

# The Audiophile Man

LU KANG AUDIO SP155 REVIEW





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A pair of 2-way, high-end speakers all the way from Taiwan, Paul Rigby gives the Lu Kang SP155 baby designs a twirl.

31 March 2021 ■ Lu Kang Audio SP155 Loudspeakers ■ £4,245 as reviewed

I like the idea of Lu Kang. This is a family business run out of Taiwan that's been around for nearly 40 years, run by a father and son team, Frank and Rox Shih. They offer three designs, the stand-mounted SP155 speakers that I'm looking at here are the smallest and cheapest of the three.

The SP155 cabinet features MDF of an inch thick but it looks out of proportion to the drive units while I thought that the speaker was suffering from a brief infestation of woodworm until I finally realised that the small hole on the rear of the cabinet was actually the bass port.



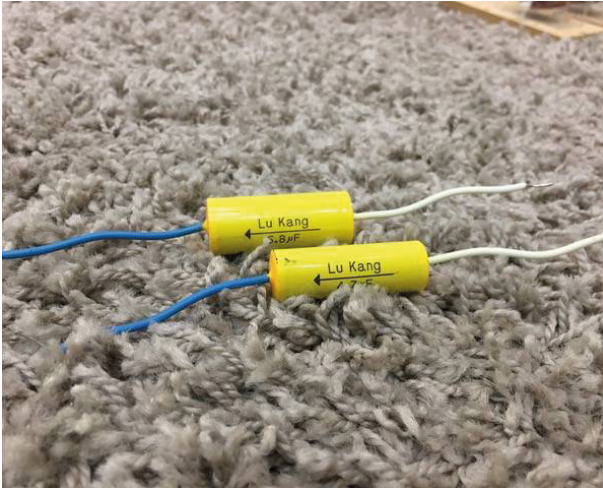
I'm still trying to work out the SP155 aesthetics of this design. If you use a standard, traditionally-configured speaker as a yard stick, they look fine. Then you do a double take and they don't. I'm reminded of those gym victims pumped up to the size of a truck on steroids who struggle to walk and support a skip full of muscles while talking through a head the size of an Action Man figure.

They look strong, sturdy, solid and...odd. All at the same time.

These 8 Ohm speakers feature a modified 155mm Audio Technology C-Quence Series 15H mid/bass unit while the 19mm OW1-FS tweeter arrives from Hiqphon, this is also modified to Lu Kang's own specifications.

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According to Rox, “The crossover, we designed ourselves, it is unique and follows the less is more approach because it features only three components inside the speakers, featuring capacitors built to our own specification and our own cabling.”



Oh and as for that bass port? The company tried a forward-firing model but the rear firing option sounded better, apparently. That was the same result in size terms. A large port didn't really cut it.

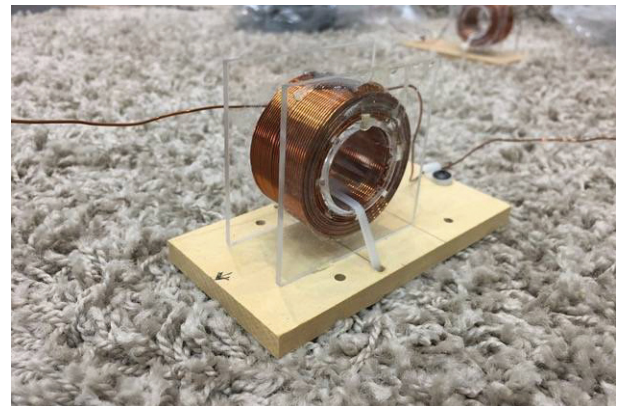
Also on the rear, you'll find a couple of high-quality, sturdy binding posts built to take banana and spade terminations.

I asked the company about their sonic direction. What were they aiming for. What sound did they seek? Rox, the principle designer replied, “Our series of speakers provide a balanced sound instead of a particular character. We also like the sound to be transparent and laid back. These two factors can conflict, so we worked on this part for a very long time.”



