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Coming in at a competitive price point, you could argue that SA's standmount is up against it. **Mark Craven** tries it on for size

Danish speaker manufacturer System Audio has been busy over the last few years releasing its active Silverback models (including on-wall, bookshelf and floorstanders – see *HFC* 502) that support the WiSA wireless transmission system. Now it's returned to its roots with the Signature series, its first new passive range of speakers since 2018.

In the System Audio hierarchy, this family slots in above the entry-level Saxo, but keeps pricing on the right side of sensible. The Signature 5 steps right into a competitive market, while the flagship Signature 40 floorstander is £2,000. The range also offers setup flexibility through on-wall models; the compact Signature 6 (£800) and larger Signature 10 (£700 each) could, for example, be positioned around a TV or used in space-starved rooms. There's also a dedicated active subwoofer, in the shape of the £1,100 Signature Sub 8.

All are available in Satin Black or Satin White finish, and the styling might reasonably be described as 'classic modern'. In its white colourway in particular, the Signature 5 appears clean and unobtrusive – even more so if you keep its full-fascia magnetically attached grille in place.

The fluency of the Sig 5's midrange presentation is its calling card

The cabinets have square edges and there's only a discreet logo on the grilles, so there's little in the way of visual flair here, but this is what we've come to expect from System Audio. The quality of the fit and finish doesn't leave anything to be desired.

The speaker's two-way specification, with 25mm dome tweeter and 140mm mid/bass driver, doesn't

exactly leap off the page. System Audio would argue, however, that simplicity is an underrated quality in hi-fi, and that there's also a little more to this bookshelf speaker than meets the eye.

The Signature 5's tweeter, for example, is a new design specifically for the Signature series, with a 'low-mass' woven fibre dome and neodymium magnet system. It's framed by System Audio's now customary DXT waveguide, which is claimed to aid off-axis response and mitigate cabinet-borne diffraction. The mid/bass driver is another fresh concoction, said to: "move 40 percent more air than a traditional speaker of the same size" thanks to its combination of lightweight glass-fibre cone and long-stroke motor. Again, attention has been paid to interaction with the speaker, resulting in a surround that's periodically ribbed for both reinforcement and to break up unwanted resonances.

System Audio says the low-end reach of its new driver design is key to the slender looks of its Signature models. Case in point: the Signature 5 measures a tidy 165mm wide and 300mm high, yet claims a low-end reach down to 40Hz, aided by its circular, rear-facing bass reflex port. Sensitivity is a suggested 88dB/W, with 40hm nominal impedance.

The size of the cabinet means no internal bracing is deemed necessary

▶ DETAILS

PRODUCT
System Audio Signature 5

ORIGIN
Denmark

TYPE
2-way standmount loudspeaker

WEIGHT
4.8kg each

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
165 x 300 x 249mm

FEATURES
● 25mm soft dome tweeter
● 140mm glass fibre mid/bass driver
● Quoted sensitivity: 88dB/1W/1m (4ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Karma AV

WEBSITE
system-audio.com
karma-av.co.uk

to support its 18mm-thick MDF panels. However, System Audio has added a 25mm-thick MDF front baffle for improved rigidity and vibration control from the two drive units, while foam and synthetic wool damping materials are deployed inside. Keeping the ‘simplicity’ ethos going is a crossover network featuring just seven components. As System Audio founder Ole Witthøft tells me: “We’ve spent quite some time getting rid of stuff. Complexity can be fascinating, but our speakers shouldn’t stand in the way of the music signal”.

As a speaker designed for regular-sized rooms, it’s conceivable the Signature 5 might end up parked on a bookshelf, especially as the company doesn’t sell any partnering stands. Alternatively, it is compatible with the manufacturer’s W.5 wall-bracket (£122 a pair), but as the port clearly shifts some air in use, such a setup might not be playing to its strengths.

Sound quality

Sat on 26in stands and powered by an A35.2 amplifier from fellow Scandi marque Primare, System Audio’s new speaker wastes no time in revealing itself to be rather special. Not in terms of extreme bass weight or treble detail, you understand, but in its sense of effortless delivery. The sound is inviting, richly textured and resolutely musical – the kind that has you listening to track after track.

Shania Twain’s *Giddy Up*, from her 2023 album *Queen Of Me*, is tight and poppy and the Signature 5 brings these qualities to the fore. There’s a great feeling of rhythm and drive as drums, bass, guitar and keyboards lock into their staccato patterns. Some sharpness and detail at the very top end are left on the table, but it’s still easy to make out the forcefully strummed strings and variations in the tone of the percussion. Bass elements are given plenty of body, and, perhaps best of all, come across



HOW IT COMPARES

Got a grand to spend on a bookshelf speaker? You can take your pick from numerous options, including some that will leave you with money left over. Bowers & Wilkins’ 606 S3 (HFC 512) undercuts System Audio’s speaker by around £250 and is a shade bigger, thanks to its 165mm mid/bass driver to partner its titanium dome tweeter. Performance-wise, the 603 S3 edges towards a more attacking sound, particularly up top, so you’ll want to bear that in mind when it comes to source/amp matching.



with impressive speed and no bloat. This ability to sound focused and punchy, while maintaining a rich presentation that steers clear of dryness, means Bonnie Raitt’s gorgeous *I Know* is crafted with all its bluesy/boogie vibes shining through. Her playful vocals, plus trumpet and slide guitar, are smoothly rendered. A decent amount of attack – but not overt brightness – ensures a natural overall presentation throughout.

Dial up the volume on a piece like this and the Signature 5 is happy to oblige. Relatively small these speakers may be, but the soundstage has generous scale and width, and that somewhat soft approach to the top-end pays into an unflagging, enveloping performance at high levels. True, System Audio’s speaker doesn’t succeed at unpicking the congested, low-fi punk/thrash of *Motor Spirit*, by King Gizzard And The Lizard Wizard, but it still makes it an enjoyably energetic listen.

The fluency of its midrange presentation is the Signature 5’s calling card, allied to a knack at precisely placing effects within its stereo image. In the early stages of Led Zeppelin’s *Stairway To Heaven* Robert Plant is effectively cast

between flute and acoustic guitar floating amiably left and right, before the music blooms with the sound of Jimmy Page’s lightly overdriven guitar. Upon the arrival of John Bonham’s drums, the speakers’ joined-up image deftly picks out the ride cymbal just left of centre.

Again, you get the impression the music would have more to give in the hands of bigger, costlier speakers – I’ve heard this Led Zep track given more heft, more sparkle – but otherwise the Signature 5 excels at not just covering off the basics, but getting them spot on.

Conclusion

This is a fine-sounding speaker for the money. Pitfalls are those common to the size and price, namely a limit to its sheer scale and a lack of pristine detail and airiness, but the Signature 5 counters with a sound that marries tight, controlled and impressively deep bass with midrange nuance and sumptuous tonality. The smart, clean design is also a winner, and because it’s unfussy about partnering electronics – I also set up a nice-quality desktop system using a WiiM Amp – it should have real appeal to those shopping on a budget ●



Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Smooth, inviting sound; minimalist styling; price

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Rivals can sound more detailed

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Don’t be fooled by the simplicity of the Signature 5’s style and spec – this is a cracking speaker

EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★

OVERALL

