

# Audioengine 5+ Powered Loudspeaker (Playback 55)

<http://www.avguide.com/review/audioengine-5-powered-loudspeaker-playback-55>

June 21, 2012

April 9th, 2012 -- by Steven Stone

Source: Playback

How many powered loudspeakers are available for \$399 a pair? Probably more than I can count on my fingers and toes. And if I were forced to listen to them all, back-to-back, I'd be ready for counseling or medication. Thank God for exceptions. The AudioEngine 5+ speakers are the second pair of under-\$400 powered speakers I've reviewed recently. The first was the Focal XS Book for *The Absolute Sound*. The XS Book was a neat speaker, but I think most people, especially those who like to rock out, will prefer the AudioEngine 5+.



The 5+ offers clean looks and neither needs (nor offers) speaker grills. Its extra beefy power amplifier provides impressive dynamic with dynamic performance. With a volume control on the front of the left speaker as well as a remote and iPod USB power option, the 5+ can be the center of surprisingly good sounding bedroom, den, or computer-based desktop system.

The 5+ is available in three finishes: satin black, hi-gloss white, or solid carbonized bamboo. Audioengine sent a pair with a satin black finish for review. The finish was impeccable with no swirls or irregular marks on any of its surfaces. I mentioned earlier that the 5+ comes without speaker grills. In lieu of a speaker grill, the 5+ has molded one-piece charcoal-colored circular baffles around the drivers so that you never need to look at a bare screw or speaker basket edge. With a look like this you don't

need or want grills.

Because the power amps to drive both speakers are housed in the left-hand speaker, the left-hand unit weighs more and has a large cooling fin on the back. The left-hand speaker also has provisions for an AC power connection, one pair of RCA inputs, one stereo mini-jack input, one pair of RCA single-ended variable outputs (provided for purposes of feeding a signal to a subwoofer, if desired), the on/off power switch, a voltage selection slider switch, and a set of five-way binding posts for output to the right-hand speaker. The right side passive speaker only has a pair of five-way binding posts.

If you prefer to swap the speakers so the left side has the passive unit while the right side has the active electronics with all the inputs and outputs, simply reverse the inputs to the 5+ and put the left speaker on right and the right speaker on the left. Why would you want to do this? One good reason would be because the 5+'s tweeter is not situated directly above the midrange/woofer driver, but rather is positioned approximately one inch off-center (so that the left and right speakers are mirror imaged). By reversing the speakers you can get the tweeters closer together than with the standard set-up. On my desktop the 5+ speakers imaged more precisely with the speakers switched left for right. Of course your mileage may vary, but it might be worth a try for either sonic or ergonomic reasons.



## FEATURES

- Built-in power amplifiers (both are housed in the left speaker).
- Credit-card-sized remote control.
- Improved thermal management vis-à-vis earlier versions of the A5.
- RCA and mini-jack audio inputs.
- Front panel volume control.
- USB power charge port (allowing users to charge up iPods from the speaker system).
- Variable preamp audio output (this feature makes it much easier to add a powered subwoofer, if desired).
- Gold-plated connectors.
- Full-size 5-way speaker binding posts.
- Custom Kevlar woofers and silk dome tweeters.
- Hand-built MDF wood cabinets (except in the case of models ordered with laminated, carbonized

bamboo enclosures).

- Magnetically shielded (not as important a feature as it once was, but a nice touch that means it's OK to use the 5+ alongside old-school CRT monitors).
- Advanced, tuned cabinet with rear-ported waveguide.
- Stand-mount 1/4" threaded inserts.
- Cables included.

## ERGONOMICS

Unlike some speakers, which can take as much as 100 hours to break-in and perform at their full potential, the 5+ speakers sounded fine right out of the box. And while I don't doubt that they still improved with some playing time, they didn't go through the sort of radical changes I heard during the Focal XS Book (\$399/pair) speakers' first 100 hours of break-in.

In my desktop system I used the 5+ speakers perched atop ADAM acoustics' desktop speaker stands. Originally made for the ADAM A5 speaker, these stands not only raise a monitor 2 3/4" above the desktop, but also angle the speaker slightly backwards. When the A5+s were on the ADAM stands, my ears were about 1" below the tweeter and 3" above the center of the midrange/woofer.

---

April 9th, 2012 -- by Steven Stone  
Source: Playback

The only adjustment on the front of the 5+ is a small rotary volume control knob. On the opposite side of the knob there's a small white light that blinks when you turn the knob up or down and stops blinking when you reach the top or bottom of the 5+'s adjustment range.

