


Lake People G109S: The Wonderful World

courtesy Dave, <http://www.headfonia.com/lake-people-g109s-wonderful-world/>



Disclaimer: Vioelectric USA was so kind to supply us this loaner/review sample.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR
Dave is a father of two, living in the USA. Although relatively new to the world of headphones, music has always played an important part in his life. Holding a bachelor's degree in Film Studies, Dave has always loved discussing and recommending movies to people, which made him very comfortable with the headfonia's atmosphere. Interesting fact: he once rescued his family from the wreckage of a destroyed, sinking battleship. True story.

First off, if you are a headphone enthusiast who tries to walk that line of maintaining a budget while trying to get a taste of some higher end gear (a difficult tightrope, I know), here is your amp. Enjoy! To those of you who require more than just the word of some guy to plunk down \$600, read on, as we explore the wonderful world of the Lake People G109S.

If the Lake People has a slightly familiar ring to it, that's because they are the people who make the Vioelectric products (much loved by L). Looking at the G109S, one can see the familial resemblance between it and the Vio amps, particularly in the two 1/4 inch headphone outputs in front. The G109S looks a bit more streamlined on the outside. It is built with anodized aluminum and while lacking the tank like nature of the Schiit or Burson (forshadowing!) products, still feels nice and solid. Solid enough that you can say, "OK, that will do. Let's see what else you have."

The products released under the Lake People moniker are geared towards professionals, for applications in, according to the Lake People's website, "broadcast, television, airports, exhibition halls, festival venues, theatres, large-scale installations, private studios and more." Their Vioelectric gear is aimed directly at audiophiles. The original intent towards professionals might explain the biggest weakness of the G109S, the gain selection. There are three levels of gain to select from, but you have to remove the top of the unit in order to get at the switch. Now, it isn't that difficult to remove the top, but it can be time consuming and is kind of a pain in the ass (see what I did there). That might not be a big deal for an audio professional who is using the same monitors all day, but for a headphone enthusiast like you and I, it could be a pain. I say could be, since I haven't actually had to switch the gain from the default since I got the unit. It was able to handle both the high impedance HD650 and the love efficiency HE-500 with aplomb. So, it is a notable issue, but for me, not a big deal.

The origin as a device for professionals might also speak to the G109S's chief strengths as an amp, mainly its cleanliness and transparency. It is these two things working in tandem that creates the wonderful sound of the G109S. Or, I should say, it is the source, music and headphones that creates the wonderful sound. What I mean by that is that this is, by far, the most transparent amp I have heard. The sources I am using for this review are the Matrix Mini-I and the Resonance Labs Concero HD (and I am never going to finish my review on the HD, because if I never finish my review, I can keep it forever). I actually think I underrated the Mini-I in my review. Although its bass detail isn't great, it has a wonderful, warm, smooth sound that is extremely enjoyable, and not too laid back either. I know this because the G109S let me know. Switching to the Concero HD, the change in source is extremely obvious as the warmth of the Mini-I is replaced by the manic electricity of the HD. It takes the source, amplifies it, and passes it on. I am trying to keep this from becoming a DAC review, which is hard since it has such an effect of the sound.

So, what does the G109S bring to the table besides transparency? It has a very neutral sound signature. The bass is full, goes deep and has good detail and impact. The highs are perfectly in line with what has come before. It sparkles when the music calls for it, but is never screechy or sharp (even with an energetic DAC and a more treble happy headphone like the T90). The width of the sound stage is also excellent. If there is something people might take issue with, it is the midrange. It is very clear and transparent (I promise, last time I will say that word), and they are never overpowered by the bass or dominated by the treble, unless the phones you are using are very bias toward one direction. The mids, however, don't have huge body. So, if you want a real fat body to your midrange, this isn't the amp for you. Also, the depth of the image is only so-so. The depth can vary greatly from DAC to DAC, but overall, that should be logged as a weakness, albeit a very small one.

