

# Audioengine's A5+ is a fun, affordable speaker system | Macworld

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February 18, 2013

## Speakers

### Audioengine A5+ Premium Powered Speakers

I've been a fan of Audioengine's [A5 powered bookshelf speakers](#) () since I first laid ears on them in 2006. They provided plenty of enjoyable sound for their size and, at \$350, they were a solid bargain. The company has since released an updated version of the A5 named, appropriately enough, the A5+—or, officially, the [A5+ Premium Powered Speakers](#). They are, in nearly every way, worthy successors to the original.

### **What's inside, and on the back**

Like the A5 before it, the A5+ has an integrated amplifier in the left speaker—specifically, a 50-watts-per-channel, Class AB amp. The amplifier and thermal grill on the back of the left speaker add significantly to its weight: The left speaker weighs 15.4 lbs versus the right speaker's 9.6 lbs. Each speaker has a 5-inch Kevlar woofer and 20-mm silk-dome tweeter.

Changes from the A5 include pro-style speaker posts that accommodate banana plug, spade, and bare-wire connections. Additionally, you'll find a slim, rectangular bass port on the top rear of each speaker, rather than the round port found on the A5. Unfortunately, the A5+ loses the rear-mounted AC-power jack of the A5—a popular feature because it provided a simple and convenient way to connect an AirPort Express base station for streaming music from iTunes.



The rear of the A5+

However, with the A5+, the left speaker has gained stereo RCA input and output jacks (the latter for connecting a subwoofer) to accompany the single 3.5-mm stereo-input jack. And the A5's powered USB port has been moved from the top of the speaker to the back on the A5+. (The USB port is for power only—you can't use it for audio input.) The RCA and 3.5-mm inputs are not switchable—they're both on all the time. This is great if you have two devices plugged into the

speakers at the same time, as you can play either without having to flip an input switch—provided you don't try to play them simultaneously.

Like the A5, the A5+ comes in white, black, or bamboo finish, with the eco-friendly bamboo model setting you back \$70 more (\$469) than the black or white versions (\$399). The bottoms are padded and include a 1/4-inch screw insert for attaching the speakers to stands. An included infrared remote control—also an improvement over the A5—features Sleep, Mute, and Volume Up and Down buttons.

## Central sound

At 10.75 inches tall, 7 inches wide, and 7.8 inches deep each, the A5+ speakers are a little beefy for a typical computer desk, but they can be used that way. Unlike Audioengine's smaller [A2 Powered Desktop Speakers](#) (), which I don't think are at their best on a desk, the A5+ sound perfectly fine. The stereo imaging holds up well even at such close quarters and the bass is big but well-defined.

In other locations in my home, the sound was just as big. I placed the A5+ speakers atop my vintage B&W DM7 Mk 2 speakers, attached a Sonos player to each set of speakers, balanced the volume between the two using a real-time analyser, and flipped between the two systems to see how they compared. (I understand this isn't an apples-to-apples comparison. The B&W speakers are more neutral, quite a bit larger, and far more expensive than the A5+. But it gave me some idea of how the A5+ is colored in comparison to speakers I'm familiar with.)

I listened to a variety of music—classical, jazz, and classic rock and soul, as well as today's modern hits—using both compressed and uncompressed media, streamed from services such as Spotify and Rhapsody and played directly from an iPod classic. Two immediate differences popped out. First, the A5+ pushes the bass and lower-midrange. Those frequencies were clearly defined rather than muddy, but they're emphasized. Second, the soundstage is focused toward the middle. With tracks that have very distinct parts panned left or right across the soundstage, the B&W speakers left them out on the edges, while the A5+ tended to bring them closer to the center.

So, yes, you'd have a tough time defining the A5+ as reference speakers—they're not, nor are they designed to be. But that doesn't mean they're not fun to listen to. In fact, I enjoyed their lower-end punch when listening to rock and pop tracks, and my daughter (bless her earwormy soul) went wild when I consented to play Carly Rae Jepsen's "Call Me Maybe" and Katy Perry's "Wide Awake" at high volume. When I attached a powered subwoofer to fill out the low end, it clinched the deal. At the same time, the lows and lower-mids don't overshadow the highs—the higher frequencies are clearly present though not entirely shimmery.

## Macworld's buying advice

There's a reason Audioengine has moved from a couple of guys hauling speakers to reviewers across the country to a respected brand: The company makes good stuff at reasonable prices. The A5+ Premium Powered Speakers are no exception, offering a distinctive sound that I happen to like for a lot of the music I listen to. (Others I've played them for like them as well.) That said, if you're looking for neutral reference speakers, these aren't for you—they simply aren't studio monitors. As with any set of speakers, your ears will be the best judge of what brings you sonic happiness. The good news is that Audioengine offers a 30-day trial period. Order a pair, give them a listen, and if you don't care for what you hear, you're welcome to return them for a refund. My guess is that you won't.

By [Christopher Breen](#), Macworld