Audioengine 5+ (A5+) Premium Powered Speakers | AudioStream

Device Type: Powered Speakers
Input: Left (Powered) Speaker: (1) pair RCA, (1) 3.5mm mini jack, (1) USB Type A (power only). Right (Passive) Speaker: speaker binding posts
Output: Left Speaker: (1) pair RCA variable line level outputs, speaker binding posts
Dimensions: 10.75" (27cm) x 7" (18cm) x 7.75" (20cm)
Weight: Left Speaker: 15.4 lbs (7 kg) RIght Speaker: 9.6 lbs (4.4 kg)
Availability: Direct and Online
Price: $399.00/pair in Satin Black or Hi-Gloss White, $469.00/pair Solid Carbonized Bamboo
Warranty/Return Policy: 3-year Limited Warranty/30 Day Audition Policy (when purchased directly from the US online web store only.)
Website: www.audioengineusa.com

Masters and Slaves

If you've read the specifications for the Audioengine 5+ speakers, you'll notice that the left speaker is the Master making the right the Slave. What this really means is Audioengine has stuffed all of the non-passive parts like the 50W per channel Class A/B amp into the Master which makes a lot of sense to me for a speaker that's sold in pairs. You'll notice that some other powered desktop speakers can be purchased solo so each one has to contain the works. The Master/Slave relationship helps save on parts cost but it doesn't necessarily skimp on performance as we shall see and I got to hear.

The Audioengine 5+ replaced the popular A5s by adding an "advance tuned cabinet with rear-ported waveguide, improved thermal management, upgraded speaker connector binding posts, remote control, variable preamp line out, RCA inputs, and stand-mount 1/4" threaded inserts". The 5+ sports 5" Kevlar woofers and 20mm silk dome tweeters and has a claimed frequency response of 50Hz-22kHz +/-1.5dB. That USB Type A input around back is so you can charge your USB-powered device while its playing music through the mini jack connection. I take it this implementation hints at the intended customer and his/her wallet since a dock would make more sense but would also obviously add cost. Since my iOS devices hold but a tiny subset of my NAS-based music library, my desktop speaker use is computer—as opposed to iOS—oriented.

Operation is very straight-forward and in its most basic configuration you just connect the left speaker to your computer with the supplied 2 meter (~6.5ft) mini jack cable, connect the left speaker's 5-way binding posts to the right speaker's 5-way binding posts with the included 16AWG, 3.75 meter (~12.3ft) speaker wire, then plug in the left speaker with the included power cord and hit play. You can also add a subwoofer via those variable RCAs as well as a DAC in between your computer and the 5+s in which case you need to add the DAC and whatever cable suits its method of connecting to your computer and on the other side connect it to the Master 5+ with a pair of RCAs (I used a few USB DACs). There's also a handy remote for controlling volume.

The Master also has an 'intelligent' LED up front in so far as it responds to what you and the 5+ are doing. Changing volume with the remote causes it to flicker, it fades in and out while in sleep mode and when muted (by pressing the mute button on the remote or pushing in the volume knob on the Master), and it stays on full when playing music. Directly next door there's the sensor for the remote, and on the other side there's a volume control knob on the Master's front face which is a very useful place for it to be as compared to the rear-mounted set-it-and-best-forget-it placement. Underneath each speaker there's a "high-density isolation pad" and a 1/4"-20 insert for

attaching to the optional Audioengine DS2 speaker stands ($34/pair). The 5+s go to sleep after 30 minutes of non-use (insert joke here).

Frequent AudioStream readers already know a few things—I always recommend sitting desktop speakers up off the desk and this holds with the 5+, I find Audioengine offers a lot of bang for the buck with their D1 and D2 DACs and this also holds with the 5+, and I have a real problem with noisy desktop speakers and thankfully this is not an issue with the 5+. As a matter of fact, even when connected directly to my iMac using that included mini jack cable, the 5+s were as silent as I've ever heard a similarly-connected powered desktop speaker be. They are quieter than the newer and improved Paradigm A2s, for example. I'd say they were damn near silent when they are supposed to be and that not only makes me happy but it also makes me wonder why every other powered desktop speaker cannot behave the same in this regard.

A Sensible Sound

If I was to create a list of recommended powered desktop speakers, the Audioengine 5+ would be very high on it. Sure you can get different sound from something like the ADAM ARTist 3s, a speaker I still recall fondly, but you'll also get a built-in DAC that's limited to 16/48 and a price tag of more than double that of the 5+. Of course there are many other candidates and I have not heard them all (who has?). But what I can tell you is that when listening to music through the Audioengine 5+ speakers, I don't really care.

With something like Bonnie 'Prince' Billy's "Hummingbird (Part 1)" from his similarly-titled EP, I fall right into the bass line's groove, and the drum kit's thwacks and taps are convincingly present and make it very difficult to sit (still). Billy's vocals stand out and apart in all their warbley scratchy goodness and the only thing I notice is the desire to keep making everything louder. And you can get the 5+'s up as loud as is healthy in a near-field environment. Upper frequencies do not suffer any spikiness yet still offer a nice visceral feel of bow on string, splashing cymbals or harmonica's harmonic delights. Bass response is not huge but it is natural, tight and tuneful which I prefer to boom and bloat. Oh hell, you get the idea—I like the Audioengine 5+ speakers and more importantly I like listening to music through them.

If you want your 5+s to make your music sound more refined, more delicate, just add a DAC. I have to say that the 5+s performed remarkably well direct-connected to my iMac, so well that I could see living happily this way for a long time. But if you listen to a wide variety of music in terms of sound quality from streaming services to HD downloads and you like to listen often, paying attention to what and how musicians do what they do, and you enjoy being carried away by the sum of all that goodness (meaning you're also not doing anything else while you're listening), add a DAC. Which DAC is up to you, your tastes, and your budget but something like the Audioengine D1 would do nicely and I'd imagine the Bladelius USB DAC would do even nicely-er.

No Reservations
For $399, yes I'm going there, I'd say that the Audioengine 5+s give you more than you've given Audioengine. They strike me as the proverbial audiophile bargain capable of delivering musical satisfaction on most levels that count. I also find them very nicely made (I dig the bamboo), nicely packaged, they include all of the cables you need to get going, and even hand you a remote to control the volume so that when you're sitting back being carried away by your favorite tunes you don't have to open your eyes or even lean forward to go even deeper.

Associated Equipment

Also on hand and in use during the Audioengine 5+ (A5+) Premium Powered Speaker review:
CEntrance Audiophile Desktop