One of the most asked questions I receive is, “Will amplifier X, work with Speakers Y?” To help me to answer that one, I try to find the recommended power requirements for any pair of speakers. What sort of power do the speakers in question require from any one amplifier?

According to the company, these speakers need 50W. Which is way too high in my opinion and wholly unreasonable and hence, useless as a piece of advice. I asked for clarification on this point and was told by Rox, “Our desire is for the customer to have the best experience, and in our opinion the more watts an amplifier has, the greater control and ability it will have over the driver. Of course this is not true of all amplifiers, and the quality of watts is more important over the quantity of power. The recommendation was just that, a recommendation – amps around 50 wpc gives us some confidence they'll be up to the task, but a demo is the way to test if your equipment will work (which is always best when considering any new equipment “



I think Lu Kang has quoted an overly safe but also frustratingly imprecise figure which is diluted in terms of its practical usefulness. Its like asking for cabinet dimensions and the company replying, “Oh, they're around two foot high, about half that in depth and height.”

So I would personally quote 25W as the figure you need to run these SP155 speakers. You can probably get away with 20W to be honest but 25W will give you wiggle room.

Spanning 340 x 232 x 310mm and weighing in at 11kg each, the SP155 speakers arrive with real wood finishes of cherry, black walnut and your basic walnut. Other colours can be created as a special order.

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## SOUND QUALITY

I began with CD and the superb – hang on let me start that again – the completely stunning 1989 album from Ryuichi Sakamoto called Beauty (packed with a host of star talent it is too) from Virgin America. The CD itself is pretty darned quiet in mastering terms with all levels set to low. For example, I need to pump up the gain on this one a full 10 clicks to reach the comparable volumes of older CD releases.



I chose a track called Asadoya, a deceptively slight yet uplifting song that sounds almost Japanese folk in its presentation but a complex arrangement sneaks into the back door. Arto Lindsay and Youssou N'Dour guest.

The piece includes tablas, keyboards, a string section, guitars (some played in Spanish fashion), a vocal chorus plus a host of secondary percussion including wooden blocks and the like. It's a gentle, quite romantic song that is full of delicacies.



Playing this song on these speakers was, I have to say, a fascinating experience. Before this song really begins, there's an almost spooky introduction, featuring foreboding, reverb-laden piano,

reverberating strings and delicate secondary percussion. Thirty to 40 seconds or so of that.

This portion, in itself, offered a wide array of detail. Everything I looked for was there in terms of basic information and clarity. The wooden block had a crisp strike, the other percussion was focused and precise, the piano was dark and moody while the bank of early strings shimmered well for a speaker of this price point.



The highlight was the bass which enveloped the soundstage without dominating it and wholly belied the size of these speaker cabinets providing excellent tonal balance.

I was taken aback at the weight from this frequency. At this stage of the game, the bass isn't supposed to do much yet here it acts like a couple of body guards might do in a gangster movies from the 30s. The bass stands there, sounding threatening and offers heaps of weight and portent. Here, the bass has a square jaw and needs a shave. You don't want to mess with it.



Then the banjo kicks in and the mood lightens. The sun rises and the song is suddenly joyous. The soundstage then changes. It opens up. And it doesn't stop opening up. For a long, long time. The Lu Kings ran with every moment as it transformed from 2D into 3D.

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At the beginning of the song that heavy bass sat in the 3D space and so lacked a point of direction. When the banjo kicked in, this bass space was suddenly filled with all kinds of percussion and voices and stringed instruments which gave the 3D space life and energy and multiple directions for the ear to point at which gave the 3D space walls and structure.



It was a neat trick from this song but the LSP155 speakers tracked the change incredibly well. They were right there with the original recording engineer. Any little tweak the guy fancied doing on that recording desk. A slider push here? A slider pull there? These speakers really did keep up.

So the earlier claustrophobic soundstage now opened up and the Lu Kang's showed just how wide, high and handsome the soundstage could be pushed. It was wholly impressive, I have to say. There was a mighty space for the performers to do their thing here. Lots of room to manoeuvre, plenty of space for detail to twist and turn which helped the overall transparency rating for these speakers.



