

# KRK VXT8 Powered Studio Monitors

By [Peter Lawrence Alexander](#) / August 10, 2008



I am a composer who writes, records, and has to engineer his own projects unless there's a big fee to include an engineer. I am not, on the other hand, an engineer (e.g., geek) who composes second and lives by specs first! So when I approach a pair of monitors where reading a bunch of engineering audio specs, or checking out the aerodynamically cool design or which fabric is used in the drivers is the main aspect of the presentation, I check out.

What I want to know is how they sound within the conditions in which they'll be used. In short, save the mumbo-jumbo and get me straight way to the gumbo.

So what I did, with my lovely composer wife Caroline, was to set up a practical listening test reflecting how we work. So our practical test included samples, virtual instruments, MP3s, and two works with scores that I could compare to. The two works with scores were John Williams' Battle of The Heroes from Star Wars 3 and Vaughan Williams' Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis. With Mr. Williams, we looked at the score with mix direct from the CD. With Vaughan Williams, we compared the score to the realization done by Jay Bacal for the Vienna Instruments library.

For an A-B comparison, we listened to an older pair of Alesis Monitor Ones. I did this for two reasons – most of us came into film scoring or dramatic scoring without the aid of a rich relative. So in the beginning, you buy what you can afford and then move up.

Second, I learned from a wise engineer during that early period that you can learn to mix on anything provided you're taking your mixes and playing them back on the worst sound systems possible, starting with a cheesy boom box, cheap car stereo et al for comparisons. A final mix is about trial and success.

And in today's economy, with MP3 downloads now a mainstream digital distribution system, you have to know how well the mix works as an MP3 played through cheap computer monitors, laptop speakers, and headphones, because that's where people are listening to final mixes. In some cases, artists are doing two mixes – one for CD and one for MP3.

This is the world in which we work today.

You can find the technical specs on KRK's website. There's also a companion review from Sound on Sound Magazine, written by Paul White and titled "KRK VXT6 & VXT8," published August 2008.

### **GENERAL NOTES**

The speakers are very heavy, checking in at just under 40 pounds per monitor. Also, these monitors are packed extremely well for shipping. So if you order online, they should arrive in great shape. Once set up, as a non-musical consideration, the VXT 8s really give your studio a professional air. They're very colorful, and the brightness of the woofer really gives the room a lift when you consider that most of the equipment we use is professional gray or black.

There are controls on the back of the VXT 8s to adjust settings for your studio, but we kept them at the factory settings which were fine for our studio.

### **COMPARISONS**

The table on the next two pages summarizes our comparisons.

<b>Media</b>	<b>Alesis Monitor Ones</b>	<b>KRK VXT 8</b>	<b>Opinion</b>
CD/MP3 <i>Sayuri's Theme</i> by John Williams from <i>Memoirs of a Geisha</i>	Mid range crisp and nasal. Bottom end washy, detail is lost, sound blooms.	Virtually no difference between the CD and the MP3. Detail with the string triplets below the solo Cello much easier to hear.	VXT 8s win hands down.
CD/Score: <i>Battle of the Heroes</i> by John Williams from <i>Star Wars 3</i> ,	Strings sound nasal and muddied, brass is nasal, bottom end is muddied. No separation between instruments. Percussion, no bite, nasal. Missing high-end detail.	Bass is nice and clean, so are the vocals.	VXT 8s revealed a lot about the mix that wasn't flattering. Compared to <i>Sayuri's Theme</i> , we felt the Monitor Ones were stronger because the mix had a more emotional sound. On the VXT 8s, the sound was a little harsh and the bass was lacking. But we attribute this to the mix. The VXT 8s just brought it out.
MP3/Score, <i>Fantasia on a Theme</i> by Thomas Tallis as realized by Jay Bacal	More warmer emotional sound, but lacking detail and bass	The entire string spectrum was clear, and the inner lines and harmonies are clear without straining to listen	VXT 8s
CD: <i>Mission: Impossible 2</i> by Hans Zimmer, theme by Lalo Schifrin	Nasal again. Lacks crispness and clarity.	Crisp. Defined. Sub bass clearly defined and punchy. Guitar is nice and clean.	VXT 8s
CD: <i>Mission: Impossible 2, Hijack</i> by Hans Zimmer	Drums sound thin and lost in the mix. Detail and richness missing overall. Punchy bass, but muddied.	Rich textured strings. High strings a little softened. Punchy rich bass.	VXT 8s

