

A Family of Amphion Monitors Compared



By Paul Vnuk Jr.

Welcome to the latest installment of *A Family of... Compared*, where we look at specific product lines from well-known audio manufacturers focusing on currently available models, whether they have been in production for 1, 10 or 50 years. This series allows us to

compare, contrast and revisit products from past reviews. So far, in this series we have covered families of microphones and headphones. This month marks our first time exploring an entire family of loudspeakers as we reacquaint ourselves with the current Amphion lineup of professional studio monitors.

25 Years of Finnish Excellence

Amphion is based in Kuopio, Finland. CEO Anssi Hyvönen founded the brand in 1998, initially focusing on the home hi-fi and audiophile market. In 2013 Amphion expanded into the professional studio arena. The current pro-audio roster includes five studio monitors (One12, One15, One18, Two15 and Two18), two Base systems

(FlexBase25 and BaseTwo25), plus a pair of power amp options (Amp700 and Amp400.8).

Currently, Amphion employs 20 people, but is still very much a family affair. For example, Anssi's son Julian Hyvönen began assisting at the factory when he was 14 years old and is now the head of marketing. Just this year, Amphion moved to a new 19,000 sq. ft. facility doubling its manufacturing and warehousing capacity. I am also told it allows for immediate shipping to customers all across the world.

Consistent Acoustical Design

While most modern speaker designs feature rounded sculptural cabinetry, active internal power amps, DSP-based tone shaping and even internal digital conversion, Amphion speakers are a beautiful balance of no-frills simplicity and Scandinavian elegance.

Each model comes housed in a classic rectangular MDF cabinet with a gently textured matte black finish. All models in the line feature aluminum low-frequency drivers of varying sizes and a matching 1" Titanium tweeter.

Radiate

Amphion speakers use a sealed cabinet design, meaning there are no bass ports or venting holes for air and low frequencies to dissipate. Instead, Amphion cabinets feature passive aluminum radiators. Each radiator is located on the rear of the cabinet, directly behind the low-frequency drivers, where it moves perfectly in tandem to disperse and control the low end.

According to Amphion, this eliminates the problems found in ported designs and greatly improves the critical low-mid resolution. This also makes Amphion speakers an excellent choice for smaller spaces as they work well close to walls and boundaries.

Large Circles of White

A visually striking feature of Amphion monitors is the large white, gently concave Corian waveguide surrounding the tweeter. The tweeter is recessed into the waveguide, so it sits on the same plane as the bass driver. This results in a super-tight time alignment as the sound from both drivers reaches your ear at the exact same time. This offers increased accuracy, focus and a uniform dispersion pattern. The result is a wide sweet spot and uniform performance across the sonic spectrum.

Passionately Passive and DSP-Free

Most modern studio monitors on the market are active designs equipped with internal power amps to power the speakers. In contrast, the Amphion models are passive designs—largely the norm prior to the late 90s—that require the use of an external power amp. While you can choose to use any appropriate, properly rated option, power amp choice can affect a speaker's output level and tonality. Amphion offers its own stereo Amp700 [Reviewed November 2020] and multi-channel Amp400.8, offering hand-in-glove performance and consistency across the line.

As a passive design, Amphion speakers have no onboard analog or DSP-based equalization or room correction options. According to Anssi Hyvönen, "Keeping the product as simple as possible electrically maximizes the resolution and transparency." This also makes Amphion monitors a great choice when used with specialized third party DSP-based room correction software when necessary.

By the Numbers

There are two available speaker configurations. The One and Two prefixes correspond to the number of low-frequency drivers in the cabinet, while the numeric second half denotes the driver size in centimeters. Despite the presence of the matching over/under drivers in the Two models, each Amphion cabinet, from smallest to largest, remains a two-way design.

On Base

If you desire three-way performance, that can be accomplished by adding one of the company's Base models—a concept Amphion introduced in 2015. Note that the FlexBase25 and BaseTwo25 are low-frequency extension cabinets—not subwoofers.

RECORDING History

In March 2015, I had the honor of test-driving the One18 along with the now discontinued Amp100. The Two18 and Amp500 (also discontinued) followed one year later, in March 2016. My predecessor laid ears on the petite and portable

One12 models with matching mono Amp100 amplifiers in July 2016, and in November of that same year I did a side-by-side look at the One15 and Two15. In June 2019, I checked out the FlexBase25, followed by the Amp700 in October 2020 and the BaseTwo25 in September 2021.

A Family of Amphon Monitors Compared

Amphon One12

At 10.2" tall, 5.2" wide and 8.7" deep, the 13 lb One12 is the smallest model of the Amphon line with a 4 1/2" aluminum woofer.

