



Photo by Vlad Savov / The Verge

REVIEWS

## Audeze LCD2 Classic review: these cans will turn you into an audiophile


*They live up to their name*

By Vlad Savov@vladsavov      Aug 3, 2018, 8:36am EDT

Quality is an invisible thing in our modern world. The hard-wearing, hand-stitched leather bag that will last you a decade has a million cheap copycats recreating its look but not its longevity. Good and bad wines are sold in the same bottles, and “organic” labels more often than not seem like a ploy to raise prices. In such a tricky consumer landscape, it’s hard to judge what’s truly worth the money, and that issue is especially nebulous in the world of headphones where quality is not only invisible but also subjectively judged.

Audeze’s LCD2 Classic cans are exactly the sort of product that could exist merely to cash in on a famous name and pedigree. The Audeze LCD-2, released in 2009, announced the company’s existence to the audiophile world and earned many reviewers’ acclaim as one of the best pairs of headphones on the market. Now, the California company wants us to believe that its Classic variant has kept the

signature LCD-2 sound intact while simplifying the design and slashing the price from \$999 to a more attainable \$799. But is the quality still there? In a word, yes. In two words, *hell yes*.



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VERGE SCORE

## AUDEZE LCD2 CLASSIC

GOOD STUFF	BAD STUFF
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Can't get better bass for the price</li><li>• Comfortable and well-built</li><li>• Expansive soundstage</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Huge</li><li>• No protective case</li><li>• Not much noise isolation</li></ul>

The original LCD-2s can be described as aggressively pleasant. They warmly embrace the idea that people enjoy listening to a little extra bass and a little less treble, and their tuning is designed to please and excite in equal measure. I write in the present tense because Audeze is still selling the LCD-2s to



this day, nearly a decade of widespread popularity after their initial launch. The strength of that popularity lies in Audeze's large, custom-designed planar magnetic driver inside each ear cup. It produces pristine, distortion-free sound, and it extends deep into the sub-bass region that's problematic for more conventional dynamic driver headphones. The LCD2 Classic maintains all of these good attributes, and measurements from other reviewers have shown their spectacularly low harmonic distortion.

So why is Audeze bifurcating its LCD-2s? The obvious answer is price: the company now faces awesomely good competition at the \$799 tier from MrSpeakers' Aeon Flows, and there are numerous cheaper hi-fi contenders like the Hifiman Sundara. The sacrifices made with the LCD2 Classic are the lack of a hard carrying case — they are shipped in the most unglamorous of cardboard boxes — and a loss of the wood veneer from the LCD-2s. But that's it. Everything else that's good about the LCD-2s is carried over in the LCD2 Classic.



But the Classics are more than a mere reissue. These new headphones are much lighter than the LCD-2s, and they use Audeze's more recent headband design, which does a better job of distributing the weight of the headphones. A combination of a metal arch and a perforated leather-ish headband, this design also figures on Audeze's LCD-X cans, which I've spent plenty of time with, but their biggest weakness has always been that they simply weigh far too much. The Classics, by reducing the weight to more humane levels, are truly making the most of the design, and they achieve a huge upgrade in comfort from both preceding models. I feel no fatigue wearing the LCD2 Classics for many hours at a time, and the only complaint I can really level at them is that they're still quite enormous and make me look a bit goofier than usual.

The huge size of these headphones is owing to the 106mm transducers inside them, but that also allows for an utterly indulgent physical design. The pads on the LCD2 Classics have to be felt to be believed. They accommodate even the largest of ears, and their immense depth and softness just make me purr with pleasure every time I put them on. Unfortunately, the pads are glued on, and replacing them might be a hassle.

Two smaller points of commendation: the LCD2 Classics emit zero creaks and, in their mostly metal construction, seem likely to last for a very long time. Questionable build quality is a problem that's troubled Audeze in the past, but I've had these headphones for months now, and they have held up beautifully. The other thing is the detachable cable that ships with the LCD2 Classics. It's a relatively new braided design, and it's the exact same cable that the company provides with its \$3,000 MX4s. The cable measures 1.9 meters (just over six feet) in length, resists tangling, doesn't generate any unwanted noise, and is accompanied by a 6.35mm to 3.5mm adapter. Audeze uses a consistent cable connector across its LCD line, which is a nice ecosystem advantage. I, for example, have been using the LCD2 Classics with the XLR cable that came with the LCD-Xs.





