

FORM and FUNCTION

Those who are beautiful... are often not taken seriously. Anyone who sees the captivating sculpture of Sonus Faber as mere furniture is doing it an injustice. The Amati Futura is first a superbox with fine dynamics that is a joy to play with - and, incidentally, sets new standards for cabinet finish.



Sonus faber



Love of detail: The acoustically transparent strings in front of the diaphragms replace a cover (above). The bass reflex vents, with their special 'stealth' damping are fixed between metal sides (lower left). Bi-wiring terminal and spider stand structure with superb surface quality.



by Malte Ruhnke

Piano finish, veneer, real leather and high-gloss nickel-plated metal: With a high end speaker, completely covered with the highest-quality materials, you wonder whether it is meant in the first place to please the eye – and whether the ears do not suffer as a result. Rational citizens of course ask themselves whether the money they have invested is really going into the functional and sound-relevant components or just a nice-looking sculpture.

I have to admit that there was a time when I had no feeling for the beauty of speakers. In my living room there were a set of studio monitors in tasteless black plastic. Speakers can look like speakers, I said to myself at the time. But one day I found myself standing in front of a Sonus Faber. It was at a trade fair: it wasn't playing, it just stood there and reminded me of the magic of the best violins, cellos and violas that I had seen as a musician and had fascinated me from childhood.

And, in fact, the construction of many Sonus Faber speakers is clearly influenced by instrument construction: the form of the box, with the softly tapering lateral supports, is that of the sound box of a lute – and this is what gave a smaller model its name, the Liuto. But I was just as fascinated by the colour combination of the red piano finish and black leather as I was by the workmanship and the form.

But there are still doubts – why should a speaker sound good just because it imitates instrument construction? A lute, a violin or a cello are supposed to enhance the resonances of the wood, expand the harmonics and externalize the oscillations. They should literally sound. A speaker on the other hand should not – it should reproduce. So I thought it rather presumptuous at the beginning that Sonus Faber should give the latest model, like its predecessor in 1998, the name Amati – one of the best known violin makers from Cremona. The Amatis have been making violins since the

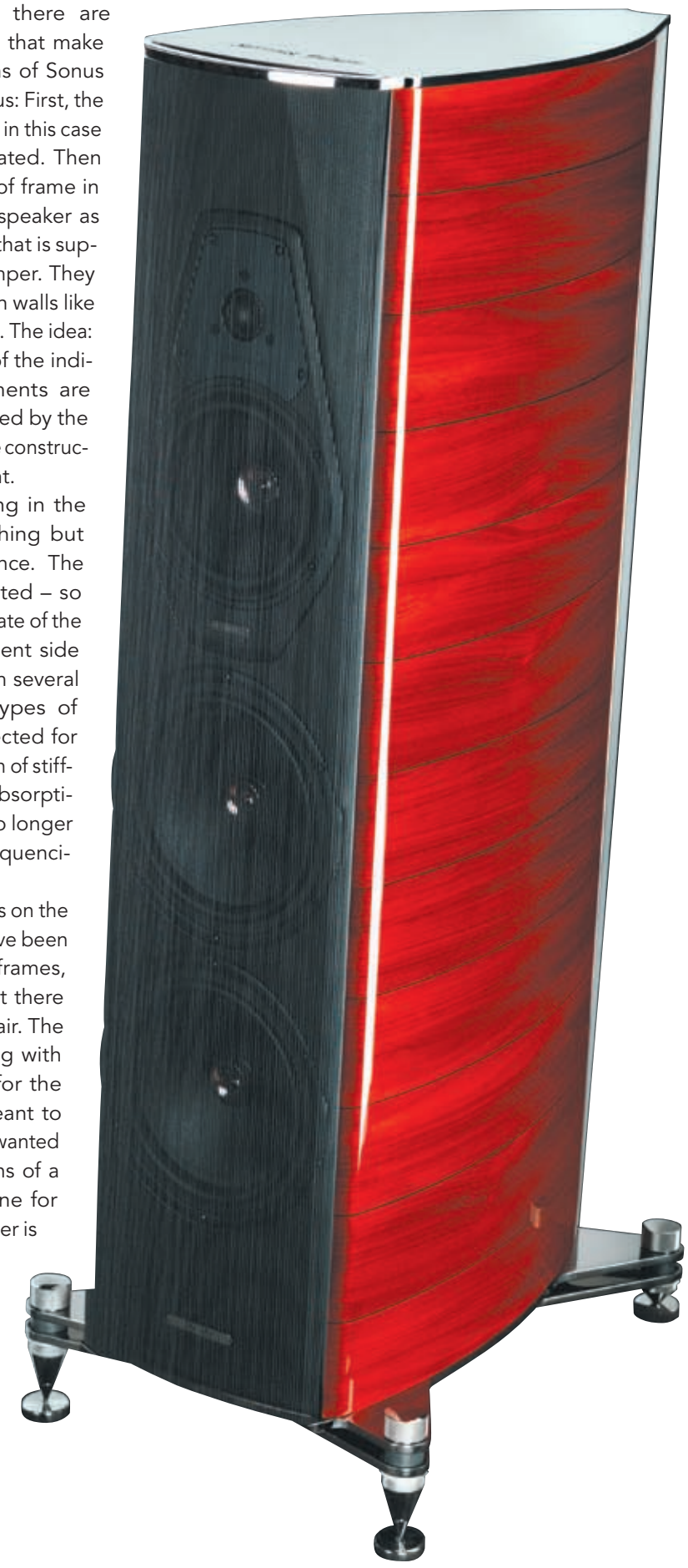
Renaissance, and Nicola was no less than the instructor of Guarneri and Stradivari.

