

audition

equipment review

Sonique SAV5 SE Floorstanding Loudspeakers

Sonique is an Australian loudspeaker manufacturer that has always been held in high regard by *Audio and Video Lifestyle* magazine. With an impressive list of Best Buy awards and the coveted Australian Manufacturer of the Year Award in 1997, not to mention an impressive folio of glowing reviews, Sonique has achieved a great deal in the relatively small space of 10 years. Although not one of the oldest loudspeaker manufacturers, the company does aspire to be one of the

best and its products are certainly worthy of the accolades they consistently receive.

Steve Lund and Greg Walden started the company in 1992 and their products have branched out to include loudspeaker models that cater for a range of functions and budgets. The loudspeakers are divided into two different ranges, Sonique's hi-fi range for high-end audiophile sound and the SAV (Sonique Audio/Video) range for home theatre applications. The Encore loudspeaker is Sonique's flagship model and is a sumptuous blend of technology and good looks in a finely crafted package. The company is also responsible for distributing the range of Micrex amplifiers, a series of no-compromise, exotic-looking valve-based audiophile amps.

Over the years, I have been impressed by not only the quality and affordability of local manufacturers' loudspeaker products but also by the versatility shown in the development and marketing of specific home theatre models. With the incredible success of DVD and the increasing popularity of new versions of Digital surround sound processing, home theatre options are becoming more and more exciting as manufacturers compete for market share. Good loudspeakers are essential for any home theatre system and companies like Sonique recognise that a lot of buyers will want speakers that perform well with music but excel at delivering sound effects that make movies come alive.

**Sonique's
Special Edition
treatment
means far
more than a
just a badge**

Vital Statistics

Dimensions:

107 x 22 x 310mm

Weight:

23kg each

Distributor:

Sonique Audio Pty Ltd

Telephone:

(08) 8285 9722 or 1300 766 418

Facsimile:

(08) 8285 9744

Website:

www.sonique.com.au

The SAV range comprises three standmounters and then the superb floorstanding SAV4 Mk2s, which I had the pleasure of reviewing back in AVL-77. The Special Edition version offers even more performance and refinement, while the range is finished off with the SAVC1 centre channel speaker, and the SAVDB1 dipole surrounds. The flagship of the SAV Series, the SAV5 Special Edition is the subject of this review.

Visually, the Sonique SAV5 SEs share a strong affinity with the SAV4 Mk2s - the towers look imposing, are very sturdy and their natural timber baffles look the part. The visual link to the smaller loudspeakers foreshadows sound that is transparent, detailed and beautifully balanced. The expressive and open sound of classical music, for which the SAV4 Mk2s are remembered favourably, is a characteristic of not only Sonique's loudspeakers but also of many other local loudspeakers. What sets Sonique apart from most of the competition is the incredible value on offer for such relatively modest monetary sums.

The SAV5 SE is a magnetically shielded loudspeaker and can, thus, be used very close to televisions for home

theatre applications. This is an important consideration since the large magnets of most loudspeakers will distort the colour of a television if it is too close. Like all SAV series loudspeakers, the SAV5s have been designed for maximum performance with home theatre. The build quality of the SAV5s is excellent in every respect. The Special Edition review sample is finished in American Oak, coloured Jarrah and is certainly an appealing look.

The SAV5s have been engineered for high performance levels with home theatre. These are efficient, easy speakers to drive and any decent AV receiver should work well. The Soniques like a bit of power and something near the 100 watts mark would be most suitable. Using a Sansui RZ-6700AV receiver, the loudspeakers performed extremely well in Dolby Digital 5.1 mode.

The engineering work that has gone into the SAV5s has certainly paid off. With all 5.1 encoded DVD titles I watched, these speakers managed to convey all the vital information with a sense of intimacy and excitement that some of the best cinemas are unable to match. The level of imaging these speakers are able to produce is right up there with the best - with every movie it is a convincing experience and with blockbusters you are always placed right in the middle of the action.

