radiators above and below, parallel to the front-side bass drivers.

### Pieces of the sonic puzzle

Three distinct design elements define the Two18 and its sound. The first two are the same as can be found on the One18, as well as the rest of the Amphion pro line.

First is the tweeter. It is recessed back into its waveguide by quite a bit, putting it on the same plane as the low-frequency drivers for perfect time alignment. The net effect is that sound hits your ears from all three drivers at the same time. The tweeter's white waveguide is not just a pretty design element; its size matches the diameter of the low-drivers so you get a more unified sonic dispersion across a wide frequency range. This gives the cabinets a great balance of focus and a natural wide sweet spot.

Next, the rear-mounted passive radiators move in tandem with the front-side bass drivers to disperse energy and control low frequencies. According to my previous discussion with Anssi during the One18 review, he told me that a sealed radiator design vs. porting offers better consistency and predictability across the lows and low mids. This in turn makes the speakers less subject to the room they are placed in.

The last feature of the Two18 is its double woofer design. If you've guessed that this adds more low-end punch and response, you would be correct, but not in the way you might think. These are not simply more bass-heavy, thicker or

boomier than the One18; they're punchier, fuller, and more forward in the lows and low mids. This principle is similar to how a 4x10" bass cabinet is tighter, more forward, and more punchy than a single 15" bass cabinet. I can sum it up by saying that the Two18 does not rumble... it punches with precision!

### In use, compared to the One18

The One18 has become a permanent part of my monitoring setup, so I am intimately familiar with the Amphion sound. I also got to spend some four months with the Two18, using it alongside the One18 as well as my other monitors, the Focal Trio6 Be 3-ways (reviewed October 2015).

While switching between the two Amphion models shows the Two18 to be bigger and bolder, sonically they exhibit a similar tone and overall response. The Two18 has the same wide imaging and sweet spot as its little brother, and it is impressive how balanced the sound stays as you move around the room, even on the sides. Also like the One18, the Two18 remains full and sonically constant at lower volumes, making it a great speaker for long-haul mix sessions.

Of course there are differences as well. Overall the One18s are best described as a little more diffuse and open sounding (especially with the Amp100). Their soundstage surrounds you a bit more, while the Two18 brings everything into a slightly more forward

and tighter focus. Due to their size, the Two18s need a bit more distance and are better suited to larger rooms.

### Lovin' the low-end

The true magic and mojo of the Two18 is how it handles low mids and bass frequencies. One of my favorite low end source testers is T-Bone Burnette's "Palestine Texas" from his *True False Identity* CD. The Two18 monitors handled the low end spectacularly—no farting out or distortion at moderate to loud levels, but you will see the cones move like crazy! I should note that unlike my 3-way Focal Trio6 Be speakers, these are not wall-melting room rumblers; they do have their limits.

They have a forward, full, and tight low end, not a faux subwoofer experience. It's a low end that makes a kick drum thump you comfortably in the chest, and makes it sound like you can ride the bass strings... I am being poetic, of course, but these boxes help nail and seat kicks and bass in a mix with ease, and their mixes translate well to the real world.

There's not much more I can add. Amphion is hitting a clear home run; for a firm that few in the studio world realized existed two years ago, few monitors have made this much of a favorable impact on the market in such a short time. ➤

**Price:** \$3000 each

**More from:** Amphion, [www.amphion.fi](http://www.amphion.fi)

### Amphion's Amp500

Since they're passive speakers, you can choose your own power amp to use with any Amphion model, but



your results may vary sonically from amp to amp. For this reason, Amphion spent time designing and sourcing the perfect power amps for use with its speakers for both sound and consistency, and offers its own audiophile cables as well.

In the One18 review, we tested the speakers with Amphion's Amp100 (\$1300). It offers 100 watts per channel with 115 dB dynamic range and is recommended for use with the One series speakers.

The Amp500 (\$1800) is a dual 500 watt amp, also rated at 115 dB dynamic range. It is recommended for the Two series models and can be used with the One18 as well. Visually it is identical to the Amp100: a 2-rackspace enclosure with a blue backlit power switch on the front. On the back are a pair of XLR inputs and a pair of Argento Audio 3-way binding posts for speaker output.

In addition to using the Amp500 with the Two18, I also tried it with my One18s to get a better grasp of the differences between the two amps. For a true side-by-side test I hooked up a single One18 to each amp, set my monitor controller's output to mono, and proceeded to switch back and forth between setups.

While the Two18 does offer a subtle boost in volume, it's not extreme; loudness should not be the reason for choosing one over the other. The difference between the power amps is sonic responsiveness, which affects the tone. With the Amp100, the One18 has a more open, sweeter top end and a slightly softer low-end response. The Amp500 tightens up the top end and adds more punch and fullness on the bottom. I can tell after auditioning the Amp500 with the One18 that it is partially responsible for the low end magic in the Two18!

While I preferred the Amp100 over the Amp500 for its top end response when paired with the One18, both amps are fantastic and the Amp500 makes a brilliant partner for the Two18. —PV