

Review: Audeze LCD2 Classic – Modern Oldschool

BY LIEVEN 18/04/2019



The Audeze LCD2 Classic is a look back at the original Audeze LCD2 which changed the personal audio world.

Disclaimer: The Audeze LCD2 Classic was sent to us by Audeze for review. Audeze is not related to Headfonia in any other way.

Audeze

If you've been following the personal audio world for the last 10 years, then **Audeze** will ring many bells. The California, USA based company completely changed and upped the headphone game to new levels. Bio from the Audeze site:

Audeze's origins go back to 2008 when founders Sankar Thiagasamudram and Alexander Rosson met engineer Pete Uka who developed specialized flexible circuit materials for NASA. They quickly realized the material might be perfect for headphones. That's when Dragoslav Colich, who has 30+ years' experience in designing planar drivers, joined the team as CTO to create the LCD-1 headphone.

Then we created the legendary, award-winning LCD-2 and LCD-3 headphones, and the higher-efficiency LCD-X and LCD-XC models. More recently, we made planar magnetic technology accessible to a wider audience with the EL-8, SINE and iSINE series headphones. Audeze turned to their strategic partner Designworks, a BMW Group Subsidiary, for the cutting-edge industrial design for the new headphones as well as the Deckard DAC/Amplifier.

Planar Magnetic Technology

A short summary of the tech for those not familiar with it.

Audeze feature proprietary planar magnetic designs with extremely thin-film driver materials and powerful custom magnets. Planars overcome many limitations inherent in typical cone drivers; our lightweight diaphragms are, for example, faster and more responsive than heavier moving-coil or dome drivers. Planar magnetic diaphragm also have a voice-coil circuit spread across the diaphragm surface. The diaphragm's voice-coil circuit interacts with the magnetic field to produce an electromagnetic force that moves the diaphragm back and forth creating the sound you hear when energized by an audio signal.

If you want to read more about the technology, you can do this here:

<https://www.audeze.com/planar-magnetic-technology>

<https://www.innerfidelity.com/content/how-planar-magnetic-headphones-work>



LCD 2 History

Do you remember when the original LCD2 was released back in 2010? I for one do as it was very big news. With the LCD2, Audeze (re)launched planar technology and they sound-wise raised the bar for other companies. The LCD-2 back then was launched for around \$1200USD if I'm not mistaken and it was one of the headphones which opened the door for other high end headphones and companies.

After the LCD2 things only improved sound-wise, build-wise and price-wise and we nowadays find it *normal* to see \$3K flagship headphones. The LCD2 back then also looked like nothing else on the market and it for me up to today still is one of the most beautiful headphones ever made. The grill –

which is still being used today – is gorgeous and I'm convinced everyone knows exactly how it looks. The first versions also exclusively used exotic wood for the cups, something that nowadays is very normal. In this very old article by Mike he is comparing two different versions of the early LCD2. The mini-article also shows how the original grill looked liked and I'm convinced many of you have never seen it before.

Then later Audeze changed the design of the LCD2, started using bamboo wood and placed the connectors on the outside of the headphone. Build wise that probably was the right thing to do, but to me the new look LCD2 from that version on, never was as sexy anymore.

The original LCD came from a period where Audeze's Fazor tech wasn't available yet, and also that tech was added in the later models, completely changing sound of the iconic original headphone. The new LCD2(.2) never had the same impact on me and by then there also was the LCD3 and other top quality planars from other brands.

The original LCD2, or LCD2.1 as I like to call it was one of the first high end headphones I bought and I still have it here with me. Even though I hardly ever use it, it means too much to me to ever get rid of. Nowadays we're used to top quality (planar) sound, but back then the LCD2 was innovative and it sounded like nothing you ever heard before. I still remember how I felt listening to it back in 2010/2011, it was revolutionary.

So yes, the Audeze LCD2 changed the personal audio world and raised the bar for all headphones, especially planar magnetic ones.



2018 LCD2 Classic

And now it's back! Well, sort of. Audeze last year decided to launch the good old LCD2 again, without the fazor drivers and in a new all black look, with no more wood. You find its dedicated web page right here: <https://www.audeze.com/products/lcd-collection/lcd2-classic>

Audeze states:

Since its release in 2009, our original LCD2 headphone has been an industry favorite among passionate listeners everywhere. Audeze proudly presents a new take on our classic LCD2 design. The new LCD2 Classic headphone comes with a lightweight suspension headband, special crystal-infused nylon rings,

remodeled audio jacks, and features the warm sound signature of the original LCD2 driver. Made right here in our Southern California facility.