But let's talk about the sound. The LCD2 Classics' sound is good enough to make you want to wear such an ostentatious head decoration and pay \$800 for the privilege. It's anchored by that signature bass supremacy that every owner of Sennheiser, Beyerdynamic, Grado, or Audio-Technica headphones is at least a little bit jealous of. I'm not talking about quantity here, even though Audeze is generous without ever spoiling you. It's the purity, the precision, the nuance of the bass. If your favorite EDM artist like deadmau5 spends countless hours finessing multilayered and subtly diverse low-frequency compositions, you'll hear every thump, bump, and variation of that.



Audeze plays the mids pretty much straight, and it tames the treble just enough, domesticating it without neutering it. That means I can turn the volume up on these headphones safe in the knowledge that I'm just going to get more goodness hitting my ears. MrSpeakers' Aeon Flow Closed, on the other hand, which are another pair I've recently enjoyed very much, can be downright piercing with badly mastered music whose treble is too hot. Audeze's tuning is friendlier to modern music and its tendency toward exaggeration, making the LCD2 Classics more versatile.



The thing that truly sets the LCD2 Classics apart from other headphones in their price range is their extraordinary soundstage. Most headphones have three distinct bubbles of sound: one at your left ear, one at your right, and the third centered above your nose. With the Classics, you get a single bubble, and it wraps all the way around your head, with every sound source inside that space manifesting with identifiable position and distance.

One of my favorite test tracks is Rustie's "After Light," which has the melody dancing from left to right and back again, includes plenty of high-pitched moments that expose headphones with excessive treble sharpness, and includes a delightful buildup and drop two-thirds of the way through. *Goosebumps*. I got goosebumps listening to it through the LCD2 Classics. The combination of that expansive soundstage, the reassuring low end, and the polite high end is just spot on.

Movies benefit immensely from a pair of headphones like these. Watching *Moonlight* with them, the sound in one scene stuck out to me even while I wasn't paying attention to what headphones I was

using. It's an unexceptional moment: one of the characters turns on a diner jukebox, which is slightly to the left of the center of the frame, and the Classics present its sound precisely in that spot. You'll enjoy the power of that movie even without fancy headphones, but damn if that scene wasn't enhanced by the extra touch of realism and naturalness. Like I say, quality is invisible.



Gaming would be an unconventional use for hi-fi headphones of this kind, but I see no reason why you wouldn't do it. Just boot up your favorite shooter and blast a few rounds off. You'll be loving that Audeze bass within moments. The only issue you might run into with the LCD2 Classics is that they're open-backed, meaning your sound will escape outward, and you'll hear external noise coming in. Not ideal for LANs. Even so, I'd describe them as semi-open, as they have a layer of felt under the exterior skeletal frame that provides a sliver of isolation. It's not much, but it's better than fully open designs.

I could spend another thousand words running through genres and happy experiences with the LCD2 Classics, but it would be a highly repetitive affair. Whether you're listening to some bass madness like Savant's "Pixel Bee" or subtler jazzy compositions like Alfa Mist's "Breathe," these headphones give you the music exactly as you'd want it. No, they're not as maniacally neutral as a sound engineer might wish them to be, but they're tuned exactly to the tastes of a consumer audience.

What the LCD2 Classics achieve is a bridging of the traditional gap between audiophiles and casual music listeners. I have sampled the extravagant extremes of personal audio, such as Focal's \$4,000 Utopias, and there's nothing I'm missing when stepping down in price to Audeze's LCD2 Classics. More

expensive headphones still have their own reasons to exist, and their own differentiating advantages, but those are slight and subtle. The upgrade that the LCD2 Classics mark over something like a pair of Beats cans is so massive as to be almost visible.



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