In his 2016 review, our previous editor immediately zeroed in on a hallmark of the Amphon sound, the One12 monitor's impressive mid-range representation. He also noted that despite their size and modestly stated 78 Hz bass response, his impression was that "bass guitar and upright bass, low piano notes and kick drum, were all present and felt balanced, even though I wasn't hearing the fundamental."

He was most impressed that, "The combination of the passive radiator and the wide waveguide for the tweeter produced a genuinely usable sweet spot that was marvelously wide and deep. To say that these speakers were forgiving of the room acoustics would be an understatement."

His final observation was, "The One12 is the first speaker I can remember hearing that has no obvious sound of its own ... it just presents my music so I can work on it. That's one heck of a revelation."



Amphon One15

The One15 has a 5.25" aluminum woofer in a 12.44" x 6.30" x 10.33", 15.5 lb cabinet. Note, the One15 and the One12 use traditional 3-way binding posts, while the larger models are equipped with high-end connectors from Denmark-based Argento Audio.

By the time I reviewed the One15, I had been mixing on the One18 for almost a year, and I knew the Amphon sound quite well.

I found that, "The One15 largely retains the clear, honest sound of the highs and upper mids as the One18, but the bass is tighter and punchier." Also, "The bass kicks a bit more on the One15 over its big brother, which is fuller and more diffuse in comparison." It also exhibited a similar soundstage as the One18. With all Amphon offerings, "If you sit in the sweet spot, close your eyes, hold out your arms to try and point at where you think the monitors are and then open your eyes, you will most likely be pointing at much wider angles than where the speakers really are!"

Amphon One18

The One18 was my entry point into the Amphon sound and ultimately, the model that best suited my studio and my personal tastes. The One18 boasts a 6.5" driver, and its cabinet measures 15" x 7.5" x 12.4" and weighs shy of 26.5 lbs.

Sonically, I found the One18, "Open, full, honest, clear, rich, subtle and bold, all at the same time." From there, I found it easier to describe what the One18 is not rather than what it is.

"They do not have the modern ultra-bright studio monitor sound. They do not have gobs of extended room-rattling low end, nor do they have scooped, tailored or exaggerated mids. In essence, they sound as if nothing is exaggerated across the sonic spectrum." I also like that, "the One18 retains its fullness at low volumes and as such they are exceptionally comfortable to mix on for extended periods of time."

My favorite trait of the One18 (and the whole line) is the soundstage mentioned above. I liked that I could walk around my studio with music playing, and, "The highs and mids stayed tonally similar, with little rolloff or coloration—even when I was standing on the sides."

At the time I purchased and purposely chose the Amp100 over the Amp500, as I preferred the more open, almost feathery top end offered by the Amp100 to the tighter, punchier Amp500. I don't know what internal voodoo was added in the current Amp700, but it seems to provide the best of both worlds.



A Family of Amphion Monitors Compared

Amphion Two15

The Two15 has the same 6.30" x 10.33" width and depth as the One15 model, but it is 20.08" tall with two 5.25" drivers and radiators and weighs 22 lbs.

As mentioned, while offering three speakers each, the two series models are still a two-way design. The dual drivers provide a fuller and more focused low-end coverage than the One15 and One18, and I found that, "The low end of the Two15 is laser focused and thumps you square in the chest like a fist."

At the time, the Two15 was my second favorite in the line, and I called it the "dark-horse sleeper of the Amphion line." I also found it, "The most unique-sounding of the family ... more grounded, forward and centered, with a punchy, palpable weight."



Amphion Two18

The largest model in the family is the 31 lb. Two18. 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.

The Two18 is sonically similar in tone and overall response to the One18, offering the "same wide imaging and sweet spot as its little brother."

As to differences, the One18 is best described as a little more diffused and open sounding, while the Two18 brings things slightly more forward with a tighter focus. Due to their size, the Two18 needs a bit more distance and is better suited to larger rooms. My favorite part of the dual driver Two18 was how it handles low mids and bass frequencies. They are not wall-melting room rumpers, but they provide 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. These boxes help nail and seat kicks and bass in a mix with ease, and their mixes translate well to the real world.

Speaking of bass, now we move to the Amphion Base models.



Amphion BaseTwo25

As mentioned, the Amphion FlexBase25 and BaseTwo25 models, while bold, thumping bass boxes, are not subwoofers and are billed as bass extension systems.

The BaseTwo25 is comprised of a pair of 36.25" x 7.5" x 14.25" cabinets. Each one weighs a whopping 95 lbs. and attaches to a pair of 15.25" x 2.5" legs (tools included), adding 1.5" to the height. Each tower is designed to act as a speaker stand underneath your chosen One or Two series monitor, and Amphion includes a set of small Sorbothane discs for isolation.

On the sides of each sealed cabinet, you will find a pair of opposing 10" aluminum drivers at the top with matching 10" passive radiators on the bottom, handling dispersion. On the rear of each is a single twin-pole Neutrik speakON connector.