Next up? The Sakamoto lead vocal was pushed, way back along the stereo image but the Lu Kangs retained and enhanced the actual texture of his delivery. It was like they were plugged into his vocal chords, such was the impressive transcription of the vibration from his delivery.

On a similar note, the instrumental separation from these designs was striking. Each instrumentalist appeared to have all the time in the world do do their thing. It was easy to hear the edges of instruments which only further enhanced the information from each point source to the ear.



The overall effect was to add a real sense of maturity from the SP155 designs. They sounded, well, expensive. Which they are, of course but that doesn't always happen. The Lu Kangs lived up to that price point. There was a really sense of quality here.

So I offered a challenge and a thought of a spot of shoegazing from classic Lush and the equally classic EP, Mad Love. This one was also from 1989.

It was obviously a classic year for music.

This recording is of high quality but is slightly edgy in the mastering. It's not wholly balanced so needs careful handling from any pair of speakers. How did the Lu Kang speakers handle this high-energy recording?

The SP155 speakers don't lie to you. They tell you there's an issue here but they don't punish you for daring to listen to the music. If you persist in raising the gain then sure, these speakers will still hurt your

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ears because of this relatively harsh rendering but again, the Lu Kang's are just truth telling here. So yes, there's an edge of brightness along the upper mids and treble but these speakers produce so much air and space around the cavernous soundstage that the effect is diluted and actually made easier to bear. Listening fatigue is effectively reduced.

You can easily discern the upper-mid problem but the effect doesn't want to obliterate your ears. In fact, this music is made all the more attractive because of how the Lu Kang's translate the grooves.

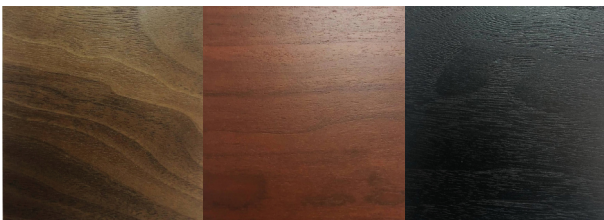
I've rarely heard this music sound better, in fact. Especially at this price point.

## CONCLUSION

Sometimes, hi-fi pricing can feel arbitrary, even though it really isn't. Sometimes, you wonder what you've spent all of your hard-earned on. Value for money or the lack of it can make you feel a little aggrieved.

Not here. Listening to the Lu Kang SP155 speakers, I know where the cash has gone and why. I can hear every penny working for me too. For example, there's so much space in that soundstage, I'm planning to take my holidays there, during the Summer, the detail is impressive, realism is quite striking and frequency discipline is absolute but its the naturalistic manner of the performance that gets me here.

It takes a lot to surprise me in hifi terms but the Lu Kang speakers have done that. So I don't just raise two thumbs for this design but my eyebrows too.



## LU KANG SP155 SPEAKERS

**Price:** £4,245

**Tel:** 02039 115 549

**Website:** [www.wholenotedistribution.co.uk](http://www.wholenotedistribution.co.uk)

**GOOD:** airy soundstage, clarity, transparency, tonal balance, build quality

**BAD:** aesthetics

**RATING:** 8

## REFERENCE

Origin Live Sovereign turntable

Origin Live Enterprise 12" arm

Van Den Hul Crimson XGW Stradivarius Cartridge

Audiolab 6000CDT CD Transport

Benchmark DAC2 HGC

Icon PS3 phono amplifier

Aesthetix Calypso pre-amp

Icon Audio MB845 Mk.II Monoblock Amplifiers

Quad ESL-57 Speakers with One Thing mod

Tellurium Q Statement cables

Blue Horizon Professional Rack System

Harmonic Resolution Systems Noise Reduction Components

CAD GC1 Ground Controls

Air Audio AC-2K Balanced Transformer

Russ Andrews RF Router Mk.II

Paul Rigby

(The Audiophile Man)

GROOVY

8/10