

ELECTRIC BLUES

AKTIMATE BLUE WIRELESS ACTIVE SPEAKERS \$1200

Well we do like a hi-fi system which can be up and running within five minutes of opening the box. And simple set-up is just the first of a multitude of merits that the AktiMate Blue (which isn't blue at all... read on) brings to the hi-fi equation, mainly through its ability to perform the duties of so much of the hi-fi chain.

How so? Well, they provide, obviously, your loudspeakers — but also your amplification, which is built in to the left speaker. Also on this speaker is your pre-amp/switching system, enabling you to select (via the handy mini remote) which of the sources you have connected. And how many sources can you connect? Would you believe up to six — plus there's the built-in Bluetooth streaming from smartphone or tablet which gives the Blues their name. [They are actually available in gloss black, white or red.]

The six inputs include direct USB connection from your computer to play your digital music collection (a USB cable is provided). There are three analogue sets of inputs — one on minijack (cable provided), two more on RCA phono pairs (one cable provided). And there are two digital inputs, one each of coaxial and optical.

So it's hard to imagine a simpler, more minimalist system than this. You might, for example, put the Blues on either side of your TV. Connect the TV via optical. Run a USB extension over from your computer for music. And use Bluetooth to throw audio from your iPad or smartphone. A full system for music and movies — and four inputs still to spare!

But this is not the true strength of the Blues. Connectivity can be impressive, but it's the sound on offer that fires up our soul with enthusiasm. Our very first action after that rapid set-up was to use the supplied minijack



cable to plug in an old iPod nano, leaving it on 'shuffle' just to play overnight (to 'run them in', as we say). But so immediately engaging was the sound that instead we sat in front of them for several hours with the iPod shuffling away, delivering that big punchy sound for which AktiMate's various products have been pulling awards from around the world (including our own — we gave the Blues an award in our 'System Solutions' category only a few months ago). It is inherently 'right' from the first notes — a big spacious sound with nothing missing, nothing overemphasised, loaded with enthusiasm, delightful in its musicality. It soundstages widely and deeply given suitable distance between the speakers; the treble is tamed to avoid any harshness but never drifts into dullness. And they can party loud, apparently without distress.

So much did we focus on the music that the technicalities seem almost irrelevant — AktiMate quotes 2 x 60W of internal Class-AB power to drive the neodymium-magnet-driven 25mm soft-dome tweeters and 165mm polypropylene drive units. The woofers are neatly embedded behind near-flush grilles (semi-removable if desired using a supplied pin hook).

while the tweeter's dome grilles protrude just a few millimetres from their bottle-opener-shaped aluminium surrounds, which give the Blues their purposeful looks and left-right differentiation. The DAC behind the digital inputs is a capable Wolfson WMB761, good up to 24-bit/192kHz from SPDIF or computer (where they appear as 'DigiHug'), while we gather that the Bluetooth spec includes aptX for near-CD quality if your phone supports it (bit.ly/aptxphones). Certainly the Blues maintained a marvellous presentation of music whatever sources and input were used.

If the the versatility of the Blues fits your needs and the size suits (they're 32 x 21 x 26cm, a bit big in both size and presentation for desktop use), don't think twice. The Blues take AktiMate's successful formula up a level, while maintaining the brand's core strength of excellent music-making. *JF* +

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