

Audience ClairAudient 1+1 V5 stand-mount loudspeaker

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We've long championed a 'metropolitan' approach to audio. The two-channel systems small enough to be used in those listening spaces where full-sized, full-range systems are too physically and sonically overbearing. But what if 'smaller' is still too big? What if you want high-grade sound in a studio flat that makes a caravan look 'roomy'? What if desktop audio is all the audio you need? For that, there's the ClairAudient 1+1 V5 by Audience.

This loudspeaker is not just small, it's tiny. It's not quite a cube, but it's the kind of loudspeaker that can fit on a desktop without looking out of place. It's also not quite a bookshelf design, as it needs space around its sides and rear. But as a desk or stand-mount loudspeaker, it's one of the smallest, making it a perfect fit for compact audio setups.

In Search of Space

Why does it need that space around it? The wide-band 50mm A3S2-16 drive unit at the front of the speaker is echoed at the rear, making this a bipole design. Meanwhile, there are 100mm passive radiator drivers on either flank of >>



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» the loudspeaker. The whole unit stands just 200mm tall. They are extremely well finished, even if they are not the world's largest or heaviest loudspeakers. The richness of the side cheek wood and contrasting piano black gives the loudspeaker a classy, distinctly American look. It's also angled to create a good degree of non-parallelism in the cabinet to reduce standing waves, ensuring a high-quality sound projection.

That wide-band A3S2-16 drive unit is flat to 22kHz, obviating the need for a tweeter. Coupled with the two passive radiators, it brings the bass down to 55Hz, too. And because this is a full-range unit with two passive radiators, there's no need for a crossover network. However, there is a high-pass filter to eliminate sub-40Hz signals. This was included in V5 to prevent the driver being damaged by deep bass notes when played loud. In the process, the 1+1 V5's bass response was improved and power handling – and volume – increased.

As the front and rear drivers work in bipole mode, they are wired in phase (unlike a dipole design) so even the wiring from the loudspeaker terminals is simple. It also makes the loudspeaker relatively easy to drive, with an eight-ohm impedance and 87dB in-room sensitivity (1W at 1m). So, partnering these mighty minis with an equally small amplifier is a distinct possibility.

Fifth Iteration

As the name suggests, the latest V5 is the fifth iteration of the ClairAudient 1+1. The original was released 12 years ago at T.H.E. Show in Newport Beach in California. There were major revisions in 2016, 2018, and 2021 before the V5 launched in June of 2022. There was also The ONE, a single-driver loudspeaker with just a rear-firing passive radiator, which we reviewed way back in issue 104. Previous editions of the now-discontinued The ONE can be brought up to the last V4 specification, while every iteration of the 1+1 can be brought to the latest V5 specifications. The price for the surgery varies from \$500 for a V4 to \$1,575 for a 1+1 V1. The upgrades include those new A3S2-16 drivers as well as 6N OCC internal wiring, ultra-low mass KLEI binding posts and re-tuned passive radiators. For the 1+1 V5, additional upgrades include a modified internal cabinet structure, baffle-step reduction, and a high-pass frequency circuit.

I want to say I had no expectations or biases in opening the Audience box, but that's not entirely true. I couldn't help but think the 1+1 V5 is quite a lot of money for not a lot of box. That bias evaporated a few bars into playing the Audience ClairAudient 1+1 V5. The 'where did you put the subwoofer' cliché is overused in audio, but it does hold here. The tiny loudspeakers pump out impressive amounts of bass in the near-field. You tend to make a comedy double-take, staring at the speakers, looking at that 55Hz rating, hearing the bass, and then going around again a few times.

