



Maestro!

AA strikes out into new territory with its new open-back headphone. **Cliff Joseph** finds himself mightily impressed

It's been a few years since we reviewed Austrian Audio's Hi-X65 (HFC 480) – an attractive open-back headphone with a very competitive £330 price tag. The company is back with a bang, though, with The Composer which is in a whole different league. Featuring an updated version of the 'high-excursion' technology used in the Hi-X range, it employs 49mm drivers with an impressive frequency response of 5Hz-44kHz, along with a rigid DLC (diamond-like carbon) diaphragm that claims to provide total harmonic distortion of less than 0.1 percent at 1kHz.

There's a good choice of cables included, with 3.5mm, XLR and 4.4mm connectors, as well as a 3.5mm-to-6.35mm adapter and each uses twin banana plugs to connect to the earpieces. The only notable omission is a storage case.

Like the Hi-X65, The Composer employs an open-back design and Austrian Audio claims it has: "the

most sophisticated mechanical design on the market". The large earpieces completely cover your ears with room to spare and as well as swivelling horizontally for a comfortable fit, you can also rotate them vertically through four different positions that are marked as notches on the adjustable metal armatures.

The earpieces are thickly padded with memory foam and the foam pads can be removed for cleaning or replacement further down the line. In contrast, the headband is covered with a light mesh panel that provides good airflow to dissipate heat during longer listening sessions. Despite this complex design, The Composer is relatively light for a large, open-back headphone weighing just 385g and the headband doesn't grip too tightly. My only minor complaint is that I find the earpieces sit quite low on my head, and I would prefer a little more room for manoeuvre when adjusting the headband. That's a matter of personal taste, though, and you'll certainly

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Austrian Audio
The Composer

ORIGIN
Austria

TYPE
Open-back, over-ear
headphone

WEIGHT
385g

FEATURES
• 49mm drivers
• Cables: 3.5mm (3m);
XLR (3m); 4.4mm (1.4m)
• Adapter: 3.5mm-to-6.35mm

DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Audio Ltd.

WEBSITE
austrian.audio
henleyaudio.co.uk

want to try it on for yourself before splashing the cash if at all possible.

Sound quality

I kick off by streaming Gorecki's *Symphony Of Sorrowful Songs* from Apple Music via iFi Audio's Diablo (HFC 474) DAC. The double bass introduction is always a challenge, starting so deep that the first few seconds can escape less discerning headphones. The Composer has the range, though, and is instantly alert to the mournful tone and rich textures. As the cellos enter, it reveals the world-weary tone of the strings.

It also shows a deft touch with the percussive electronics that open *Don't Be So Serious* by Low Roar, landing each beat with precision yet also keeping the sound light and fluid. Ryan Karazija's lyrics evoke yet more melancholy, but The Composer highlights the warmth and hope in his voice and, as the electronic keyboards enter on the chorus, its open-back sound lifts me into an immersive ambient soundscape that makes me wish a spatial audio mix was available.

The Composer proves it's not limited to just sombre sounds as it launches into My Chemical Romance's *Vampire Money*. The drum intro lands with a taut, firm thud as Gerard Way introduces the band members by name and the middle-eight is a raucous delight. The Austrian Audio neatly balances the thrashing guitar and crashing cymbals, all the while keeping an eye on the drum rhythm that holds the whole piece together.

Conclusion

Of course, you're entitled to expect versatility at this price and there's no shortage of rival open-back models that you might want to explore if £2,250 is a stretch for your bank account. But, if you're looking for an open-back headphone that combines clarity, range and spacious detail, The Composer is well worth an audition ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★ **LIKE:** Clear, well-balanced sound with impressive range

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** No case

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★ **WESAY:** It's certainly not cheap, but The Composer is an absolute sonic delight

FEATURES
★★★★★

OVERALL

★★★★★