Now, the only other solid state amp I have handy is the Fiio e9k, which, though fantastic for the price, just isn't in the same league as the G109S, nor is the Torpedo (not SS, but I had it at hand). The G109S needed proper competition, so I turned to the current gatekeeper of \$600 amps at Headfonia, the Soloist SL. I had spent some time with the SL last summer, and knew it was an excellent amp. How would it fair in battle with the G109S? I figured I should go all out on this showdown, so I procured (along with my trusty HD650) the Hifiman HE-500, Audeze LCD-2, Beyerdynamic T90 and the Mad Dog Pro by Mr. Speakers. I would go through each of these headphones, one by one, and see how the different amps fared. The thing is, as I was doing this, and writing down my thoughts, I realized this had become pointless. The simple fact is the G109S is a better amp, and I didn't need to waste the space. The Soloist SL is a wonderful amp, but it has a very definite opinion on the music it outputs: forward, fast, a little bright. No matter the DAC or headphone, this was the SL's sound. That means that some headphones had excellent synergy (the HE-500 pairing is absolutely divine), others not so much. I'm not sure I have ever heard anything as sterile and lacking in musicality as the SL/LCD-2 pairing. The G109S, on the other hand, sounded very fine with the HE-500, wonderful with the LCD-2, quite enjoyable with the T90, fantastic with the HD650, and so on. Plus, switching the DAC to something more neutral or more laid back will have a dramatic effect on the sound, giving you a lot more options. The Mini-I made for a great time with the HE-500, while the Concero HD made the LCD-2 sound like a god of rock. It is the superior transparency (damn it!) of the G109S made this possible. With the G109S and a good source, if you don't like the sound of your headphones, you simply don't like the sound of your headphones.

And that is why the G109S is the clear winner. No matter what headphone you pair it with, you won't be wrong. It's not that the SL isn't a great amp, far from it. It just doesn't have the amazing versatility of the G109S, and that is that. Via Violectric's USA distributor, the G109S runs \$615. Should you need an amp with a balanced input, you can move up to the G109P, which will set you back \$680.

After spending some time with the G109, I emailed L telling him that I finally understand why he loves the Violectric products so much. I am now very much on that bandwagon. If my wife will let me (and the jury is still out), I will be buying this amp for myself. It will be very useful to me, both as a writer at Headfonia.com, and as a lover of music. What higher recommendation can I give than that? If you are cultivating a large headphone collection and are looking for an amp in the \$600 dollar range, this is the amp you have been looking for. I dare you to find a better one for the price (but if you do, for the love of all that is good and holy, please tell me about it).

Violectric's USA distributor: <http://violectric-usa.com/>

Technical Data

Balanced inputs: 2 x Cinch (L / R) with priority
Impedance: 10 kohms
Amplifier Channels: 2 (Stereo)
Nom. input level: + 6 dBu
Amplifier Gain: +8 dB
ø with PRE-GAIN: -4 / +8 / +14 dB

Frequency range: 0 Hz ÷ 150 kHz (-3 dB)
Slew Rate: > 8V / usec
Dynamic range: > 129 dB (A-wtd)
Noise: < -101 dBu (A-wtd)
THD+N: < -100 dB @ 10V in 100 Ohms (1W)
< -100 dB @ 18V in 600 Ohms (5W)
Crosstalk: < -110 / -100 dB (@ 1 / 15 kHz)
Max. output level: > 18.8 Veff in 600 ohms = 590 mW
> 13.8 Veff in 100 ohms = 1900 mW
> 10.7 Veff in 50 ohms = 2300 mW
> 7.8 Veff in 50 ohms = 1900 mW
> 3.7 Veff in 16 ohms = 410 mW

Outputs: 2 x 1/4 phone jacks
Power supply: 230 / 115 V AC 8 VA
Dimensions: 168 x 49 x 145 mm (W x H x D)
Case Material: Black anodized aluminium