

MAGNETIC

HEADPHONE REVIEW: THE AUDEZE LCD-XC

High-end audiophile cans for both the studio and hi-fi listening.

DAVID IRELAND

UPDATED:

MAY 30, 2020

ORIGINAL:

MAY 29, 2020

If you are in the market for a high-end headphone that will serve as both an audiophile experience and a brilliant studio headphone, then the closed-back [LCD-XC](#) is worth your consideration. This is by no means the newest headphone in the lineup, but after hearing it at NAMM in January 2020 at the Audeze booth, we had to get our hands on a pair to test in the studio and at the home turntable lounge aka the sanctuary.

We recently reviewed the [LCD-1](#), which is the more price point driven model for mobile producers and the in-ear [LCDi3](#) an on the go audiophiles dream.

So now, as we are all locked up in the shelter in place mode, there is no better time to invest in a pair of headphones that will probably change your life. It's the perfect time to get into the studio or dive into that old vinyl or CD collection.

The setups we tested on:



Magnetic Studios

- [Magnetic Studios](#) - The LCD-XCs were run through an Apollo X6 audio interface and used for casual listening and in monitoring our work in Logic Pro on some tunes and DJ mixes.
- The iMac equipped with Schiit MODI DAC and MAGNI amp - This was more of an office setup to enhance streaming from Tidal/Spotify along with a ripped CD collection.
- The Home Turntable lounge with the Schiit MAGNI amp - The home vinyl haven, which is used to shut off the world and do some deep listening.

So let's dive into the LCD-XC

Volume 90%

What comes in the box:

- LCD-XC closed-back planar magnetic headphones
- 1.9m 1/4" to dual 4-pin mini-XLR cable
- Professional travel case (not included with Creator Package)
- User guide and warranty card



Build Quality - For roughly two grand, you would expect these to be bulletproof and built like a Ferrari, which I can confidently say they are. The polished maple exterior and leather earcups just scream luxury and high design. They are heavier than most (720 grams) because of the metal and wood construction, but the headband helps to alleviate the girth to some degree, but don't think you are going to be traveling with these, at least not something we would recommend.

Why go for the closed-back model? Many producers and hardcore audiophiles will only use open-back headphones, often with low impedance levels, which requires an amp to get them going. The significant upside for the closed-back LCD-XC is that if you want to use it for casual listening, you can do that without any annoying ambient noise leaking in. These headphones walk the line very well and work for both studio and personal listening with incredible detail. So if you are looking for something a little bit more versatile, especially at such a high price point, you should be happy with these.

The Planar Magnetic vs. traditional dynamic drivers -

The planar magnetic headphone has been revived lately by brands like Blue Microphones with their Ella Premium and, of course, Audeze, which has kind of taken pole position in this style of headphone.

The upside is that planars sound incredible, the downside is that they are quite expensive and often out of reach for most consumers.

The luxurious and high performing Audeze LCD-XC is the brand's first full-size beast designed to straddle both personal audiophile listening and studio reference.

The planar magnetic headphone is by no means new technology and was initially used for producers and musicians in a studio setting to get clear, precise, and loud referencing.

Here is a great article that goes into more detail:

Planar Magnetic Technology - [Here](#)

Sound Quality - If you enjoy deep rich bass, then we are starting off on the right foot because the LCD-XC delivers big here. This is not dopey over tuned bass, this is the velvety smooth, luxurious kind that just feels right. It almost sneaks up on you if that makes any sense. The mids and highs are also vibrant and crisp and really shine when you are listening to complex electronic music like Autechre, Aphex Twin, Flying Lotus, and even more ambient stuff like Brian Eno's *Music for Airports*.

While working on tracks, and trying to get the mixdown smooth and balanced, the XC delivers those essential subtle details. With compositions that have a lot of modulation, samples, and live instruments, this makes the process a whole lot easier, so we were quite happy with the studio.

Summary: These are tanks, built to last and impress both in the studio and in the lounge chair. They not only sound incredible, but they look the part as well, fitting for any finely crafted studio or home listening lounge setup.



SPECIAL Q&A WITH AUDEZE SPOKESPERSON, JAREN CLOUD.

The Audeze brand is a true entrepreneur's story, bootstrapped, and started in a garage. Can you tell us a little about the origins of the company and what the mission was at the launch?

Our mission has always been to produce the best quality audio possible, even from the very beginning. We started in 2008 when our founders, including CEO Sankar Thiagasamudram and CTO Dr. Dragoslav Colich (we call him Dr. C), met and realized that their combined technology, business, and manufacturing experience could be utilized to create some pretty outstanding headphones. After a suitable amount of time spent tinkering in the garage, we debuted our first planar magnetic headphones at the Rocky Mountain Audio Fest, where they were received extremely well. We actually got our name (Audeze - pronounced like Odyssey) from a movie poster of 2001: A Space Odyssey that was hanging on the wall of the garage at the time! Since then, we've continued to refine our processes and technology, and have been granted several patents that have allowed us to distinguish ourselves among other established audiophile brands.

What are the advantages of Planar magnetic headphones over traditional dynamic drivers?

