

ProAc Studio 118 | Stereo speakers | £1075

# Unassuming top-quality Pro

The ProAc Studio 118s may look ordinary on the outside, but they are terrific performers

Look at Lionel Messi. Universally regarded as one of the best footballers on the planet, yet, with his short stature, sizeable conk and schoolboy haircut, he's otherwise about as ordinary-looking a chap you're likely to see this side of a geography classroom. We'll let you fill in the blanks before this metaphor becomes even more laboured, but the point we're trying to make is that you underestimate ProAc's Studio 118s at your own peril.

Give these standmount speakers a bit of space - the offset tweeters on the inside - angle slightly towards the listening position and around 24 hours to run in and you'll know what we mean.

## Making sense of it all

Physically, the only noticeable difference between the Studio 118s and their predecessor, the 115s, is the mid/bass driver. This now has a phase plug - a sort of extension of the pole piece, meant to help control dispersion, that makes the unit look like a wooden boy who told a lie. There's a bit more work gone on underneath, including a new magnet assembly geared toward better bass response - evidently a priority for ProAc's engineers.

You feel it from the first thud of Radiohead's *15 Step*, but equally apparent is that they've surrendered no clarity as a result - especially if you make use of the option to bi-wire. In the wrong hands this track's polyrhythm can sound like an injured crab tripping over a boiled-sweet wrapper, but the Studio 118s manage to make sense of it all.

The amalgam of electronically filtered thumps, scratches and scrapes time perfectly, and it's as though they've each been given their own shelf from which to sound. There's detail of which Vermeer would be proud; you can hear the musician as well as the instrument, and the vocal has the natural sound of a live recording.

## Off-kilter

Where *We're Going*, from Hans Zimmer's *Interstellar* OST, showcases the dynamic range. The Studio 118s are delicate as the texture builds, following the complexities of each part intimately as they rise and



settle. You get the feeling that, given a blank score and these speakers, you could fill in the dynamics yourself.

ProAc says the Studio 118s handle all genres excellently, and it's difficult to argue. They follow the story of The Streets' *Blinded By The Lights*: there is real oomph in the kick, the snare snaps and the synthesizer's out-of-time tremolo gives it all that off-kilter feel of being slightly spaced and paranoid in a club. Still, there is enough space to express the vulnerability in the vocal, that honest, almost confessional Mike Skinner tone.

## Wrong side of annoying

Compared with ATC's SCMI1, our 2014 Award-winner in this price bracket, you notice the Studio 118s are much more lively. In the end it becomes a question of preference, rather than quality, but our only warning would be to take care when

The option to biwire is there, but otherwise the back of the Studio 118s is rather sparse



system-matching. The 20mm tweeter sparkles, but pairing these speakers with too bright an amplifier could tip that top end just the wrong side of annoying. Take just a bit of care, however, and you're bound to have a lot of fun.

## Rating ★★★★★

**FOR** Weighty, detailed bass; lively treble; enthusiastic attitude; natural balance

**AGAINST** Take care with system-matching

**VERDICT** An energetic-sounding speaker with which it is difficult to find fault; finally a rival for ATC in this price bracket



## System builder total build £5065

### CD player

Roksan Caspian M2 £1900

★★★★★

This 2014 Award-winner is, in our opinion, the finest CD player available at anywhere near this price



### Stereo amplifier

Roksan Caspian £1900

★★★★★

It's had a re-design, but this latest version of Roksan's Caspian M2 is a formidable amplifier



### Speaker stand

Custom Design FS104 £190

★★★★★

Best speaker stands, Awards 2013. Allow your speakers to sound vibrant, transparent and rhythmical

