

JBL LSR4326/PAK & LSR4312SP

A Monitoring Solution for the Imperfect Room

by Jay Matheson

As everyone who has built a studio knows, achieving accurate control room monitoring is the one of the main obstacles to obtaining pro results in both tracking and mixing. I've known people to drop \$20,000 on A/D converters, pres, and killer mics at the expense of room analysis and treatment, controllers, and decent monitors, only to be left lamenting their recordings and wondering where it all went wrong. It's a tragedy that repeats itself in home studios the world over. Responding to these unfortunate realities, JBL has designed a product that supposedly addresses, and compensates for, a less-than-ideal monitoring environment.

OVERVIEW

For specs, check out JBL's website. I will say this, though: The system was not nearly as difficult to configure as I feared it would be upon unpacking all the components. Don't be put off by all the ins and outs, calibration mics, and dipswitches—a novice can set up this system.

Also, note that some of the LSR's best features are remote controllable. The ability to solo individual monitors, control volume, select EQ presets, bypass RMC (Room Mode Correction), bypass the sub, and select between analog and digital—all using the remote or a user-supplied computer connected via USB—is really cool. Furthermore, the 31-segment LED level metering on the front of the cabinets is handy as a visual reminder of your monitoring level, as it's easy to let your levels get out of hand 10 hours into a 20-hour session.

IN USE

We placed the sub dead center and each full-range cab at ear level in an equilateral triangle arrangement, with the sub crossover at 50Hz. After arranging the sub/cabs and making all the proper connections, you place the calibration mic at the listening position and engage the system's RMC. It may sound scary, but the process is simple: Hold the button for three seconds while the system goes through an automatic set of frequency sweeps and bass pulses and you are good



JBL
LSR4326
with cali-
bration mic.

to go . . . supposedly. But can this quick fix for inaccurate monitoring really work?

I tested the system by playing some older recordings I knew well (like the Stooges' *Funhouse*) and some newer mixes as well. I immediately noticed the system's incredible stereo imaging; I could easily identify each track's position in the stereo field. Excessive compression and limiting on some newer recordings were very apparent, giving the tracks a squashed sound and fuzzy high end, and I heard some over-corrective EQing (presumably done during mastering) that was more of a problem than a fix. Translation: This system doesn't smooth over the rough edges; it's flat and honest.

Next I used the system while remixing a song that I had moved from a Pro Tools HD rig to LE. Using the system's digital input, I ran the output of an MBox, using S/PDIF, into a TC Electronic Finalizer, in bypass mode, into the sub's AES digital in. I then had to use two more XLR cables to connect the two full range cabinets digitally. Using the digital inputs yielded superior results *vis-à-vis* analog when using the MBox. The JBL A/D converters seemed very accurate, with good dynamic range—an improvement over the converters in most semi-pro gear.


I proceeded to mix the song, applying compression and effects with a fair amount of limiting and EQ on the master bus. During the mix, I occasionally bypassed RMC with the supplied remote. Though I generally avoid mixing with a

sub, the RMC tames the unsettling woof of the sub, making the system sound much more balanced.

Moving the mix out to my Saturn for the requisite "car test" resulted in no surprises—any flaw in the mix was something I had noted in the control room. Going back inside for a quick touchup, I realized that I had already become quite comfortable working with the LSR system.

CONCLUSIONS

While skeptical going into these tests, I was pleasantly surprised by working with the LSRs; when the RMC was engaged I found the system well-balanced, with the mixes translating well into the outside world. However, while the mix position sounds great using the RMC, other areas of the room don't benefit from this technology. RMC corrects for the specific point of the room where the mic is placed during calibration, so tell your drummer to shut up if he's trying to tell you what to do from over your shoulder.

JBL has made a flexible system that is user-friendly and offers a great alternative to mixing in a bad-sounding control room. If the above sounds like your current digs, consider this package. 

PRODUCT TYPE: Studio monitoring system with subwoofer, remote control and DSP room compensation technology.

TARGET MARKET: Project and pro studio owners needing an all-in-one monitoring solution.

STRENGTHS: Digital and analog inputs. System expandable for 5.1. Feature-packed remote. Computer controllable. Room Mode Correction works well. Easy to operate.

LIMITATIONS: Room Mode Correction is great for the mix position but may leave some areas of the room a bit out of balance.

LIST PRICES: LSR4326P \$619 each, LSR4312SP subwoofer \$1,113, LSR4326P/PAK: \$1,239 (includes two LSR4326P speakers and accessory kit with calibration mic, mic clip, wireless remote control, LSR4300 Control Center software for Windows/Mac, USB cable, and set of AAA batteries)

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