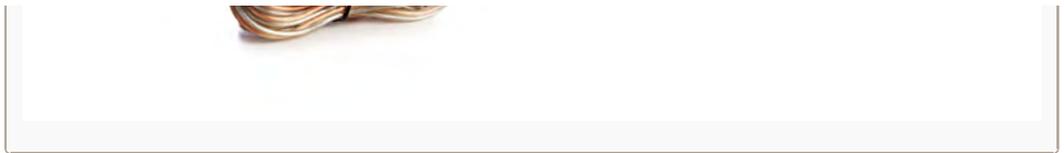
Next to the white light is the small translucent circle of the 5+'s remote control. The remote is one of those credit-card-sized units that have a way of finding the crevices of couches with tiresome regularity. The remote offers four options: volume up, volume down, mute, and sleep. For the end-user there's not a lot of difference between sleep and mute—in both cases the music does a quick fade (nice touch that fade) to silence. But in sleep you've actually partially powered down the 5+, while in mute you've merely attenuated the audio output. The acceptance angle for the remote is extremely wide and the remote itself has plenty of reach.

## SONIC CHARACTER

If the 5+ speakers were a breed of dog they'd probably be golden retrievers: friendly, smart, easy on the eyes, and loyal. In the 5+'s case, the loyalty is to the music, although they do lean towards the warm euphonic side of absolute neutrality. Given the 5+'s modest price, a somewhat harmonically



“friendly” skew with a smidgen more lower midrange and mid-bass than would be considered ruler-flat isn’t a bad way to tilt the odds in favor of a wider variety of music listeners.



Some speakers, especially smaller powered speakers, are dynamically limited. That wasn’t a problem with the 5+ speakers. I recently recorded the world premiere of a modern classical “concerto” for beat box and orchestra (a beat box is a guy with a microphone and the skills to mimic percussive sounds). When I listened to the playback over the 5+ speakers the big percussive attacks were handled with ease, but what was even more impressive was the way the 5+ speakers captured the micro-dynamics involved in the subtle rhythmic play between the full drum kit, tympani, and pair of xylophones onstage.

Although not as three-dimensional or revealing as the far more expensive combination of a pair of Aerial Acoustics 5B speakers (\$2400/pr) tethered to a Parasound A-23 amplifier (\$799), the Audioengine 5+ speakers were still capable of creating a cohesive and convincing three-dimensional sound stage that came very close to the higher-priced spread. Although the spaces between the instruments and outlines of the instruments weren’t as well defined, and the background wasn’t quite as quiet or grain-free as with my reference separates, it became clear after a few minutes of listening that it’s easy to be seduced by the amount of sonic information the 5+ speakers deliver.

The 5+’s published specs list their lower threshold at 50 Hz. If you want real low bass, you will need to use a subwoofer. But the 5+ speakers do deliver more than adequate amounts of mid and upper bass. The rear-firing slot-loaded port lets the speaker’s 5” Kevlar mid/bass driver generate more low-frequency energy than you would expect. And it is high quality, nuanced bass, not a one-note blatt. In a leaky-bass environment, such as a dorm, apartment, or small condo, using the Audioengine 5+ system without a subwoofer would be a more neighborly way to go, and given the 5+’s mid and upper bass capabilities, would still make for a rollicking good time.

If you move around in your chair while listening, you’ll be glad the 5+’s listening window is size gigantica. For chair-bound listeners it’s virtually impossible to boogie your way out of the 5+’s sweet spot. Taller listeners using the 5+ for a near-field desktop system will want to use some sort of speaker riser or stand for optimum performance, and even shorter listeners may find a stand improves the 5+’s image cohesion and soundstage size.

## MUSICAL EXAMPLES

To hear how well the 5+s handled well-recorded commercial rock I played Toy Matinee’s “Last Plane Out” from Toy Matinee’s eponymous album [*Toy Matinee*, Warner Bros.]. Although the 5+s didn’t plumb the depths of this track’s low bass, they did a good job of handling the



synth's upper bass lines. The acoustic guitars' midrange was sweetly rendered while the electric guitar's solo remained salty. The synth-drums didn't have quite the impact I'm



accustomed to and the dynamic slam wasn't nearly equal to a pair of ATC SCM7 speakers driven by an Accuphase P-300. Still, the 5+'s overall presentation was euphonically musical, with enough backbone to keep the music lively. Volume-wise, the 5+ had enough horsepower to produce over 95 dB at listening position without audible distress. By the time the 5+s began to get untidy they were really LOUD.