Technical Specs

Style	Over-ear, open-back
Transducer type	Planar magnetic
Magnetic structure	Proprietary magnet array
Phase management	N/A
Magnet type	Neodymium N50
Diaphragm type	Ultra-thin
Transducer size	106 mm
Maximum power handling	5W RMS
Maximum SPL	>130dB
Frequency response	10Hz – 50kHz
THD	<0.1% @ 100dB
Impedance	70 ohms
Sensitivity	101dB/1mw (at Drum Reference Point)
Minimum power requirement	>100mW
Recommended power level	>250mW

The Box, Accessories & Price

The old LCD2, if I remember well, set you back over \$1K while the new version is only \$799. Of course there's no more exotic wood and the technology and building cost have probably become cheaper, but that does mean you're getting a lot of headphone for the money.

The downside? Well you no longer get the protective carrying box/hard case the old LCD2 and the other, more expensive, Audeze units come with. The contents of the box are also limited and you only get a 1.9m 1/4in to dual 4-pin mini-XLR cable as well as a USB stick with the manual and a certificate of authentication (Inspected by x).

The LCD2C arrived in a simple card wood box and it has the foam cut-out interior directly on the inside. It's simple but it works. If you're planning on transporting your precious headphone I do suggest buying one of Audeze's ruggedized traveling cases from their shop, where it sells for \$130USD – <https://www.audeze.com/products/accessories/travel-case-lcd23xxcmx4>

You can of course also buy a cheap case from Aliexpress and add pluck foam yourself. It will be less expensive but it probably won't have the same quality.

Design

The LCD2 Classic is a more robust, modern look version of the LCD2 yet it at the same time uses the old style connectors which are integrated in the driver unit. Of course it has the beautiful grill and Audeze's iconic headphone band so it breaths Audeze.

There's no more wood but you in return get a very modern, slick looking headphone. It's all black and all the matching elements create a stealth like design. I like it. Even though the cable connectors have been integrated in the cup again, they now are more to the front (which is better for comfort)



The big advantage of not using exotic wood anymore is that the connectors won't crack anymore. It was a well known issue with the original and even though Audeze replaced the cups, it's something everyone still remembers. In fact, my LCD2 has the famous crack, but I never sent it in for repair.

The LCD2 now comes with leather-free earpads and a spring steel suspension headband. The old version used lamb skin leather but I almost immediately swapped it out for the vegan headband Audeze offered back then.

The new LCD2 looks modern, robust and very cool. The original looks softer, more expensive and more unique. I myself like both versions, though the original just is more special.

Build Quality & Comfort

Build quality-wise these new LCD's are as good as it gets. They look and feel robust and they can for sure take a beating (if you would do that to a \$750 headphone). From the screws to the connectors, to the grills, to the headband: everything is perfect and I can't find a single flaw with these. I've seen a lot of more expensive headphones with a lesser build quality so Audeze here really gets a full score here.

And then there's the comfort. I remember that we back in the day found the first LCD headphones extremely heavy, and they kind of were. We quickly got used to it however and it personally never bothered me too much. Technology has improved since then and the new planar magnetic units are much lighter these days. This LCD2C unit however still ways a serious 552gr but the headphone band perfectly distributes the weight of the drivers over your head. The memory foam pads are also soft and the clamping force is just right.

I for sure prefer the efficiency of the new headband system over the old one and going back to my vegaized original LCD2, comfort-wise is very tough. But the LCD2C is heavy and if you're not used to it, you will notice it for sure. In short: still heavy, but well working head band.

Cable

The LCD2 Classic comes with a new shiny, braided, 4 conductor cable with a 6.3mm termination. Unlike with the some of the other models it doesn't come with a balanced cable but in the end that's ok, as I find it to sound better in single ended mode. This is the exact same cable that also comes with the

Audeze LCD MX-4 which is selling for \$3KA lot of brands nowadays use the mini-xlr plugs and so I have a lot of cables to use with this Audeze. The standard cable works perfectly fine but my favorite cable for the LCD-series still is by Norne/Norse cable I bought together with the LCD2 back in 2010. The other cable I really like with the LCD2 Classic is the PlusSound X16.



Sound

One of the first things I always do is test the difference in sound between balanced and single ended, with IEMS most of the time I prefer a balanced connection but with headphones it can be very different. It turns out I prefer the LCD2 Classic in single ended mode, as it has a better overall presentation, better placed vocals, a better bass kick and way better dynamics. The amplifier used for this test is the high end Niimbus US4+. For the description of the LCD2 Classic's sound I

used a series of desktop sources but mostly the Niimbus as well.

At home in my living room setup I use: Roon -> Pro-Ject Audio Stream Box S2 Ultra -> Violectric V850 DAC -> Niimbus US 4+ / Auris Audio Nirvana. I'm a ROON fan and as some of you might know it has special settings for Audeze headphones, which I applied.