This is a pretty dense topic, so I'll leave the complex details to the experts and just limit my answer to the basics! The very short version is that our planar magnetic drivers feature zero audible distortion up to 130dB, and have an extremely fast transient response, which allows them to produce highly accurate true-to-life sound. This all starts to make more sense when you look at the physical and mechanical differences between planar drivers and dynamic cone drivers. Instead of a heavy and cumbersome cone being moved from a voice coil affixed at a central point, our planar diaphragms are thinner than a human hair and have the voice coil etched onto the surface. Since they weigh less than the air they displace, and because the voice coil is spread evenly across the entire surface, we're able to achieve more uniform diaphragm movement as opposed to a cone diaphragm which has a lot of passive mass that is very difficult to move uniformly, significantly reducing distortion and more faithfully reproducing the audio signal.

For anyone who is interested in learning more about the specifics of planar magnetic technology, we actually have several tech articles on our [website](#).

Can you tell us a bit about the partnership with Embody on the Audeze Reveal + plugin? Why would a producer want to use this plugin in their workflow?

The partnership with Embody was a very natural fit for us because, as companies, we both share a commitment to producing the best audio quality possible. In the case of Embody and their spatial audio solutions, this meant coming up with a new efficient system of creating and integrating customized HRTF profiles, or Aural Maps, because they understand that you'll never create a convincing spatialized listening experience in headphones without factoring in the anatomy of the individual listener. This is exactly what they've done in Reveal+, and it's part of what makes the plugin such a powerful tool for producers.

There's not just one reason why a producer would want to include Reveal+ in their workflow - the plugin can serve a variety of functions depending on the needs of the individual. For example, more and more audio producers/engineers have been switching to headphones as their primary mixing and mastering tool because they are a much more mobile solution than studio monitors. Reveal+ provides those people with a variety of monitoring environments that they can experience from inside their Audeze headphones, meaning that they don't have to be tied down to a specific place in order to get a reliable picture of what their audio sounds like. In this case, Reveal+ is another tool to help beef up their quality control toolkit.

Sticking with the theme of spatial limitations, many producers, particularly those who are just getting started or who operate more independently, either don't have access to a professionally treated studio OR don't have the luxury of working on studio monitors due to noise concerns in their environment (apartments, HoA regulations, etc.). For them, working on headphones is a necessity, and our goal is to make sure they don't have to

feel like the quality of their work is suffering for it. Of course, the audio quality of our headphones is the primary way we try to achieve that goal, but with Reveal+ we're giving people the option of turning their headphones into a professional studio so that they can experience the best of both worlds. It's kind of a "have your cake and eat it too" kind of situation.

Are there any plans to get into the DJ headphone market?

Nothing that we can talk about! Ultimately our goal is for all audio lovers to experience what truly top-tier audio sounds like, and of course, that includes people in the DJ space.

You guys recently got into the gaming space, can you tell us a little bit about that and the Mobius and LCD-GX models? Are there plans to keep going in this space? Are you working with any eSports athletes?

As far as the gaming space is concerned, Audeze is here to stay. We really changed the game when we launched Mobius. Even though we're still a relatively small company compared to the heavy hitters in the gaming headphone market, everyone took notice of Mobius when we announced it, and it continues to inspire the industry today. One of the most fun parts of my job is getting to watch gamers try the Mobius for the first time at tradeshow events like PAX East and Guardian Con. Many of them come into our booth skeptical because they think they already own the best of what the gaming headset world has to offer - how could a small company that they've never heard of have something better than the headset that's been heavily marketed to them and whose name is already known by every gamer who cares about audio? Then they listen to Mobius, and they instantly understand the difference, usually while laughing or smiling. The audio quality of Mobius really is leaps-and-bounds beyond anything else in the gaming space (except maybe our LCD-GX), and that's before you even get to the 3D processing and multichannel audio capabilities; it's a night and day difference.

LCD-GX is for gamers who want the absolute best-sounding audio they can get out of a gaming headphone, period. It's part of our flagship LCD line, which is what Audeze's brand and reputation were built on. It's an audiophile product that has been tailored to better meet the needs of gamers: it's one of the lightest weight and most comfortable LCD headphones we've ever made, it comes with a detachable boom microphone cable in addition to our standard braided audiophile cable, and it's extremely easy to drive meaning you can plug it directly into your headphone jack if you want to. However, if you're an audiophile and you happen to have access to a headphone amplifier already, it's going to sound absolutely beautiful out of that too. I had the opportunity to showcase the LCD-GX a lot during PAX East this year, and it was a real pleasure getting to see people's reactions upon hearing it for the first time. I know the \$899 price point is a lot, especially in a market with so many cheaper options available, but I can say honestly that I haven't met a single gamer who, after hearing the LCD-GX, didn't understand why it costs what it does. Listening to game audio on the LCD-GX really is like hearing the game for the first time - there's nothing else quite like it.

As for esports, it's something we've dabbled in and are continuing to look into, but we're still navigating our place in that space.

What is the best and most affordable model in the Audeze line up for the casual listener that just wants great sound on the go?

LCD-1 and Mobius are going to be the most affordable options. As for choosing between the two, that comes down to how you plan to use the headphones. Mobius has Bluetooth, so if you're someone who prefers wireless headphones and listens to music a lot from mobile devices, then Mobius is going to be a great option for you. If you just want a great sounding headphone that's light-weight and easy to carry around, and using a cable isn't an issue for you, then LCD-1 is going to be the headphone to check out. It's foldable and comes with a semi-hard travel case as well, so it's really built for portability. Both Mobius and LCD-1 are priced at \$399.



BY

DAVID IRELAND