

Does Amazon Echo Studio speaker deliver on its promise of amazing sound?

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When Amazon demonstrated the new Echo Studio at a company event in September, I was blown away. This was some of the best audio I had ever heard from a little speaker, filling a room of hundreds of journalists and sounding like it was many speakers connected together.

My initial thought was that rival Sonos, which specializes in great-sounding Wi-Fi speakers, was in trouble.

But not so fast.

After spending several hours with the \$200 Studio, out Thursday, there will be no need to schedule a benefit for Sonos. Not this week, anyway.

The Studio does sounds great. Just not as jaw-dropping as in Seattle.

And the \$200 Sonos One, which answers to both Alexa and the Google Assistant and lives in my home, sounds pretty comparable. At least in my humble opinion.

To sweeten the pot and entice consumers to buy Amazon's most expensive Echo speaker to date, it's promoting that "you've never heard an Echo like this before."

The selling point is the addition of "immersive 3-D audio," from Dolby Atmos, which brings immersive, movie theater-like separation to the experience.

Amazon describes Atmos as "placing music objects such as vocals and instruments in a 3-D space so you can imagine hearing voices from above you, drums to the side, etc."

In a pro setting, Atmos is awesome. For instance, when I caught an Atmos demo at the historic Capitol Records studio earlier this year, I truly could hear audio all around me, as execs played back Marvin Gaye's classic "What's Going On" over 16 speakers. The sound was distributed into several of the speakers, with the street chatter that opens the song appearing in front and the conga players in the back of the room.

But at home, even when I asked Alexa to play the "Best of 3-D music" playlist, as Amazon suggested I do, it was hard to hear much of a difference coming from the Studio, which actually has six speakers in the body of the unit, and the smaller Sonos One, which didn't playback

in Atmos.

If you want to hear what 3-D Audio is all about on the Studio, Amazon offers the 3-D playlist for free, including artists like Lady Gaga, Ariana Grande, Rufus with Chaka Khan, Kool and the Gang and the Jackson 5.

Amazon recently introduced an upgraded tier of Amazon Music for higher-resolution audio, bringing the average \$7.99 monthly subscription rate to \$12.99. If you want to hear HD audio with Atmos, Amazon suggests downloading the Music app and looking for the HD notation on the song track.

Echo speakers come in all shapes and sizes and have found their biggest popularity as small devices that people use as kitchen radios and to access the Alexa personal assistant to set timers, look up recipes and operate their smart homes.

Great sound has not been part of the equation, especially for the best-selling Echo, the hockey puck-like Dot, which has AM quality audio. For most folks, they don't mind. Audiophiles are a different bunch.

As for Sonos, the company has built a loyal following of folks who wanted to listen to streaming music the old-fashioned way, on speakers, but sans [speaker](#) wire. Many of us have amassed multiple collections of Sonos speakers to connect to one another and take it from one—like, say, one Sonos One connected to three larger Sonos Play 5 speakers in my garage.

Now that really rocks the house.

And I can ask Alexa or Google to do the rocking, which is even better.

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