



Arcam

MusicBOOST iPhone 6 headphone amp & DAC

POCKET ADD-ONS AIMED at improving the inferior sounds of smartphones are great, but, using them often means carting around a second box in your man bag, with the added hassle of extra wires and connections. Arcam's MusicBOOST does away with this faffery as it slips around the iPhone 6 like a glove.

It's very discreet and about the size of a phone case, adding little in the way of extra bulk. And because it brings only 7mm of extra thickness and 25mm in length to the phone's standard dimensions, it can remain a permanent fixture. Its polycarbonate chassis feels well made, with a rubber coating on the outside providing a degree of bash protection from everyday knocks and scuffs.

At the MusicBOOST's core sits a TI/Burr-Brown PCM5102 precision DAC alongside an internal battery with enough muscle to fully charge your phone more than twice over.

Easy does it

Using the MusicBOOST could not be easier, simply slide your phone in until the Arcam's lightning connector locates and you're good to go. Control switches are limited to two small silver front panel buttons, with the left one activating its iPhone battery charging function and the right indicating the MusicBOOST's battery status. Socketry consists of a 3.5mm headphone jack plus a micro USB slot for charging. Handily this will also charge your phone at the same time. There's also an external speaker on its lower edge (mirroring the phone's) for playing music *sans* cans, plus a rear panel cut out for your phone's camera lens.

Using my reference Audio-Technica ATH-SR5BT headphones for back-to-back comparisons with the MusicBOOST attached and then disconnected, immediately highlights what the Arcam brings. In short, it breathes life into what is otherwise a flat-sounding performance. Playing an ALAC rip of Goldfrapp's

Jo via the iPhone flying solo, the music sounds thin and uninspiring, with the song's rich production left by the wayside. Bringing the MusicBOOST into the equation ensures the musical picture becomes a more colourful landscape, and leaves the iPhone's one-dimensional portrayal for dust. Where vocals and instruments sound thin and clustered before, there's now depth and tonality, and instead of feeling frustrated at what I'm missing out on I enjoy repeat listens, thanks to the Arcam's intervention.

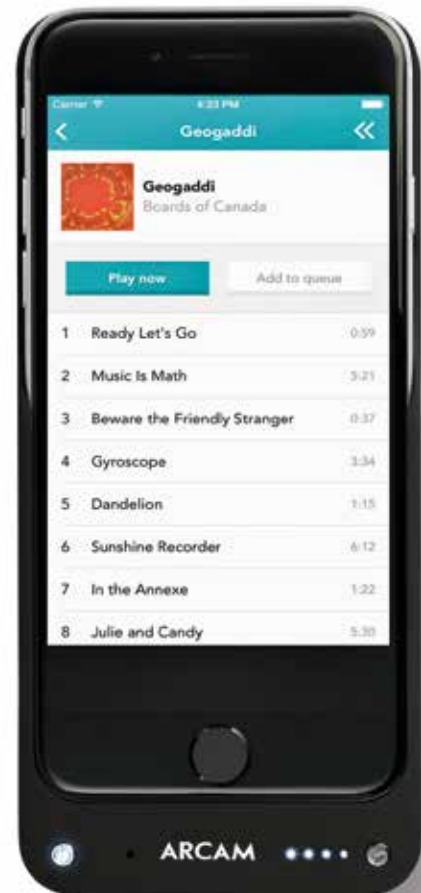
Soundstaging is also much more open and evenly distributed with the MusicBOOST in play. Dennis Wilson's epic *River Song* from his *Pacific Ocean Blue* album is a track I usually shy away from playing on my iPhone, as

An almost essential buy for iPhone 6 users craving better quality sounds

its audio quality simply can't do the song's sweeping vocals and grand soundscapes justice. Via the Arcam, however, the music gets much closer to how it sounds on my reference system at home as backing vocals extend from deep within the mix and the percussion becomes more clearly defined and imaged.

Another trait that's common to the Arcam's treatment is in how it smooths out the iPhone's harsh edges, making the music more relaxing to aid longer, fatigue-free listening sessions. Streaming a 256kbps download of Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong's *Cheek To Cheek* from their 1956 duets album *Ella And Louis*, the Arcam ensures Armstrong's rich vocals are presented with a velvety tonality that's nice and rich.

Perhaps the areas of criticism that I level the most at my iPhone's audio performance is in its bass quality and quantity. But with the MusicBOOST driving the Audio-Technica cans, I'm



presented with more low frequencies than I'm used to, brought home by the double bass, which doesn't shy away from properly resonating with a good sense of texture.

Marked improvement

For those who use an iPhone more out of necessity than for its audio quality, the MusicBOOST brings welcome relief. In a nutshell, it converts the iPhone's mediocre (at best) musical performance into a true audio experience, and for that it should be applauded. Add to this its fit-and-forget nature – which ensures you never need be without it when on the move – and the MusicBOOST stands out as an almost essential buy for iPhone 6 users craving better quality sounds. **AS**

DETAILS

PRICE
£120
WEBSITE
arcam.co.uk

OUR VERDICT

