

## Audioengine 2+ Desktop Loudspeaker System

BY AUDIOHEAD - MARCH 8, 2014

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Audioengine makes some great digital audio products that span the utility of the hobby in many helpful and unique ways, but what they are most commonly known for are their economically responsible desktop speakers. The easily-recognizable black or refrigerator-white design is almost a visual staple in the computer audio world. Retracting far away from the \$20k speaker designs of the audiophile high end, the robust desktop speaker line makes a home starting at \$249 and progresses up from there. The current lineup features the all-new 2.75" woofer A2+ (now with a built in DAC), the passive 4" P4, and the powered 5" A5+. With the addition of a Burr Brown PCM2704C DAC to the entry level A2+, the complete computer desktop is really starting to contend with some of the more mainstream options out there. Jawbone's newest Big Jambox retails for \$300, the Soundmatters foxL

DASH 7 sells for \$249, neither of which allows for USB connectivity other than power. The resulting combination of amp/DAC/speaker demands attention from the budget listener looking to breath new life into his desktop setup.

First things first, the 4" wide by 6" tall real estate the A2+ takes up will most likely be able to fit on most desktops. Sadly, many of the audiophile "bookshelf" style loudspeakers do not. Add on a separate amp/source and you might as well throw in some racking and full size stands into the mix. Not so with the A2+, it knows its consumer well. It accurately fits within the parameters given. A direct flight path is usually the best setup for treble frequencies, so the matching DS1 desktop stands Audioengine offers may do well for most listeners to get the angle just right for near field listening. An initial setup on the desktop proved to be an excellent fit on either side of my Macbook Air and connecting the unit via USB was a breeze. It's worth repeating here that the A2+ *does* fit on most standard desktops, which is not something that many (if any) decent sounding speakers can really claim. Truly an appropriate fit for the company's computer-adjacent positioning. After an initial walkthrough on the desk, further critical listening took place next to loudspeaker reference system in the main room.

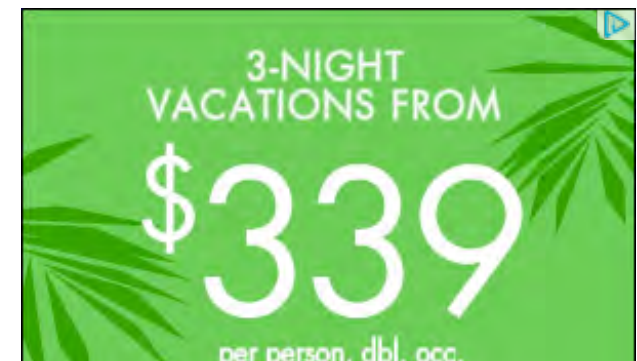




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Having heard the company's products at audio shows before, I was very eager to get a pair into the lab to hear what all the excitement was about. Entry-level loudspeaker gear doesn't swing about as commonly as head-fi products do. With all the prosper ingredients for success in a single package, the A2+ combination had the potential to pull "audiophile" down from the rafters and into the hands of the many. Connection to both Mac and PC was simple, and straight out of the box it was easy to tell why Audioengine can often be seen in the same hallways with the rest of the audiophile elite. It lives and breathes where the search for better sound starts for so many, clarity. The vocal transparency of the very first track pushed through the small rig far exceeded my expectations for a 2.75" woofer in a 4" by 6" box. Telltale extraneous mouth sounds (lips, mouth opening) were all tangibly audible around the vocal performances through the system on well-recorded tracks. These as well as other minute sonic indicators added to the realism and believability of the presentation. The title track from Diana Krall's *Glad Rag Doll* clearly contained the precious information surrounding the singer's voice that helped the compact loudspeaker cross the invisible threshold into high fidelity with grace. There was simply no comparison to the other mainstream consumer products I had on hand. The Jawbone

Jambox required careful line level maintenance through the use of a preamp to avoid any traces of distortion through its analog input. Even with this assistance, highs were out of focus, and the whole presentation felt a bit tizzy by comparison. The A2+ ruled supreme across the board in the shootout. The Audioengine's mid frequencies likewise were also surprisingly coherent and deliberate. While the low end from the A2+ won't be a substitute for a subwoofer in your home theater any time soon, the bass is ample for nearfield listening and small rooms. My office desk shook with a satisfying rumble at high levels and with bass intensive songs. The volume output of the entire system is easily enough to fill small room with no issue.



While USB input tops out CD quality 16/48, the resolution cap still feels appropriate for the product. AudioEngine does offers a step up product in that direction with their external D3 USB DAC. There was a little more depth to the loudspeaker with the inclusion of the Auralic VEGA digital processor



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(\$3,500) and a pair of Zu Mission RCA Mk.II-B cables connected to the analog inputs of the A2+ (the unit also offers a minijack input as well). But at this price point, this speaks very well for the actual drivers and design of the unit, more so than a symbolic ding to the DAC section. The A2+ even supplies a pair of single ended RCA outputs for connection to a subwoofer should you really want to bring the house down.

The true value of this product is derived from the sum of its parts. USB connectivity, amp and speaker make for an appetizing combination that feels right at home next to any computer setup and (dare I say) on a bookshelf. This is where the audiophile journey begins for many people. The A2+ is something truly reasonable among outlandish designs and price tags. It is a well-deserved gateway drug for those looking to take the plunge, like a pied piper of audio dancing down the street drawing you into the next hifi store. The upgrade from any laptop speaker is undeniable and almost a necessity for any lover of music. The A2+ brings a sense of immediacy that is all but foreign feeling for loudspeaker audio combinations in the sub \$300 arena.

Audioengine is quite gracious with their time, attending a very high percentage of audio shows across America, throwing down tunes side by side with rigs easily 100x the cost. This gives many of the general populace the chance to hear their competitive wares in person. I highly suggest you seek them out if you find yourself in such a situation. The A2+ does a great many things right, breaking some fresh ground for budget and even mainstream audio products within its competitive set. The size, price and performance are a lethal combination. Highly recommended.

<http://audioengineusa.com/>

On Amazon: <http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/B00DQMJE7E/>