



BY MIKE METLAY

EVE Audio SC203 Active Monitors

The DSP-savvy EVE sound comes to the desktop

EVE Audio is a German speaker manufacturer whose designs distinguish themselves by a combination of Air Motion Transformer tweeters and user-controllable DSP functions. The line includes everything from 2-way reference monitors to large 3-way and dual-woofer main monitors, and a line of powerful subwoofers, but the SC203 is EVE's first foray into desktop audio for the computer-studio musician.

The SC203 is intended to be a complete out-of-the-box solution for pretty much any desktop or small-studio application that requires a powerful and clear yet light and portable monitor. It can be used alone or in combination with a subwoofer, and comes with both hardware and DSP options to maximize its flexibility.

The box

The SC203 is a master/slave system; all of the electronics are contained in the Master (Right) speaker, and the Slave (Left) speaker is a passive unit connected to the Master by a four-conductor locking

cable. Both units are 4.56" x 7.48" x 5.27" in size.

Surprisingly, there's not a huge weight difference between the two speakers, implying that EVE took care to alter the internal design of the slave to compensate for the audio effects of the missing electronics. The entire package weighs less than ten pounds, making the speakers easy to place, move, and carry with you.

Each cabinet has a μ AMT Air Motion Transformer, EVE Audio's version of the pleated-ribbon Air Motion Transducer pioneered by Dr. Oskar Heil in the 1970s and now seen on monitors from a number of manufacturers. The low end is handled by a 3" coated-paper woofer and augmented by a passive radiator on the back of the speaker's sealed cabinet. According to EVE, the passive radiator is responsible for the surprising low-end extension of the SC203, as well as its reduced intermodulation distortion and lack of low-end resonances that can occur in ported designs. Both drivers are protected from harm by integral metal grilles.

The SC203 comes with a pair of FlexiPads, custom-fitted isolation/absorption pads that decouple the speaker from whatever it's resting on (even if it's mounted on a mic stand with the optional threaded adapter). These bright orange pads are tapered at the same 7.5° angle as the bottom surface of the speakers; depending on how they're attached, the speaker will fire straight forward or at a 15° upward angle, giving the user a choice between mounting at ear level or on a desktop. The speaker enclosures can also be used without the FlexiPads, losing some speaker isolation in exchange for a 7.5° up-angle.

The innards

The SC203 is a biamplified monitor; the Master speaker contains four 30W power amps, one for each of the drivers in each speaker. The crossover frequency is quite high at 4800 Hz, placing a lot of critical midrange material squarely in the woofer's domain. While a fair bit of tweaking is available from the front control knob (see below), a few functions are still



set on the rear panel with DIP switches: you can enable or disable Standby mode (where the speaker drops into a "sleep" state after 10 minutes with no audio present at the analog input), enable a Satellite Filter (80 Hz highpass for use with a separate subwoofer that doesn't have bass management), or set the analog input sensitivity to 8 dBu or 22 dBu.

Also on the rear panel: the 4-pin locking connector for the cable to the Slave, a connector for the inline power supply, a mono RCA Sub Out (passing audio between 10 and 500 Hz), and three sets of stereo inputs: analog on unbalanced RCA, USB-B, and Toslink optical S/PDIF. Attachment points for a wall bracket are just below the passive radiator.

The front-panel encoder serves multiple purposes, clearly marked by a bright orange LED ring around it. This encoder will be familiar to anyone who's worked with an EVE Audio monitor before, as it's present on every speaker the company builds. On the SC203, the encoder/LED ring is used to power the speaker on or off, set volume, indicate Standby or active status, and set Balance (L/R relative level), the three built-in filters (High, Position, Low), choose the active analog or digital input, and control how volume settings are displayed on the LED ring. The LED ring also flashes when the input A/D converter is overloaded, a useful indicator when setting nominal input levels going to the SC203—turn up your mixer or interface until the ring flashes, then back off a bit, and you'll be getting the most A/D dynamic range (and can control listening level at the speaker).



Maximum SPL is 94 dB at 1 meter, which is uncomfortably loud and a suitable upper bound for such a small speaker. The High and Low filters are shelves at 3 kHz and 300 Hz, with a range of control from a -5 dB cut to a 3 dB boost in 0.5 dB increments. You can use these to adjust for positioning near walls or in corners or tight spaces, or to compensate for other anomalies in your listening space.

The Position filter has three settings. The Flat setting is intended for when the speakers are mounted at ear level and firing directly at the engineer; the Desk setting goes with placement on a desktop and the 15° FlexiPad up-angle; and Console is for meter bridge mounting at either 7.5° or 15°. This compensates for audio bouncing up to the ears from the desk or mixer; you'll want to experiment with audio you know very well and determine the most accurate setting for your room and speaker placement.

In use

Unusually for a speaker with a 3" woofer, the SC203's stated frequency response (-3 dB) is 62 Hz to 21 kHz. That lower number is pretty impressive, and owes a lot to the passive radiator working in tandem with the woofer.

Do these speakers sound like they're delivering accurate audio down to 62 Hz?

Yes, they do, but no further. If you want that last octave of audio to feel the moving air of a kick drum or resolve the fundamental in a bass's B string, you'll have to add a subwoofer to the SC203. Oh, those naughty laws of physics...

Once we get above the lows, though, the SC203 paints a pristine sonic picture. Low-mids, like the harmonic structure of bowed strings in movie soundtracks and deeper sources like bass guitar, come across with clarity and richness. Vocals and lead guitars are present but not in your face, with perhaps a tiny dip at the crossover frequency (although this could also be a function of speaker placement in my room). Highs are extended and clear without a hint of spittiness—the μ AMT tweeter is doing its job admirably.

These speakers are intended for desktop use, close to the engineer, and as such they provide a sweet spot that's smaller than on some monitors but very smooth in the lows and mids. Off-axis speaker performance is graceful, with the highs smoothly fading as you move too far to the left or right—don't plan on working side-by-side with another engineer if they've been set close enough together to keep the center of the stereo soundstage from collapsing. I liked them at 36" or less, and 24" was ideal for solo work.

Conclusions

The SC203 is a brave entry into an already crowded market. Buyers of desktop speakers are used to models that are either very inexpensive, meant for casual listening/computer gaming, or both. Why buy a desktop computer speaker system that costs as much as a pair of decent-quality nearfields?

In this case, it's because you get way more than a desktop computer speaker with the SC203 monitors. They're detailed, airy, offer a lot of nuance when working with stereo material, and deliver a surprising amount of low end that's clear, balanced, and more accurate than what you'd get in a lot of budget speakers with bigger woofers. The DSP settings and the flexibility of going from analog to optical to USB add up to a listening experience that you can take advantage of just about anywhere, and in today's world of recording work on location in places far from home, that's a huge advantage for the serious engineer.

EVE Audio has turned a lot of heads with its existing line of larger monitors; with the SC203, it's going to turn a lot more. ➔

Price: \$699

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