Bass extension is excellent with the SAV5s, a characteristic shared with the earlier SAV4 Mk2. The benchmark disc

of *Star Wars Episode 1: The Phantom Menace*, regardless of your opinions on the film itself, is an extraordinary journey into one of the most creative and groundbreaking uses of multichannel sound. From the traditional spaceship opening scene through to the speed of the pod race sequence and then to the light-saber duel climax, the disc really is a showcase of the best of the format and the Soniques make each scene exciting. When pods crash, the bass is powerful and involving. When the light-sabers clash, the bass extension adds to the intensity and build-up of tension. When ship engines are ignited, there is a suitable rev from the speakers. Even before a Sith Lord approaches, the low-end frequencies capture so effectively a



Technotalk

Product Type:

Floorstanding loudspeaker

Driver Complement:

2 x 200mm composite Mica woofers

25mm ferrofluid tweeter

Sensitivity:

92dB

Nominal Impedance:

6 ohms

Frequency Response:

45-20,000Hz ±3dB

Recommended Amplifier Power:

25-200 watts RMS

Enclosure Type:

Bass reflex, front ported

Connection Method:

Gold-plated, three-way 4mm binding terminals

Cabinet Finishes:

American Oak in three finishes: polished clear, coloured Jarrah or Black stain.

Technotalk specifications and recommended retail prices are supplied by the manufacturer

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feeling of menace and doom - you need a deep, well-controlled bass for that.

Blade is another Dolby Digital 5.1 DVD release that benefits from the use of capable loudspeakers. A lot of the sword-fighting vampire action takes place with a million other things going on in the background. The director makes extraordinary use of multi-camera studio shots and his use of sound is vital to provide meaning to the visual action - in so many scenes, horror and tension is created by the use of a clever soundtrack and sharp, disorienting sound effects. And, once again, for menace and doom the director wisely opts for low-end frequencies. The SAV5s love this film. They make engaging communicators of information and handle all swift transient sound effects with poise.

The bass response of the Soniques can partly be blamed for my week of indulging in dark and scary movies. *I Know What You Did Last Summer* is another sinister sounding 5.1 surround DVD release that has a superb soundtrack and its use of rear effects build a heart-pounding level of tension that makes for a very realistic and chilling film. Thanks to the Soniques' ability to deliver detail, people die horribly with added realism, quite moments of contemplation are rudely interrupted by fast chase sequences and the soundfield never falters.

The Sonique SAV5 SE loudspeakers have certainly lived up to the very high standards set by the SAV4 Mk 2s. They deliver an excellent all round performance for all home theatre applications and are especially suited to multichannel 5.1 movies. The flagship of the SAV range is well and truly aptly positioned and thoroughly deserves the Special Edition tag.

For normal hi-fi listening, these loudspeakers perform equally well. I used the SAV5s in a system comprising a Marantz CD6000 OSE LE CD player and a trustworthy Musical Fidelity A3 integrated amplifier. The combination worked superbly with a synergistic, articulate sound and expansive soundstage. With all types of music, especially classical, the SAV5s presented music with real depth and a degree of communication that is most impressive at this very competitive price point.

It is not just the bass extension that impresses with these speakers, but there is also much to enjoy in the midband. Female vocals are showcased in a rather

stunning mixture of detail and projection and there is a tuneful and focused quality to the treble. Male vocals are also well reproduced with an agile but smooth presentation that many listeners will find agreeable.

Sonique has done an excellent job in making the SAV5 Special Edition everything that a multi-purpose AV floorstanding loudspeaker should be in today's demanding market. They are definitely worth the extra money over the SAV4 Mk2s, themselves high commendable loudspeakers. For under two grand, the SAV5 SE model is a realistic high quality option for many buyers. In terms of looks and performance, they are most worthy of the designation Special Edition. **AVL**

Ancillary Equipment: Sansui RZ-6700AV receiver, Panasonic TC-63A61 television, Epos M12 loudspeakers, Jamo Prestige centre speaker, Akai SR-M500 effect speakers, Musical Fidelity A3 integrated amplifier, Marantz CD6000 OSE CD player, Neotech & Musicway cables

O p i n i o n

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

“What sets Sonique apart from most of the competition is the incredible value on offer for such relatively modest monetary sums.”

Performance
★★★★½
Build Quality
★★★★½
Compatibility
★★★★½
Value For Money
★★★★½