

EVE SC203

Compact Desktop Speakers

Review: Preshan John

▶ I'm sure we can agree that a studio monitor doesn't have to be enormous to be accurate. But let's face it — you can't get much smaller than a three-inch speaker before the term 'pro audio' starts to lose weight.

The Eve Audio SC203 is the baby of the company's well-regarded offspring of studio monitors. It's a master/slave speaker system, meaning the unpowered left speaker is chained to the right, which receives power and input signal via USB, optical, or analogue RCA connections. You can hook up a subwoofer through the RCA output, though its quoted frequency response of 62Hz-21kHz actually puts it in the full-range category.

The provided FlexiPads are like the toy in a HappyMeal — not really a mandatory addition, but it totally sweetens the deal. Like the base of the SC203 itself, the FlexiPad has a 7.5-degree slant. Sticking it underneath a speaker kicks it back 15-degrees while flipping the pads allow the speaker to sit flat for ear-level mounting. As a bonus, the FlexiPads' rubber surface provides a degree of acoustic decoupling for cleaner low end and isolation.

Other goodies include threaded adapters that let you mount an SC203 on any speaker or microphone stand. Eve Audio also graciously provides an abundance of connection cables — companies with Thunderbolt interfaces, take note.

WHIZ KID

The SC203 is laden with digital intelligence. 24-bit/192k Cirrus Logic converters deliver signal to the DSP section. These converters are bypassed entirely if you use the optical digital inputs. Among the almost unnecessarily large amount of DSP tweakability are three settings depending on what position the speakers are in — ear-level on stands, angled up on a desktop, or somewhere in between on a console's meter bridge. Each option sounds notably different, but to my ears the best-sounding setting in each scenario didn't always correspond with its intended position.

All DSP functionality is controlled with the knob on the right speaker, with which you can adjust volume, select input, control the ± 3 dB high/low shelf setting, choose speaker position, adjust left/right balance, and more.

Next to even a pair of humble five-inch M-Audio monitors, it's still abundantly clear that a three-inch monitor won't reproduce sounds with the lifelike quality of larger drivers. It's just the way things are.

It'd be unreasonable to put the SC203s up against



six- or eight-inch monitors; but put them in a decent space, crank them up, and they'll punch well above their weight. It's near impossible to make them sound tinny, even if you choose to use the DSP controls adversely. The μ A.M.T. tweeters don't provide a clinical sense of clarity in the highs; they have a certain 'mush' to them, but impart enough top end to not sound bland. Of most surprise was the woofer's tight and defined low end. Whatever technical wizardry Eve Audio has implemented with the coated paper woofer membrane and rear passive bass radiator, it works admirably for the size.

SMALL'S SMALL

The thoroughbred DNA the SC203 carries is apparent in its DSP capability, but there's no denying it's still a small speaker — so small it basically renders itself unworthy of the 'monitor' title. To be fair, Eve Audio actually calls the SC203 a more fitting 'compact desktop speaker.' In other words, you wouldn't use the SC203s for mixing, and Eve Audio seems to know that. It's hard to ignore the family of premium studio monitors

these micro-speakers are joining.

So instead of underwhelming monitors, I see (and hear) the SC203s as impressive-sounding mini speakers, with a truckload of DSP and flexible input options. They are expensive for their stature, so to buy these you really have to be sold on the concept of size and the USB D/A conversion — gaming, education facilities, and travelling producers come to mind. The SC203s are miniaturised enough to fit in a backpack with plenty of room to spare, and you only need to locate a single power outlet when you whip them out. Potentially just the ticket for location recording playback. They won't replace your go-to mixing monitors, but they might suit your specific need to a 't. Plus, with onboard USB D/A conversion, they're certainly a step up from plugging speakers into your laptop's headphone jack. ■