

HIGH END: \$2000-\$3999

# Abyss Diana

**A**byss Headphones is a spin-off from the famous audio cable manufacturer JPS Labs, both companies founded by audio veteran Joe Skubinski. In 2013, JPS launched Abyss and the firm's flagship AB-1266 open-back planar magnetic headphones. The sound of the AB-1266 quickly won the hearts and minds of personal audio enthusiasts everywhere, but its industrial design proved controversial. Unlike typical planar headphones, the AB-1266 sported a wide, industrial-looking, square-shaped frame beneath which were mounted machined aluminum ear cup/driver frames, plus an elastically supported leather head-strap. The frame also featured a top-mounted thumbscrew that enables listeners to adjust the spacing of the open-back drivers from their ears. Also atypical for planars at the time, the drivers were single-sided.

While the AB-1266 looked like something out of a science fiction flick, its exceptionally dynamic sound was something to behold—especially its spectacular low-bass extension. Even so, the headphones were dauntingly power-hungry meaning they demanded muscular yet refined headphone amplifiers to give of their best. Recognizing the AB-1266 was not for everyone, Abyss set out to design a lighter, more compact, and more conventional-looking headphone that would preserve much of the AB-1266's sound. That headphone is the new Diana reviewed here.

The Diana packs the signature Abyss punch in a small, comfy, and stylish package, sporting a thin, aircraft grade aluminum frame for "incredible strength". The "Emotion" headband features leather wrapped over a high-grade aluminum frame and adjusts magnetically, creating a comfortable fit. Diana is available in "black onyx," "arctic white," and "coffee" colors. Different leathers and custom "soft Alcantara" skins are available upon request. The Diana sports impressively large 63mm single-sided planar magnetic drivers—a pleasant surprise in such a compact headphone. The Diana is semi-open back, for "directional limited interference." This design feature also aides in Diana's wicked low-end reproduction.

Having an Abyss-style headphone in such a small, sleek package is a serious sonic treat, though Diana's looks might prove deceiving to the untrained eye (in a good way). The Diana's slender, minimalist design might give the impression that it can't throw a thumping kick drum or bass line, but that's not the case at all. Instead, Diana capably and forcibly handles everything from the low-end crash of house music and techno to the soft voices of folk. Its resolving capabilities are evidenced through its fine handling of complexities in classical and jazz. Diana's dynamic prowess shines through its rumbling bass on electronic dance music (EDM) and its exquisite layering of atmospheric synths in ambient and trap music.



The masterfully textured roll and pound of bass line crescendos in Massive Attack's "Angel" [Angel/EMI/Universal/Virgin] is enrapturing. The echoing vocals pierce through the ebbing crunch of the guitars and jump out at you. Diana renders the transient click and knock of the drums with precision and speed, while delivering the overall volume of a much larger headphone. Diana's superbly executed soundstages are wide and dimensional. Diana isn't scared of a challenging sonic workout; she relishes it.

Jose Gonzalez's "Crosses" [Crosses, Imperial Records/Mute/Peacefrog] offers an engaging look into Diana's rock/pop sensibilities and her flare for nuance. Gonzalez's vocals are clear and coherent, but also possess a difficult-to-render, smoky, glass-like quality—a quality the Diana captures in a believable, organic presentation. "Crosses" is minimal in composition, but its sound is huge with plenty of space between notes and an intricate sense of air. Diana reproduces this song with fantastic transparency, detail, and dimensionality—especially on Gonzalez's velvety, clean, glacial vocals.

Abyss has managed to squeeze a stunning amount of dynamics and oomph into a stylishly compact headphone. Diana is a beautiful lady with an attitude. She'll please

demanding headphone fanatics and draw personal audio newbies into a wondrous world of pounding, fluid bass, and silky-smooth mids. Diana is a grand headphone for discerning listeners with a keen sense of style and grace that matches their desire to carry a killer sound-system with them wherever they go. **Michael Mercer**

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

**Type:** Open-back planar magnetic headphone with single-sided drivers

**Driver Complement:** Patent-pending 63mm, single-sided planar magnetic drivers

**Frequency Response:** 7Hz–28kHz

**Impedance:** 40 ohms

**Recommended Power:** 300mw/2 watts

**Weight:** 330 grams

**Included Cables:** JPS Labs w/3.5mm/6.3mm adapter (4-pin XLR or 4.4mm plug optional) 1.5m

**Accessories:** Made-in-USA dual-zipper canvas carry bag with leather accents and accessory pockets

**Price:** \$2995 US, £3450 UK

## MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

**Abyss Headphones**

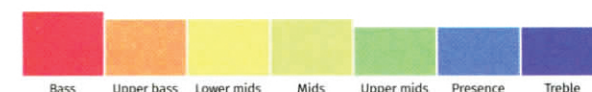
Lancaster, NY 14086

**Tel:** +1 (716) 288-9112

**URL:** <https://abyss-headphones.com>

## Summary

**Voicing:** Midrange-rich/extreme low-end extension.



(All ratings relative to comparably priced headphones.)

**Resolution/Focus:**



**Soundstaging/Imaging:**



**Dynamics/Expression:**



**Value:**



### Pros

- Stylish and stoutly built.
- Ergonomics.
- Incredible low-bass extension and weight.
- Warm, silky midrange.

### Cons

- A bit heavy for such a sleek design.