It's a grippy and fast bass, taut and precise rather than flabby, but the sound has some real depth. Best of all, it's the kind of bass that doesn't just lend itself to one type of music; flip between a string quartet, jazz trio and electronica, and it comes with bowed and plucked strings and the almost square wave bass drum beats with equal aplomb. This loudspeaker doesn't have the usual 80Hz bloom to make it seem bigger and deeper. Instead, it plays music with fidelity and charm in equal measure. »



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» Point source

Then there's the imaging. Point source loudspeakers like this image well and the ClairAudient 1+1 V5 is no exception. However, I can't help but listen to the ClairAudient 1+1 V5 and think 'Quad Electrostatics'. The two loudspeakers share an ability to image that few other brands get close to achieving. The image adds immensely to the realism with the right recording, such as the Decca/Eloquence reissue of the 1957 D'Oyly Carte recording of the overture to Gilbert & Sullivan's *The Pirates of Penzance*. You get the impression of singers walking around on stage, the orchestra pit in front of them and occasionally the rumble of Underground trains beneath the Kingsway Hall where they recorded.

Like the Quad Electrostatic, the little ClairAudient 1+1 V5 has a seamless and coherent sound, even from top to bottom. It has none of the brash brightness or glare that you often find in shrill tweeters and instead sounds lithe and smooth, especially across the mids and treble. This becomes all important with recordings with solo voices. My go-to Joyce DiDonato *Stella Di Napoli* album [Erato] gives the voice extension and clarity that is a joy to listen to. As the orchestra gradually falls away to just her and a French horn, the interplay between the two is highlighted perfectly. This is how a Quad Electrostatic resolves this music, although the ClairAudient doesn't need a barn of a room to breathe.

Where the Audience and Quad loudspeakers diverge is in the dynamic range. The ClairAudient 1+1 V5 is a far stronger contender when playing music with either subtle textures or large and loud dynamic swings. This is a loudspeaker that knows no fear playing Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances* and Tool's *Fear Inoculum*, so that audiophile jazz trio is easily dealt with.

This loudspeaker is a remarkably powerful little model, too. It can fill a small room with sound and goes loud enough in context. No, it won't play at PA levels, but given you are likely not far from touching distance to the loudspeakers, maybe a PA level isn't necessary. It goes loud enough and clean enough in the near-field to set off the 'Loud Environment' alarm on an Apple Watch. While that shouldn't be a badge of honour, if it can play loud and clear in an appropriately sized room, what's not to like?

The limitations of the ClairAudient 1+1 V5 are clear and entirely academic in context. In not trying to break the laws of physics, the restrictions on bass and absolute headroom

from a small speaker become noticeable when used in a large room. It remains surprising how large a room these loudspeakers can fill and how little that bass matters to those of us who don't have a collection of Organ Pedal and Alpine Horn music. But if you are determined to try and use a pair of 'personal monitors' in a room where a PA might struggle, yeah... you found the limits of this speaker. And you probably won't find a subwoofer that can keep pace with the quicksilver-fast ClairAudient 1+1 V5 either.

Personal monitors

Look at them for what they are, though, and suddenly, the Audience ClairAudient 1+1 V5 makes a lot of sense. They are true 'personal monitors'; used in the near-field in a small listening space, these pocket rockets are stunning and extremely hard to beat. They make many of the more conventional multi-way loudspeakers sound uneven and inconsistent. They have none of the artifice we normally accept as part of listening to 'hi-fi' as they sound closer to real music in so many ways.

Whether this forms the loudspeaker end of your first system in a starter home, you live in a chic apartment that costs a fortune in rent, or you decided to downshift to somewhere smaller now that the kids have grown up, the Audience ClairAudient 1+1 V5 brings Big Audio Sensibilities into the smallest spaces. But don't just dismiss them as micro monitors; they are one of the best loudspeakers money can buy. And they need to be more widely available! +

Technical specifications

Type: Full-range bipole loudspeaker with side-mounted passive radiators

Drive Units: 2x 50mm A3S2-16 titanium full-range units in dipole layout, 2x 100mm passive radiators

Terminals: five-way binding posts

Frequency Response: 55Hz-20kHz ±3dB

Impedance: eight ohms

Sensitivity (in room): 87dB/1W/1m

Dimensions (HxWxD): 20.3x15.2x24.8cm

Weight: 3.29kg

Price: \$3,900 per pair

Manufacturer: Audience

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