---

April 9th, 2012 -- by Steven Stone  
Source: Playback

On my own classical recordings I could hear and admire the 5+'s superior imaging capabilities. When set up optimally, the 5+ speakers created a convincing and articulate three-dimensional soundstage. Overall soundstage size was excellent and practically on a par with my reference speakers. The 5+'s extra dollop of energy in the upper and mid-bass gave my recordings more weight and heft at the expense of some transparency. Anyone looking for a small powered monitor with a neutral harmonic balance would be better served by other options, such as the similarly sized, but twice as expensive, ADAM ARTist 5 powered monitors.

## CONCLUSION

For \$399 the AudioEngine 5+ powered speaker delivers more than enough music to be satisfying, even if you're used to listening to far more expensive gear. Dynamic, well designed, and well made, the 5+ offers an elegant solution to the problem of choosing a high-value desktop/nearfield monitor.

### Consider this powered speaker if:

- You need a speaker with one volume control for both speakers.
- You want a powered speaker with a remote control.
- You like to play music loudly on occasion.
- You favor a speaker that images well and offers mostly neutral voicing, but that adds a touch of euphonic warmth.

### Look further if:

- You prefer less boxy looking transducers.
- You must put your speakers where there is no AC power.
- You don't need a speaker that can play loudly.
- You want a self-powered speaker with digital audio inputs (but note: the combination of the 5+ with Audioengine's superb D1 DAC should address this requirement quite nicely).

### Ratings (relative to comparably-priced self-powered speaker systems)

- Transparency and Focus: **8**
- Imaging and Soundstaging: **9**
- Tonal Balance: **8**
- Dynamics: **8**

- Bass Extension: **8**
- Bass Pitch Definition: **8**
- Bass Dynamics **8**
- Value: **9**

## **BOTTOM LINE:**

*If my brother-in-law came to me and asked what to buy for his computer audio system with a budget of \$399 for powered speakers I'd recommend the AudioEngine 5+ speakers in a heartbeat. Their performance in a desktop environment leaves little to criticize. Sure, the overall harmonic balance is a bit warm, but for most people, that's just one more reason they're going to enjoy listening to music through them.*

## **SPECS & PRICING**

**Type:** 2-way powered (active) bookshelf-style speaker system

### **Accessories (what's in the box)**

- A5+ powered (left) speaker
- A5+ passive (right) speaker
- Remote control
- Speaker wire (16AWG), 3.75 meters (~12.3ft)
- Detachable power cord
- Mini-jack audio cable, 2 meters (~6.5ft)
- RCA to RCA audio cable, 2 meters (~6.5ft)
- Cloth speaker bags (2)
- Cloth cable bag
- Setup Guide
- Product line brochure

### **Amplifier Section**

**Power Output:** 150W peak power total (50W RMS/75W peak per channel), AES.

**Inputs:** Two stereo analog audio inputs (one via 3.5mm stereo mini-jack, one via a stereo pair of RCA jacks).

**Input impedance:** 10K ohms unbalanced.

**Outputs:** One stereo analog audio via RCA jacks (full-range, adjustable level),; one USB Type A (power/charging).

**Voltages:** 115/240V, 50/60Hz manually switchable.

**Protection:** Protection: Output current limiting, thermal over-temperature, power on/off transient protection, and replaceable external main fuse.

**Amplifier Type:** Dual Class AB monolithic.

**Signal-to-noise:** >95dB (typical A-weighted).

**THD:** <0.05% at all power settings.

**Crosstalk:** <50db

### **Speaker Section**

**Driver complement:** 5" Kevlar mid/bass driver with advanced voice coils, 20mm silk dome tweeter with neodymium magnets.

**Frequency response:** 50Hz-22kHz +/-1.5dB

**Finish options:** Satin Black, Hi-Gloss White, Solid Carbonized Bamboo

**Materials and Construction:** 25mm thick MDF cabinets.

**Frequency response:** 50Hz-22kHz +/-1.5dB

**Dimensions (each speaker H x W x D):** 10.75" x 7" x 7.75"

**Shipping Box Dimensions (H x W x D):** 15" x 22" x 11.5"

**Weight:**

• **Left speaker:** 15.4 lbs.

• **Right speaker:** 9.6 lbs.

• **Shipping weight:** 31 lbs.

**Warranty:** 3-year warranty, 30 day audition period

**Price:** \$399/pair

---

April 9th, 2012 -- by Steven Stone

Source: Playback

[LOGIN](#)

[GET OUR FREE WEEKLY NEWSLETTER](#)

[HOME](#)

## **MANUFACTURER**

AUDIOENGINE

(877) 853-4447

[www.audioengineusa.com](http://www.audioengineusa.com)

All content, design, and layout are Copyright © 1999 - 2011 NextScreen. All Rights Reserved.

Reproduction in whole or part in any form or medium without specific written permission is prohibited.