

These Cheap Headphones Will Knock Your Socks Off



We test a lot of audio products around here — so many, in fact, that it's getting harder to differentiate between many of them. But these RHA SA 950i [headphones](#) [1] set themselves apart from the crowd with a triple punch: They're relatively cheap, they're feather-light, and most importantly, they crank out some spectacular sound.

The minute I first held these unusually small over-the-ear headphones in my hands, I was astonished. Something this substantial has no business being so light. They weigh hardly anything — a mere 3.7 oz (105g). I handed them to a few of my colleagues here at the Midwest Test Facility, and all of them immediately had a look of surprise on their faces — even those who don't care at all about headphones and their associated gadgetry.

Placing the headphones on my ears, their light weight proved to be a pleasing characteristic. I could hardly tell I was wearing them — they were so light they might as well have been weightless. Although the headphones clamped onto my oversized noggin more tightly than I would have liked, I quickly became acclimated, realizing it was good to have them pressing up against my ears firmly enough to form a proper seal, and to keep them from falling off my head if I started feeling energetic. After wearing them nonstop for a couple of hours, I hereby declare them officially comfy-cozy longtime.

Next it was time to get down to some serious listening. I started out with some righteous funk, cranking it up a bit. Whoa! These babies were *loud*. And where have I heard sounds like this before? The most noticeable attribute of the sound quality was the forceful bass, reminding me of my favorite headphones for low frequencies, the [Beats Studio by Dr. Dre](#) [2].

Heck, I thought, why not break out [those stellar \\$300 Beats headphones](#) [3] and compare them with this relatively cheap \$59.95 product? Would it be a fair fight?

While I was at it, I picked out another pricy pair of cans, the [Soul by Ludacris](#) [4], to

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see how this humble pair of sound muffs stood up to the monsters of the headphone midway.

In mid-listen, quickly taking off these headphones and placing the Dr. Dre phones on my head, I realized the more expensive headphones did sound somewhat cleaner (but not by much), and their signature bass response was almost equaled by these RHA headphones.

When I replaced those with my overall favorite headphones, the Soul By Ludacris, the result of my comparison was the same. The bass response was equal, and the highs and midrange were comparable as well. I can only conclude that when you spend four or five times as much on an audio product, you certainly expect it to sound at least *twice* as good — but in this case, these cheap headphones were nearly the equal of the much more expensive Dr. Dre and Ludacris models. The only difference I could discern was slightly better presence and a bit less distortion with the two high-end pairs.

So how would I describe the sound of these [RHA SA 950i headphones](#) [5]?

- The highs are extremely well-defined and relatively free of distortion — tightly tuned snare drums, cymbals and bell trees shimmered with their clear high-end frequency response.
- The midrange sounds realistic, with the headphones able to faithfully reproduce the subtle sounds of classical guitar and the clear tones of the human voice with aplomb.
- And then there's that bass. Wow. It felt like the headphones were dancing on my head, just like the Dr. Dre's do. The sound was firm, clear and clean, and when I cranked the volume up, it was almost scary.

These little British headphones knocked my socks off. After intense listening to a variety of musical styles, and comparing them with my favorite headphones, I can only conclude this is the best value in headphones I've ever seen. Unless you're an audiophile or you're lucky enough to have inherited golden ears, I don't think you'll be able to tell the difference between these and headphones costing five times as much.

They'll be available Nov. 5 for \$59.95 on [Amazon](#) [6] in the U.S., and although that's still plenty of money, when it comes to this kind of sound, this is one of the best bargains of the year.

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