



# KEF LSX II

## Streaming Speaker System



- Positively sings playing all music genres
- Generous streaming and physical connections
- Flexibly small, aesthetically striking



- Remote is undesirable
- Native 24-bit/192kHz playback requires a wired connection

RRP

**\$2,195**  
per  
pair

It makes sense that KEF is more prolific in the burgeoning stereo speaker system market than pretty much every other brand. After all, the British brand more or less single-handedly carved it out with the launch of its LS50 Wireless six years ago.

Not surprising considering the success of that very system, it's a market the company has been very present in ever since. The LS50 Wireless II and even more innovative LS60 Wireless have stolen a lot of headlines of late (and rightly so), but we shouldn't forget that there is actually a third member of KEF's wireless speaker system family.

The LSX launched way back in 2018 and the diminutive streaming speaker system (try saying that fast five times in a row!) made an immediate impact. Given the evolution of the rest of the range since, though — the implementation of KEF's high-frequency-enhancing Metamaterial Absorption Technology (MAT) and inclusion of HDMI connectivity, to give two examples — it was probably about time that we saw a sequel. And that sequel is the fittingly named LSX II.

### SAME OLD

If you were expecting big design changes over the original, you might be disappointed to learn that the LSX II looks identical to its predecessor. As internal electronics changes have increased manufacturing costs, KEF has stuck with the same look in order to keep the asking price down. Such lack of evolution in the design department might not be all that exciting, but it's hardly a bad

thing considering how gorgeous these compact cabinets have always looked and felt. Indeed, they hardly struggle for shelf appeal. Predominantly down to the distinct design and bold colour of the Uni-Q driver, they're striking to look at regardless of the finish you choose — white matte satin, red high-gloss, black or blue in Kvadrat fabric, or the special Soundwave by

output. KEF said including MAT would have — you guessed it — increased cost too much. Perhaps if there's ever an LSX III...

Amplification once again amounts to 200 watts, with 30 going to the tweeter and 70 to the woofer on each channel.

### WHAT'S NEW

The big changes for the KEF LSX II have indeed happened deep beneath the surface in software territory. The LSX's DSP has been completely redesigned, with some of the changes trickling down from its siblings.

The LSX II now uses KEF's own W2 wireless streaming platform, too, bringing it into line with the LS50 Wireless II and LS60 Wireless. This platform is your gateway to all the network connections on offer, including AirPlay 2, which is handy for playing Apple Music and local files on iOS devices; Google Chromecast, for one-touch access to a bunch of apps including Qobuz, Tidal and Deezer; and Bluetooth, for offline streaming. You also have Spotify Connect and Tidal Connect support, as well as the ability to stream music stored on an external NAS drive. The LSX II is also Roon Ready, which will no doubt please subscribers to that music management platform.

KEF has also blessed the LSX II with a couple of modern-day physical connections — HDMI ARC and USB-C — to accommodate TV and laptop/portable device hook-ups. Neat.

The LSX II partnering a TV makes a lot of sense for those who don't want to go down a premium soundbar route, so long as they're placed on

## The KEF LSX II is a stylish proposition that comes with none of the baggage a separates set-up brings

Terence Conran Edition that marks one of the late British designer's final collaborations.

It is more of the same as we move onto the internal hardware: the LSX II uses the same 11th-gen version of KEF's Uni-Q driver as the originals, as opposed to the 12th-gen version that is found inside its siblings and defined by the addition of MAT technology and a reworked motor system. Indeed, that means MAT isn't part of the LSX II's engineering — a shame really considering that the patented tech does a brilliant job of absorbing soundwaves that radiate from the back of the tweeter dome, facilitating a notably cleaner



stands or decent supports at head height. KEF would naturally point you to its matching S1 floor stands (\$649), P1 desk pads (\$279) or B1 wall bracket (\$379).

Playing *Top Gun* on Netflix, the KEF system, given a bit of volume of course, does a much better job of sucking you into the fast-paced action than you might think given its size. Jet engines growl, and the whistle of them racing through the air is pleasingly piercing. The spread of sound is broader than most premium crop soundbars are capable of kicking out, too, though you don't get any Dolby Atmos effects here of course. Basic but important: the LSX II doesn't appear to suffer from any syncing issues. And if you were wondering, connecting a laptop (in this case, a MacBook Pro) via USB-C works just as seamlessly too.

### IN USE

As with the two other wireless systems in this KEF range, there is an Ethernet port at the rear of the right ('master') speaker for connecting the speakers directly to a router, as well as a second Ethernet port on the left ('slave') speaker which you can use to connect the supplied LAN cable between the two speakers. This wired inter-speaker connection is required if you want native playback of 24-bit/96kHz digital music files through the KEF; anything higher than this is downsampled to 24-bit/96kHz. The system is also capable of handling up to 24-bit/48kHz natively through KEF's own low-latency wireless connection (again, it will simply downsample anything above and up to 24-bit/384kHz to this sample rate too). There is also support for DSD256 and MQA decoding.

