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## Elegant Signature

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**Once in a while, it does one good to step off the familiar path and take a detour into alternative realms**

### **PMC FB1i Signature**

**Price: RM14,500/pair**

**Distributor: AUDIO VISUAL DESIGNS SDN BHD (% 03-2171 2828)**

YOU would think that in more than two decades of reviewing audio gear, I would have sampled at least a pair of PMC loudspeakers. However, if memory serves me right (although I'm becoming increasingly suspicious of it with each passing year), there never has been such an occasion. I can't even recall having listened to a pair of PMCs at a distributor or dealer showroom. Well, first time for everything.

The Britain-based stalwart made a name for itself in pro audio and audiophile realms with speakers sporting its "advanced transmission line" (ATL) technology. The speakers are highly rated for their tonal accuracy, clarity and dynamic range.

Amongst PMC's numerous models over the past 20 years, the FB1 has become a classic in its own right. Now, what better way to commemorate its decade in existence by turning out a limited edition version? The PMC FB1i Signature goes on the rack this week, its crossover fine-tuned by designer and company founder Peter Thomas himself. Yes, the back-plate bears his signature.

### **Veneer of elegance**

The cabinet, handcrafted in Britain, is finished in a rare Rose Palissandre veneer, and each box rests on a black plinth. The effective transmission length of the cabinet is three metres, the port opening up near the base in front.

The drivers on this two-way design are a PMC/SEAS 27mm, Solonex soft-dome tweeter and a PMC ATL 170mm doped woofer, crossing over at 2,000Hz.

Quoted frequency range is 28Hz to 25kHz, while the 90dB sensitivity make them relatively easy to drive. Each cabinet measures 1,000 x 200 x 300mm (h/w/d). Two sets of inputs mean bi-wiring and bi-amping are options.

Both the finish and fittings on the Signature are of a superlative standard, as one would expect – the dark veneer won't attract attention, instead lending a touch of elegance to the overall package. Testimony to the construction is the fact that PMC provides a 10-year warranty on each pair, extended from its usual five.

### **Effective transmission**



Looking, sounding good: The PMC FB1i Signature loudspeakers strike all the right notes.

First, I must disclose a not-so-secret bias, which is my preference for ribbon or ribbon-type panel speakers like Apogees and Magneplans.

I've always felt I would need to spend upwards of RM30,000 to find a dynamic speaker that would make me not miss the Maggies. The PMCs didn't fall under this price category. Also, their modest size didn't quite impress me. Then, I hooked the pair up to my system, comprising Odyssey Audio Tempest preamp and Khartago Extreme SE monoblocs, Ayon CD-1s CD player, Linn Majik DS streamer and VPI Aries 3 vinyl rig. Cabling was from MIT (speakers, interconnects) and Furutech (power).

While rear wall distance was less of an issue than in rear-ported units, one aspect of positioning is of significance – I was advised to set the Signatures up with minimum toe-in or not at all.

After initially listening to the speakers toed-in, I straightened them out during the review sessions and immediately understood why. While the speakers sounded great even toed-in, firing them straight ahead opened up the stage and lent more air to the presentation. Some congestion observed in certain areas earlier disappeared, with the ambience and space around each element of the mix being brought to detail with greater clarity.

Indeed, clarity and detail were among the Signature's forte; I was made aware of more things happening on familiar recordings than previously. Also impressive was the ability of the Signatures to reproduce busier passages of piano music without falling apart the way some speakers do. That it managed to retain a sense of space around the various instruments spoke volumes for the level of discerning work that has gone into these speakers.

I've also seldom heard deeper and better bass in my room ... the Signatures are not quite full-range, yes, but they exhibited a confident grip on the lows that impressed me; in fact, parts of the room began rattling when I pushed up the volume with certain bass-dominant recordings. Even at this point, the Signatures never sounded as if they were straining.

The majesty and scale of the recordings were impressive – despite their size, the Signatures sounded larger and more dynamic than I expected. Once the speakers were well positioned, I heard a holographic quality further up the treble frequencies, coupled with a near-life-sized sonic picture that reminded me of the Maggies.

They had speed, too, and this along with their bass grunt, let most music played through them shine. I was almost blown away by their sheer weight, authority and deftness in presentation, while maintaining vocals clearly, crisply and well-defined in the mix. The speaker's tonal balance was impeccable – a smooth and neutral midrange bridged the well-presented highs and lows perfectly.

### **Box of temptation**

The PMC FB1i Signature is the kind of speaker that will have you pulling out CD after familiar CD to hear if you missed out on anything earlier. Yes, they're that captivating!

I will admit this – for the time I had the speakers, I found myself almost not missing my Magneplanar MG1.7 panels. Allowing oneself to step out of the, er, box, so to speak, can have its rewards.

Now, if I were to have some spare change to the tune of RM15,000, these would be one of the most compelling temptations since the Maggies.