General Signature

After some burn in, the first things that struck and impressed me were the incredible dynamics, great speed and excellent control.

The LCD 2 is a headphone which is supposed to have a warmer tuning, but it's nowhere near where the old version was. This new LCD2 Classic is a more neutrally tuned headphone with a normal/neutral amount of body from bass to treble. The level clarity is higher than before and you get a really clean and clear sound from top to bottom, more so than in the original.

This LCD2 is fast, precise and tight all over with a lighter presentation which is musical and straight to the point more than it is smooth and warm. You still get that perfectly black background and a wide sound stage. The sound stage is wider than it is deep though, that together with the layering are the two weakest points of the LCD2 Classic. On the other hand, the instrumental separation and the spaciousness/airiness are excellent. It's the perfect mix between realism, precision and musicality.

These last few years we've really been spoiled with great sounding headphones, and even though the LCD2 Classic doesn't wow me anymore like it did 10 years ago, it's still a higher end headphone which easily holds its place with the best in this price range. In fact it reminds me of the tuning of the LCD-X, yet at a lower level. And as a fan of the LCD-X, that means a lot.

Bass

The bass in the LCD2 Classic is more neutral than it was in the beginning. Bass here is tight and reaches low when needed but it doesn't have the big impact anymore. The layering, as said, isn't the very best compared to newer headphones. Bass tightness and control are still top and the delivery is punchy.

The original version had more body and impact and it was one of the main reasons why so many people love(d) the LCD2 so much. The typical orthodynamic bass back then simply was impressive. Nowadays it's more behaved and neutral, yet dynamic.

Depending on the amp used you can add a bit of bass if you want more impact, or you can always EQ it up a little. I never felt the need to do so however.

Mids

The mids connect perfectly to the bass, which means they are also lighter in body and presence, but with excellent prat. Mids are fast, clean and clear and the voices are slightly forward. Instead of a warm, smooth delivery you get a fast and clear presentation as you would expect from a more neutral tuned headphone.

In the original LCD2, the mids were softer, smoother/warmer, fuller and more romantic, but they technically didn't score as high as they do now.

Treble

The treble section never was the strongest point of the original LCD2 and it still isn't now in the Classic, even though I find it to be more lively and further extended compared to before. Treble is energetic and very dynamic but it simply is a little rolled off. Some say the LCD2 Classic's treble response still is warmer but I can't really put that label on the LCD2 Classic's treble. On the original I perfectly can though.



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In the original the bass and mid-bass (as you have just read) was more present and I think it made the treble seem of a lesser level, but in the new Classic version, the bass is different and it makes you see/hear the treble in a whole different way, it just combines better compared to before.

Treble still isn't the best on the market, but it certainly is good, especially at this price point. Don't go expecting super extended, layered and precise treble however.

Sources / Amplification

In my opinion the LCD2 Classic, rated at 700ohms impedance and 101dB sensitivity isn't the headphone to use straight from a DAP, but let's try!

DAPS

From the Sony WM1Z the volume has to go up as never before but the Sony actually pulls it off somewhat. Bass goes deep and has nice impact. The Classic does sound a little slower and warmer and the delivery is smoother but that most likely is due to the WM1Z. The treble becomes softer and for me a bit too soft but if you like the WM1Z and clear and clean, neutrally sounding headphones, then you actually might love this combo. For me it's mostly the bass that impresses straight from a DAP, but the SQ isn't up to level as when compared to a desktop amp.

The HiBy Music R6 PRO sounds cleaner, has a lighter bass kick, fuller mids and more extended, energetic treble. This actually is a good pairing but you body-wise from bottom to top get a lighter sound. The balance here is going a bit too much to the bass section, and the linearity of the Classic is off here. It's nice sounding if you just want extra bass, but it's not the real LCD2 Classic. Voices are really nice though.



I do really like the Classic straight from the L&P L6 as it seems to deliver just the right amount of body, smoothness, energy and extension. You get a very airy, wide musical sound and the voices are really excellent. The only thing one could complain about here is the bass impact, as many of you will probably want it to be bigger. Also if you don't like spacious sound, this isn't the combo for you either.

The combo with the A&K SP1000M probably is the one most of you will like as it has good body, good bass impact, speed and clarity with energetic treble. The downside here is the sound stage width and depth but everything else really sounds nice. The vocals are a little more forward sounding though. Now on to the real amps!

AMPS / DESKTOP GEAR

When switching to the real amplifiers the performance of the LCD2 Classic immediately rises.

