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AUDIOENGINE A2+ DESKTOP SPEAKERS AND D3 DAC

A Perfect Starter Combo that Sports an Easy Entry Fee

by [Spencer Holbert](#) | Feb 05th, 2014

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Though it wasn't that long ago, I haven't owned a pair of desktop speakers since my college dorm days. Space was at a premium back then, and the hi-fi system that I loved had to stay at home and collect dust until I moved into larger accommodations. For the time being, I was stuck with the terrible-sounding computer speakers *du jour* and had to wait for a bigger place that could house my real stereo. Once I got my stereo back, I never thought twice about computer speakers—that is, until I learned I would be reviewing Audioengine's A2+ Powered Desktop Speakers and D3 DAC. It was with a mixed sense of excitement and intrigue that I opened the door a week later and found a box from Audioengine on my front porch. I mean, they're *computer speakers*, how good could they really sound? But then again, if *The Absolute Sound* wants a set of desktop speakers reviewed, then they must be decent, right? It was time to discover the truth.

The first thing I noticed when I opened the box was the amazing amount of care



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Audioengine took while packaging this system. Each speaker—as well as the power supply and cables—is placed in its own microfiber bag, and everything in the box fits snugly together in such a way that it seems almost impossible for shipping damage to occur. The Audioengine A2+ package is as turnkey as it gets; the speakers will accept virtually any high-level source you can throw at it, as long as that source outputs via RCA, USB, or 3.5mm. If you are in the market for some affordable powered desktop speakers, that means you will be able to connect all of your source components to these bad boys with nary a worry: TVs, computers, iDevices, Blu-ray players, external DACs, Betamax, five-second anti-skip CD players...er, childhood flashback. They even have a variable RCA output so that you can connect a subwoofer (maybe their S8 powered sub?) or one of Audioengine's wireless streaming devices. Included in the box are two meters of 16AWG speaker wire to connect the left and right channels (the binding posts also accept banana/spade-terminated speaker cables), a 1.5-meter 3.5mm mini-jack audio cable (for those iDevices and Walkmans), a 1.5-meter USB cable, the power supply, and all documentation needed. Short of a puppy with a red bow, the A2+ Powered Desktop Speakers come with everything you need to start rockin' in no time flat. An extra surprise was also shipped along with the A2+ speakers, the Audioengine D3 DAC, which I will discuss in a bit.

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The only source I used with the A2+ speakers—except for a stint of rabble-rousing friends who took turns playing iPod DJ via the 3.5mm input—was my MacBook Pro, which is presumably the kind of source most consumers of Audioengine products will use. I definitely ran the gamut of digital audio quality, from lossy MP3s to hi-res WAV files, Netflix streaming movies to DVDs, and even Pandora. I also tested every possible combination of audio format with the stock cables all the way up to audiophile-grade connections and speaker wire, just for the fun of it. But let's stick with what comes with the A2+ speakers and go from there.

Starting with USB input (which is a new feature that the last version, the Audioengine A2, does not have), I connected my laptop directly to the A2+ using the stock USB cable,

launched iTunes *sans* any third-party audiophile software, and played one of my favorite “soundstage test tracks,” Radiohead’s “Everything In Its Right Place.” I love this track, not only because it’s great music, but also because the way Thom Yorke plays with phasing and the soundstage. But when the track started, my heart sank: It sounded as if I were listening in a phone booth, plus there was some serious cone breakup and distortion coming from the left channel (the channel that houses the amp and inputs). I checked all my settings and everything looked correct, so I decided to step away for an hour, let the speakers break in for a bit, and come back for another listen. Interestingly enough, that did the trick; after only an hour on repeat, the speakers sounded much better, and the left-channel distortion had vanished. The lesson is to let these speakers play for a while before judging them (Audioengine allows for a 30-day audition, lucky you).

Actually, they sounded really good. *Really* good. I would have never thought that 6" desktop speakers could sound this good, except for maybe those studio monitors that call themselves desktop speakers. But these are actually *designed* for use with your computer, hence Audioengine’s tagline, “Join the computer audio [r]evolution.” Okay, where do I sign? I suddenly had that ole music-lover’s itch to play as much music as possible (the best kind of itch, I might add), and selected numerous tracks from downtempo-ambient artists on the Ultimae record label. Want to really test a speaker’s capability? Then choose any album in Ultimae’s catalogue (ultimae.com) and be prepared to stretch for the highest highs, lowest lows, and widest soundstage you could possibly imagine. Well, the A2+ speakers performed beautifully. Not only did they provide enough bass extension to satisfy any bass head (65Hz response seems a lot lower when speakers are so close; then there’s that S8 powered sub you can add on), they proved extremely forgiving in the set-up department. I set mine at arm’s length (roughly 25" from ear to tweeter) and toed-in directly at the flanks of my ears, which provided the best soundstage. Did I mention they were forgiving? Whether I hunched over my computer, slouched in my chair, rested my head on my hand (*à la* a tired college student), or sat up in that sonic sweet spot, the A2+ speakers sounded great. Let’s check that price tag again: Yep, for \$249 you can’t ask for any better than this.