

AUDEZE LCD-4Z PLANAR-MAGNETIC HEADPHONE

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A few years ago, I got a call from the late Arnie Nudell, perhaps the best designer of high-performance loudspeakers in history. He raved about how good the Audeze LCD-4 planar-magnetic headphone was and encouraged me to buy a pair. Indeed, the LCD-4 garnered many rave reviews, most notably for its clarity, deep bass extension, and exceptional midrange performance. However, with its high-impedance 200-ohm voice coil, the LCD-4 required a powerful headphone amplifier, essentially ruling it out for portable applications. Additionally, some objected to the LCD-4's relatively heavy and bulky feel.

Enter Audeze's LCD-4z, essentially a lighter and much easier-to-drive version of Audeze's flagship LCD-4. The LCD-4z features a 15-ohm voice coil and a lightweight magnesium frame. It is sensitive enough to be driven by a cellphone or a good portable music player. Better still, according to Audeze, the LCD-4z is intended to capture the amazing sound of its flagship LCD-4.

The new LCD-4z uses the magnesium frame of the company's LCD-MX4 model, but incorporates a much higher-end, ultra-lightweight driver. Its magnesium rings are designed to be strong and non-resonant, and the LCD-4z uses a nano-scale film diaphragm that reportedly weighs less than the air it displaces. Sensitivity is significantly improved, enabling it to be directly driven by a cellphone, portable player, or small amplifier. It is also 15% lighter than the LCD-MX4 model, which helps make long-term listening sessions with the LCD-4z somewhat more comfortable. Although the headphones are still on the heavy side, their leather ear pads are comfortable and their overall weight is effectively distributed.

Like the original LCD-4, the LCD-4z has excellent bass definition and extension. Listening to Reference Recordings' outstanding SACD of Saint-Saëns Symphony No. 3 (aka the "organ" symphony), the LCD-4z reproduced the lowest pedal tones of the organ with such control and extension I could almost feel the massive air movement generated by the instrument. You'll also hear the deepest tones of a synth or concert grand piano in a variety of recordings. Indeed, I found myself following bass lines in familiar recordings more often because they were so cleanly articulated and natural.

The LCD-4z has a way with voices and massed strings, which are always difficult tests for transducers. Listening to Nat King Cole on an SACD reissue of *Love is the Thing*, his voice was smooth and rich. I heard an amazing amount of inner detail, for instance on the leading edges of consonants in the lyrics, yet I did not hear any excess sibilance. I was transported to the recording venue and became enthralled by how palpable and present the "King" was. This speaks to the incredible transparency of the LCD-4z. Better still, the massed strings were natural and lovely without any edge or forwardness. On instruments such



as cello, the midbass sounded rich and full-bodied; yet the Audeze's tonal balance is fundamentally neutral.

Another of the LCD-4z's formidable strengths is its ability to reproduce percussion instruments such as drums, cymbals, and piano with outstanding clarity and low distortion. Its clean reproduction of the transient snap of rhythm sections helps propel the music forward, and this generated excitement on high-resolution recordings like the wonderful IsoMike SACD of *Joe McQueen and Friends*. The Audeze passes the toe-tapping test with flying colors!

In many respects, Audeze LCD-4z comes surprisingly close to the performance of the best electrostats in fine-detail retrieval, transparency, coherence, openness, and clarity. It should appeal to those who want top-tier performance in an easier-to-drive and more comfortable package than the in LCD-4. While its price tag may be a bit daunting, when compared to reference headphones, as well as loudspeaker systems costing many times more, the LCD-4z is arguably something of a bargain. If you want the best, make sure you audition the LCD-4z. **tas**

Specs & Pricing

Type: Circumaural, open back, planar-magnetic headphones

Frequency response: 5Hz–20kHz (useable high-frequency extension to 50kHz)

Sensitivity: 98dB/1m/W

Impedance: 15 ohms

THD: <0.1% @ 100dB

Power requirement: 1–4W

Weight: 15.87 oz.

Price: \$3995

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