

Bring on “Da Noise”

Today’s Affordable Headphones Can Handle It

Silence is golden, but sometimes some good music or an engrossing audiobook can make for the perfect break from reality.

Clap on a good headset and queue up some smartphone tunes, then you’re usually ready to go — but not always. Loud noises like the drone of an old air conditioner or nearby traffic can overwhelm your content and destroy your bliss. The



ZVOX AV50 Photo courtesy ZVOX Audio

good news is that noise-cancelling headsets — units with technology that drastically decrease extraneous sounds and enhance the listening experience — are now very affordable.

Two good examples include the AV50 by ZVOX Audio and the Soundcore Space NC from Anker Innovations, both of which are Bluetooth wireless, over-the-head headphones. Both are good choices for home, office or commuter listening and both come with protective cases, thus making them good travel companions.

Noise-cancelling headphones have extra microphones which listen to the noises around you — especially those that are not in the voice or music audio spectrums — and then use that information to generate soundwaves inside the headset that are the exact opposite of the extraneous noises. The result approaches silence, thus

allowing much more of your music or audiobook to reach your ears.

When Bose launched its innovative QuietComfort noise-cancelling consumer headphone line in 2000, the price was in the hundreds. However, the \$149 ZVOX AV50 and \$99 Anker Soundcore Space NC provide admirable noise cancellation at affordable prices.

The Space NC — part of Anker’s relatively new Soundcore line of wired and Bluetooth wireless headphones, speakers and earbuds — offers very effective noise cancellation with solid bass. The Soundcore Space NC has two 40mm drivers and has touch controls on the right earphone. Tap or swipe up, down, right or left to adjust volume or manage music playback or calls.

Anker claims that its technology “blocks out up to 93% of low-frequency engine noise and up to 96% of high-frequency sounds such as voices and vehicle horns.” The company also claims that the Soundcore Space NC provides up to 25 hours of noise-cancelled wireless listening per charge or 50 hours when wired.

The smaller, lightweight ZVOX AV50 uses some of the same technology used in hearing aids to enhance speech clarity while still offering an excellent music experience. At a recent CE Week technology show in New York, a ZVOX representative explained that its Accuvoice technology “roughs up the edges” of speech soundwaves — especially consonants — to make words more distinct, which is good news for

older ears.

The 8-ounce ZVOX AV50 is thin and simple: easy-to-use buttons control all functions and a pleasant voice confirms when the unit is pairing, powering up or down, or whether noise cancellation is engaged. ZVOX promises that the AV50 will last 11 noise-cancelling hours per charge wirelessly or 15 hours when corded.

In a test conducted by the author with both headphones and a music video, it was easier to distinguish the words of the song and count the number of background singers with the ZVOX AV50. The Soundcore Space NC handled the music video admirably with solid bass and clarity.

What you lose in less-expensive noise-cancelling headphones such as these is the heavier hardware, more solid build and the larger and more expensive drivers necessary to handle the deepest bone-rattling bass sounds. But both the ZVOX AV50 and the Anker



Anker Soundcore Space NC Photo courtesy Anker Innovations

Soundcore Space NC offer pleasant, quiet audio experiences without generating screams when the charge card bill arrives. ■



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