From the Auris Audio HA2-SE you get a full bodied sound, with impressive deep bass, full bodied mids, natural voices and soft treble. The bass isn't the very tightest though, but the deliver overall is smooth, musical and relaxing. The soft and warm tube approach of the HA2-SE wonderfully blends with the speed, clarity and precision of the LCD2 Classic. If only the bass was a little tighter.

From its big brother, the Headonia, you get just hat. The Headonia is a more neutral, sounding, very precise high end tube amp and it at all times is perfectly in control. Great body, linearity, precision and clarity is what you'll hear. The sound stage is wide, the separation and spaciousness excellent. And all that while being musical, fast and detailed. This is simply perfect, but the amp of course isn't the cheapest either and it can buy you 10 more LCD2 Classics...

IF that's out of your budget, I can fully recommend the Feliks Audio Euforia. Great bass, body, impact, clarity and speed. It's just like the Headonia but at a lower technical level and a little bit of added tube warmth/smoothness. This is the "dream away" combo for sure.

The Solid state Vioelectric V281, the "little" brother of the Niimbus used for the above sound section, with the Classic also sounds best in single ended mode. The V281 in SE mode (basically a V200) still is a warmer sounding, full bodied, softer and musical amplifier and that's exactly how your LCD2 Classic will sound. It's very good and musical but technically it's under the level of the Niimbus and it's less neutral of course. Still a very enjoyable combo, something that was to be expected as the Vioelectric gear and Audeze headphones have always had great synergy.



The LCD2 Classic also sounds excellent from the transportable Chord Electronics Hugo 2. Great balance, good bass body, nice detail, natural voices and energetic treble. For me the Hugo 2 is the best sounding "budget friendly" solid state source. If that's still above your budget, I can confirm it also sounds really good from the Mojo, yet not as refined, relaxed and rich. With the Mojo you get less depth, bass body and you get a more digital, slightly sharper sound. But one I could perfectly live with all day long.

In the end it's safe to say the LCD2 Classic prefers a good amplifier to sound its best and that won't surprise anyone. It performs excellently both on tubes as well as on solid state, but as good as always in a single ended configuration. For me the 3 best amps with the Classic are the Headonia, the Niimbus US4+ and the Hugo 2.

Comparisons

The one and only headphone that really matters to compare the Classic to is the original LCD2.1.

You've seen many references to it in the review already, so I'll keep it short. The original version, at least to me, is fuller bodied from bottom to top, a warmer and smoother sounding than the classic, and the presentation is a bit slower and richer aka more romantic. The bass section has slightly more impact (it's bigger) and the treble section is softer. The mids to me are the closest together in both the new and old version, though the older one is smoother and the newer cleaner, more precise. I don't really think there's any difference in regards to sound stage width and depth, separation and spaciousness. The new version is cleaner, more clear and faster, like the LCD-X.

When I first started listening to headphones I would for sure have preferred the original version but nowadays, I tend to prefer a faster, cleaner, more precise sound and that means the LCD2 Classic is my preferred LCD2 of both versions. They're both good, close to each other and at the same time different enough. I doubt many people will have or want both in their collection but it's perfectly defensible to have both, if not only for the gorgeous, sexy look of the original. The Classic is pretty too, but it has a more industrial, clean look which I certainly appreciate as well.

Comfort wise the Classic easily is the best as it has the newer, improved headband system which distributes the weight a whole lot better. It's still a heavy headphone but you feel it less.



The major contender of Audeze has often been Hifiman and with the award winning Ananda (\$849) they have direct contender using the *same* technology at the more or less same price point. The Ananda is more like the original, with a fuller bodied and (much) warmer, smooth sound. The Ananda beats it in technicalities though and it is more wide, deep and spacious with better layering. The Ananda sounds a lot more like a modern open headphone but it shows the speed the Classic has. I absolutely love the Ananda and have given it an award, it's just hat good. Comfort wise it's much lighter and even more comfortable as well.

Does that mean the Ananda is the best headphone? On technicalities it maybe is but their sound signature is so very different that they're more complimentary than direct competitors if you look at it from a sound point of view.

Conclusion

I think Audeze did the right thing with creating the classic the way they did it. A great looking, more comfortable headphone, which is a very affordable and to top it off with a really great sound quality.

The Classic is enough the same and different to even have both headphones in your collection, and as it is now, I actually prefer the sound of the Classic over that of my LCD2.1.

They're both beautiful and great in every way, but emotionally they're not the same. Audeze and the LCD2 did so much for the personal audio world and back then this really was an eye opener. The original LCD2 might actually be one of the most sexy headphones ever built. A true icon.

In this price range the LCD2 classic certainly is recommended if you want a balanced, precise and clean sound from a more neutrally tuned headphone. It's very easy to like.