<b>Media</b>	<b>Alesis Monitor Ones</b>	<b>KRK VXT 8</b>	<b>Opinion</b>
CD: <i>Mercy Me</i> (selected for pop vocal sound), <i>Here With Me</i> .	Bass muddied. Vocals thin and nasal, overpowered by bass and strings. Strings sound thin and nasal, full chorus is muddy. Vocals don't cut through. Drums thin.	Vocals clean and clear. GREAT stereo separation. Bass is better defined. No muddiness. Strings still a little nasal.	VXT 8s
Logic 7/EXS 24, Chamber String Ensemble	No high end, mid range thin and nasal, bottom end blooms	Bottom end is flat, doesn't bloom like Monitor Ones. More texture.	VXT 8s
Logic 7/EXS 24, Concert Hall Grand	No high end detail, sounds dampened, no texture or richness	Richer sound than the Alesis. A little dulled, bass nice and consistent, doesn't overpower. Rich and full.	VXT 8s
Logic 7/EXS 24, Pop Flute	Rich in the middle but a little dampened, blooms in bottom end.	Rich sound, no dampening, Clear, softens a little at high pitches. Low end is consistent.	VXT 8s
Logic 7/EXS 24, 12-String Guitar	Nasal, dampened highs	Rich, clean and detailed. No nasal noise. Crisp, clear and biting.	VXT 8s
Logic 7/EXS 24, Nylon Concert Guitar	Dampened highs, no richness or texture, blooming bass	Punchy, rich. Can you say BASS?	VXT 8s
Logic 7/EXS 24, solo trumpet	No bite, dampened	Bright and biting, really cuts through, detailed texture	VXT 8s
GVI/Continuous velocity piano	Dampened mid, no highs, all detail lost	Dampened sound	VXT 8s
GVI/ Ensemble Strings Legato R	Canned sound, nasal and flat	Harsh at mid to high end	Mixed review based on effects added to strings

## **Other Sample Library Tests**

I also tested the older Garritan Orchestral Strings, Miroslav strings original (GS version imported into the EXS 24), Miroslav Philharmonik, Vienna Instruments Orchestral Strings 1 and 2, the Appassionata Strings, sounds from SONiVOX Muse.

Garritan and Vienna, which were both recorded using Sequoia from Magix, have great detail because they were recorded in programs whose audio engine brings out the exquisite detail of the sound. The transfer of detail and richness continued. The original Miroslav strings and the IK Multimedia version of them also sounded full and detailed.

The Violin highs of Orchestral Strings 1 are harsh, even on the Alesis Monitor Ones. The VXT 8s just bring out what's there.

In comparing the Appassionata Strings to the Fostex NF1As (my usual monitors) or the Alesis Monitor Ones, the VXT 8s allow the Appassionata Violins to sound like 20 violins. Previously, compared to my time on the scoring stage at Warner Brothers or Sony MGM, they sounded more like 14 violins on the other monitors.

I also checked out various electric bass and percussion sounds. All I can say is, turn down the volume on the back of the monitors because you will get BASS and DRUMS.

## **TAKE A LISTEN**

You should visit the KRK Dealer list and set up an appointment to bring in your own mixes, some CDs and MP3s. If you've got a laptop situation where you can audition some of the core sample libraries you're now using, bring them, too.

## **CONCLUSION**

As 21st Century composers, our task is to recreate a realistic orchestral sound and other types of ensembles depending on the projects and cues that come our way. KRK VXT 8s are like an electron microscope because they bring out the strengths and weaknesses of the sounds we work with, including reverb and other effects. How we hear the sound affects how we perform it, how we position it in the mix, and how we add effects. Unlike Joseph Haydn, we don't have 16 "live" players at our disposal. Instead, we have artificial orchestral replications whose sound changes from one developer to the next.

In both orchestration and sound design, you learn quickly doing this kind of work that you have to know equally what something sounds like and what it doesn't sound like. The KRK VXT 8s give your mixes an edge because you can hear all the detail.

Nor have I taken into account programs like WIVI and Synful, and keyboards from Korg, Roland and Yamaha where sounds are either pure synthetic or based on PCMs (Pulse Code Modulations).

The KRK VXT 8s are great monitors for media composers, game composers, sound designers and developers because they bring out a level of detail you may not be getting from your current monitors.

The street price for a pair is just under \$1,200. Though pricey, I think the time you save in doing mixes will cause the VXT 8s to more than pay for themselves in a short period.

*This article was previously published at the SonicControl website.*