The LSX II has to make do without the touch controls that feature on the top panel of the LS50 Wireless II, and nine times out of ten you might want to bypass the rather cheap-feeling remote. It's OK for quickly changing volume or switching source but isn't particularly nice to use or useful for more complex actions. Instead, reach straight for your phone or



other iOS/Android device and download the KEF Connect app, to which the system gets access thanks to the W2 platform. It places all of the playback controls and music streaming services (including internet radio) at your fingertips. It's an accomplished app that is straightforward enough

to navigate, though we do find that it loses connection with the system on occasion, and that can be a tad frustrating.

One of your first calling points in the app should be the EQ settings. You have 'Normal' or 'Expert' to choose from, and these offer varying degrees of adjustment.

The former is the one to start with, first allowing you to make adjustments based on whether the speakers are being used on stands or a desktop, and whether they're up against a wall or out in a bit of free space. It'll also take into account if your room is heavily or lightly damped. The Expert option covers all this and more, including subtler adjustments if you use the LSX II with an additional subwoofer, such as the wonderful KEF KC62 — though I imagine that partnership would be an overkill for this type of product.

### PERFORMANCE

The smooth and soulful sounds of *Easy* by The Commodores kick off testing, and the KEF system settles into the groove of the track in no time at all. It delivers a confident performance, perfectly in tune with the relaxed, easy-going nature of the track. It's laid back, but expressive when required. The speakers communicate all the subtle dynamic shifts in the piano key strikes, drum thwacks and guitar string plucks with ease — there's a real sense of refinement and maturity to the sound without being showy. You just know you're in the presence of capable speakers.





We up the tempo slightly by switching to Kendrick Lamar's *Rich Spirit* and the vocal hangs right in the middle of the soundstage, surrounded by the track's swollen bassline. Given the size of the speakers, you can't expect the LSX II to delve too deep (which it doesn't), but there is enough weight for the notes to feel full and wholesome. Bass is tight and controlled, too, with a nice layer of texture on the surface of the notes. The LSX II is also a stickler for rhythms, as tucking into Hot Chip's *Down* demonstrates. This is an electro-pop band that carves out dancefloor-filling melodies like their lives depend on it, and this opening single from their new album 'Freakout/Release' is a peach. The KEF's rendition is suitably juicy, its agile bass bopping along beneath an equally present and pacey melody and vocal accompaniment. Before I know it, the album's played through and the sole of my right foot is very warm. What's more, the LSX II doesn't completely lose its cool when you whack up the volume, which is by no means a given for this size of speaker with this size of driver.

I've heard enough KEF speakers to know to expect a stereo image that's like a bubble of sound from a Uni-Q driver, and while this one's smaller than most, that same quality is apparent here. It's all very well having a decent spread of sound, but whether we are talking about a pair of small speakers like these or ones five times the size and price, the output is not going to draw


listeners in without also having layered depth. Play Tina Turner's *Proud Mary* and the system gets the layering of all the different elements of the track spot on. As different elements introduce themselves, such as the guitar, drums, Turner's voice and the accompanying male voice hanging in the background, the music becomes more interesting to listen to — and that's before she even launches into the more frantic section of the track.

Switch over to Rival Consoles' ambience-rich handiwork and a musical cacophony of lush experimentalism is presented with a decent amount of organisation, with the production's dynamic depth largely intact to keep things interesting through tracks' often six-minute duration. Tonally, the presentation is extremely inviting and shows a lot of natural warmth — and this rings true whether you're listening to the speakers in a more conventional set-up on stands or are sitting more up close and personal using them on a desktop. The closer you get, the more precise and focused they sound — so from this point of view they are extremely flexible too.

Whether or not you use an Ethernet cable or Wi-Fi will likely depend on how close your system is to your router, but if possible you should try to accommodate the cable option. The streaming sound quality *is* preferable with the wire in place. Without it, music sounds a little less substantial and a touch more forward. It isn't a huge

difference by any means, but it's enough of one to recommend one way over the other if it's practical. Similarly, while Bluetooth is onboard for convenience, going down online or physical paths will reward you with better sound quality.

## CONCLUSION

Ultimately, KEF has taken what was already a winning formula, introduced some functionality and usability upgrades, and without really altering the speaker hardware has produced a talented system that sings with any genre of music sent its way. The KEF LSX II is a stylish proposition that comes with none of the baggage a separates set-up brings. It's pretty modest as far as hi-fi systems go, of course, and will best suit bedrooms, offices or smaller living rooms as opposed to the biggest spaces in a house, but it is certainly as good as it gets at this modest price and size. 

## CONTACT INFO

**Brand:** KEF

**Model:** LSX II

**RRP:** \$2,195 per pair

**Warranty:** Two Years

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