

# audition

equipment review

## Sonique

### AV Home Theatre Speakers

**L**oudspeakers. Take your pick — there are thousands of them. So much so, we could devote every review of every single issue of *Audio & Video Lifestyle* just to loudspeakers and still only scratch the surface. So you can imagine, buying a pair can be hard enough, let alone six or more of them. Before AV surround sound became so popular, at the least the job of auditioning loudspeakers meant only having to listen to two at a time. These days, 5.1, 6.1 even 7.1 channels of surround sound mean lots of loudspeakers and to deliver convincing surround sound, they all have to gel.

Initially speaker manufacturers simply bolted on a three-pack to existing designs, so if you wanted to make the move from stereo to home theatre, a centre and pair of rears was all that was needed. Dolby went digital, DVD replaced Laserdisc and all of sudden things got a little more complex. The speakers needed to match tonally as with increased audio dynamics, the role of home theatre speakers became a lot more involved. And with the latest multichannel music pushing the frequency boundaries further still, today's AV speaker system really needs to be able to cut the mustard.

In terms of population, Australia has an inordinate number of decent loudspeaker manufacturers. One of them is Sonique Audio, based in South Australia, a company that over the past decade has been busily producing quality gear, from a factory just outside Adelaide. The past couple years has seen a fair few new models join its portfolio and there's a Sonique speaker for most tastes and budgets. The core of its range has to be the SAV series. Comprising bookshelf monitor designs and floorstanding towers, along with centre and rear effects, the SAV models suit both hi-fi and home theatre uses. There are also a number of active subwoofers as well, so if you're after the whole lot, Sonique has it covered.

We've looked at and reviewed a fair slice of the company's products, but it had been a while since we took delivery of a complete home theatre package. With a new centre channel just out and offering Special Edition versions of every loudspeaker it manufactures, this collection of Sonique SAVs represents the best the series has to offer.

Up front we have a pair of the new SAV-5SE floorstanders, reviewed on their own in *Audio & Video Lifestyle* issue AVL-119, the new SAV-C5SE centre speaker, a pair of the rather

**It's not just  
fine wines that  
are born in  
South Australia  
... quality  
loudspeakers  
also call SA  
home**

By Nic Tatham

nifty SAV-DB1 surrounds and no self-respecting home theatre system should be without an active subwoofer — in this case it's the SE version of the Thunderbox 1200. All up, six loudspeakers with a collective worth of some \$10,000. Not exactly bargain basement, but then nothing about this speaker system is.

Loudspeaker manufacturers have also had to be able to offer the consumer the best of both worlds. Listening to music and taking in a movie are two very different experiences, so the speakers have to be able to communicate this difference. Quite often a system can be mightily impressive with film soundtracks but doesn't have what it takes with the finer art of reproducing music. Take it from me, this isn't something that afflicts any of Sonique's loudspeakers. They are as adept at reproducing a subtle ting of an orchestral triangle as they are making you believe you're aboard one of the sinking ships in *Pearl Harbor*. For a loudspeaker to be able to convey this sort of audible repertoire convincingly and accurately, takes a lot of design and engineering as well as listening input during its journey from conception to finished product.

Many loudspeaker designers spend much of their time listening to and fine



tuning their products. Even seeking other people's opinions, all is taken onboard and digested. And as a result, loudspeakers differ dramatically in sound quality. Some sound bright, other bass-heavy. Some sound lively, others dull as ditchwater, and we all have different tastes and musical preferences. So finding a balance that will appeal to a wider percentage of the speaker buying public, is a tricky and almost impossible task, but one that I feel Sonique has achieved moreso than most. Its designs are solid and well implemented and combined with impressive build; Sonique's speakers achieve a very desirable balance.

With so many speakers to drive, the job of an AV receiver or multichannel amplifier is not an easy one. If the speaker system is inefficient and a difficult load, the amp, unless it's up to it, is going to run in to trouble. Even if you've one of the popular so-called Japanese 'mega-receivers' that claim huge power outputs, combined with a tricky speaker load, all the watts in the world aren't always a safe bet. It comes down to the speakers' load and the amplifiers' ability to deliver current. So to make things as friendly as possible for the electronics, it pays for home theatre speaker designers to implement high sensitivity designs.

That's just the case with the Sonique SAVs, with the '5SEs at a very high 92dB efficiency and nominal 6 ohm load. The same figures go for the

SAV-C5SE, while the SAV-DB1s are a higher 8 ohm impedance and 88dB sensitivity. All this equates to a particularly balanced and friendly loudspeaker load — one that even a modestly powered AV receiver shouldn't have much trouble driving. Something a bit more capable is better still, and as with many decent loudspeakers, these Soniques definitely sound better with quality and able partnering equipment.