This connects to an included BaseAmp1200 purposely designed to integrate the BaseTwo25 with your other Amphion models. The BaseAmp1200 pumps out a whopping 700W per channel and lives between your audio outputs and main speakers.

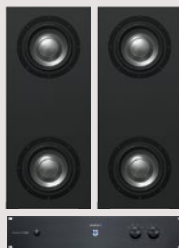
The controls on the BaseAmp1200 include an active 4th order crossover with a choice of 40, 60, 80 or 100 Hz crossover points. There is a level control knob, a backlit power button (along with a master power switch on the rear) and a second backlit button that bypasses the system and restores your main monitors to full range. A 1/4" TS jack on the back of the unit also offers a foot pedal-controlled bypass.



A Family of Amphion Monitors Compared

Amphion BaseTwo25 (continued)

In use, I found that while the BaseTwo25 “can kick with mighty force” when set correctly, it turned my One18 monitors into a “full-throated, perfectly integrated three-way system.” A crossover setting of 80 Hz kept the well-loved midrange of the One18 intact. An output level of 5.5 worked well in my well-treated studio, but pushing it to 7 was excellent for modern, bass-heavy music.



Amphion FlexBase25

The FlexBase25, unlike the dual BaseTwo25, is a single unit designed to live between rather than under your monitors. This 110 lb. box measures 33" x 12.25" x 13.5". It breaks from tradition in that it has a pair of opposing 10" aluminum drivers at the top, but it does not use any radiators.

It features a single 4-pole speakON connector that attaches to the Amphion FlexAmp1200 (700W x2). Like the BaseTwo25, the FlexBase25 system lives in line between your interface and speakers. The FlexBase25 receives and sends a stereo signal, and a unique aspect of the design is that the coincident speakers in the cabinet are also stereo. You can choose if the low-frequency signal is mono, stereo or pushed even wider, depending on your needs/tastes.

The FlexAmp has buttons for power and bypass, which take the FlexBase25 out of the system and returns your main monitors to full range. A crossover knob lets you choose a crossover point from 35 Hz–260 Hz. A second knob adjusts the unit's volume level, and you also get a 1/4" TS jack for the connection of an external footswitch.

Like the BaseTwo25, think three-way, bass extension more than subwoofer. Yes, it too will shake your room, but most of the time, when set moderately, I forgot that the FlexBase25 was there.

It never felt like the bass was overcooked; it added just the low end I needed to nail my mixes and makes any speaker setup “even more flexible.”

Since most of the low-frequency information is directed to the Base units, you get improved headroom and greater midrange clarity as the woofers in the main speakers are allowed to focus primarily on the mid-range.

It's also worth noting that while the Base systems are clearly Amphion-centric, they will work with any well-designed monitors that can match the speed and dynamics of the system. Amphion's Julian Hyvönen let me know that he even has users integrating the FlexBase25 with Yamaha NS10 monitors.



An Amphion Family Reunion

While I have been mixing in my studio on a set of One18 monitors for the past 7 years, I recently had the opportunity to get reacquainted with the entire series, including a chance, for the first time, to compare each model side-by-side at Plastic Dog Recording in Los Angeles, which is owned and operated by producer Colin Liebich—the US rep for Amphion.

By the Numbers

Starting with the Two models, the Two18 puts out a large, full, wide sound. Moving to the Two15, the image firms up and, as mentioned, is tighter and punchier than its Two-sibling. The One18 is still my favorite of the single bass driver models. They have a very relaxed sound that, to my ears, just sounds ‘right’. I can say from experience that if you can nail a mix on the One18, it should translate well to the real world.

Hearing the One15 again was a nice surprise. Its top-end and mid-range imaging are very similar to the One18, but there is just ‘something’ about the 5.25" drivers in the 15-models that produces a firm, focused punch that is quite deceptive considering their size. Plus, the overall volume levels they can handle impressed me.

This is even more true with the One12. I had never heard these before, and I agree with our previous reviewer. They image great and put out a very respectable low-end and level for their petite footprint. I think these should pair great with the multi-channel Amp400.8 in a spatial audio setup.

Moving to the Base system, simply put, they change the game. The big thing to know is the low end they add is clean and dynamic, compared with many subwoofers, which are just muddy and thuddy. The Base models add a sophisticated fullness and depth that opens up the tone of the two-way speakers and can form the basis of any high-end mixing or mastering system.

Your choice of Base unit will most likely come down to price, space, and personal taste—I do remember I preferred the sound of the BaseTwo25 better in my studio.

Conclusion

Across the board, each model in the line retains a great familial constancy in the mid and upper frequencies. My favorite attribute of the line is that with each model if you shut your eyes while mixing and point to where you think that the sound is coming from, you will most likely be pointing wider than where the speaker is sitting.

It was great to experience the entire Amphion lineup again and be reminded of these impressively designed products. ➔

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