Physically, all these models are pretty big and would best suit a reasonably large room. The new SAV-C5SE centre is quite substantial and not the sort of centre speaker you'd perch on top of a TV — it's best located underneath on a stand or equipment rack. The surrounds are a neat and interesting design — being both bipolar and dipolar with the flick of a switch. This lets you tailor the surround effects to the size and shape of your room or partnering equipment and is a very handy and effective feature. I found the 'DB1s worked best alongside the listening position, rather than behind it, but if you have to position them at the back, the bipole setting means they'll still provide a plentifully broad and dense soundfield, blessed with a smooth and controlled bass. With impressive room-filling power, these surrounds don't just let you hear panning effects, you actually can feel them too. The Thunderbox 1200 is also a Special Edition of the

## Technotalk

### Product Type:

AV loudspeaker system

### Enclosure:

SAV-5SE, SAV-C5SE,  
SAV-DB1 - bass reflex, side ported  
Thunderbox 1200 - bass reflex,  
front ported

### Frequency Response:

SAV-5SE - 45Hz-20kHz ±3dB  
SAV-C5SE - 49Hz-20kHz ±3dB  
SAV-DB1 - 79Hz-23kHz

### Impedance:

SAV-5SE, SAV-C5SE - 6 ohms  
SAV-DB1 - 8 ohms

### Sensitivity:

SAV-5SE, SAV-C5SE - 92dB  
SAV-DB1 - 88dB

### Recommended Amplifier Power:

SAV-5SE - 25-200 watts  
SAV-C5SE - 20-180 watts  
SAV-DB1 - 35-140 watts

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

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immensely popular design and without doubt one of the most capable and best sounding active subwoofers around for the money. All together, it makes an immensely listenable home theatre loudspeaker system.

With a wealth of massive sounding DVDs around at the moment, testing

## Vital Statistics

### Dimensions:

Various

### Weight:

Various

### Distributor:

Sonique Audio Pty Ltd

### Telephone:

(08) 8285 9722

### Facsimile:

(08) 8285 9744

### Website:

[www.sonique.com.au](http://www.sonique.com.au)

the power and dynamic capability of AV speakers has never been easier. A personal favourite is still *Ronin*, with a Dolby Digital 5.1 soundtrack that contains a bit of everything. There’s plenty of bass clout, subtle surround detail, fast panning effects and tricky accents on the dialogue, so if the speakers are any less than open and articulate, things can get lost. Nothing strays from the Soniques’ delivery with a tasteful measure of timing, broad soundstaging and a uniform sonic spread. Just part, but a large one, is this speaker packages ability to sound ‘all of a piece’. Whether it’s the frantic car chase in *Ronin*, the overtly bassy THX-derived overhead sweep of the starship in the opening scenes of *Star Wars II: Attack of The Clones*, the system springs to life, such is its ability to deliver dramatic changes in volume and intensity with vivid impact and realism. The front three combine in such a seamless and wholesome way, that the subsequent scale of the soundstage is immense.

And bass, there’s a ton of it. Deep, menacingly well extended and controlled, in the latest *Star Wars* instalment the Thunderbox 1200 and SAV-5SEs combine so well that they allow the listener to literally feel the power of the sleek spacecraft, while the other speakers are freed to blast out the sound of hostile fire. With 128 watts of hefty onboard amplification and large twin forward-firing exit ports, the Thunderbox doesn’t lose its grip either when placed against the wall. Its speed, tightness, energy and timing all remain

wonderfully intact, whatever the movie or music occasion.

Speech and other centrally placed effects carry much weight and impact — dialogue is focused, balanced and locked to the screen and the centre matches its front floorstanding counterparts in terms of the bass weight tonal balance. It sounds open and confident and makes everything central sound full of weight and authority.

Big sounding, beautifully made and all Australian, Sonique’s best of its SAV Series makes a very tempting AV loudspeaker package. Rest assured, it’s one that also performs impeccably with music, whether it be stereo or multichannel, making this system a true all-rounder. I’d more than happily live with these loudspeakers as a permanent fixture in my AV system and to anyone looking for a high-quality, amplifier-friendly collection, I couldn’t recommend they have a listen strongly enough. **AVL**

## Opinion

The ‘Opinion’ expressed here is that of the reviewer, summarised in the form of a 5-star rating system, and should be considered as an integral part of the full contents of this Audition Equipment Review. As such, each category should be judged on its own merits and not necessarily used as a comparison with other equipment reviews in this, or other editions of Audio & Video Lifestyle magazine.

- ★ Shocker
- ★★ Average
- ★★★ Good
- ★★★★ Excellent
- ★★★★★ Perfection

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### Performance

★★★★★

### Build Quality

★★★★★

### Compatibility

★★★★★

### Value For Money

★★★★★