But the speaker model is also called „Futura“ to emphasize its claim to the future. And indeed there are constructional details that make violin makers and fans of Sonus Faber initially suspicious: First, the generous use of metal, in this case highly-gloss nickel-plated. Then a cover, floor, a type of frame in the back part of the speaker as well as a middle strut that is supposed to act as a damper. They span the wooden main walls like a large and rigid clamp. The idea: Possible resonances of the individual wooden elements are meant to be suppressed by the clamping and the entire construction made totally silent.

The wooden casing in the Sonus Faber is anything but susceptible to resonance. The speaker is multi-strutted – so far it corresponds to state of the art. In addition the bent side walls are pressed from several layers of different types of wood, previously selected for an optimal combination of stiffness and resonance absorption, and thus in total no longer respond to certain frequencies.

The bass reflex ports on the back of the speaker have been in turn fixed in metal frames, because it is here that there is most movement of air. The back view is surprising with its three vents: two for the basses, which are meant to effectively filter out unwanted airflow noise by means of a damping ring, and one for the midrange. The latter is thus not meant as a classic reflex port, but is to allow the midrange to develop freely in its acousti- >

Black, red – and silver. The Futura changes not only the material, but also has major effect on colour philosophy in the Sonus Faber line-up.



Mirror, mirror: Cover and back are nickel-plated and provide a perfect contrast to the red finish.



cally separate chamber, without the resilience of the enclosed air or the sound waves of the woofers being able to negatively affect it.

The real sound transduction is performed by four specialists with a material mix that seems unusual for a 3 way speaker design: first, a silk dome, very large at 29 mm, which plays down only to 3200 Hz. Second, a 17 cm midrange with an air dried, unpressed paper diaphragms that transmits almost the entire vocal and formant range, from 220 to 3200 Hz, of which the Sonus engineers promise the best possible homogeneity. And finally, two classic 22 cm bass drivers, which a sandwich construction from an aluminium-magnesium alloy with extra-light foam is meant to help achieve a low frequency sonority and accuracy. In order not to produce unwanted interference effects, one of the basses is unobtrusively faded out from 80 Hz.

When asked whether classical music and sparkling joie de vivre were not at odds with each other violinist Nigel Kennedy once said, that he chose Mozart for his favourite composer because he had proved to the world that serious musicians can have fun and give free reign to their appetites. He did just that with Mozart's Fourth Violin Concerto (plus Beethoven's Violin Concerto, EMI), where he performs and freely shapes the cadences on the electric violin supported by jazz bass player. The result would have inspired Wolfgang Amadeus, especially if he had listened to it through an Amati Futura: The Italian box and the English violinist sparkle with joy of playing, but also recreate the sweet tones of the concerto in a masterly way. The reproduction of the orchestra comes across massive, but well balanced and without too much detail. But Mozart is also a master of the emotive song, in this case „Abendempfindung“ („Between Life and Death“, Prégardien, Challenge) Because of the elegance and the warm, exclusive design of the box I would have bet on a similar sound characteristic,

maybe even a lack of spirit. But nothing of the sort: The sound of the grand piano was reproduced in bigger dimensions than I had previously experienced from this recording, and Prégardien's lyrical tenor came through with a vehemence and force which is seldom heard from such minimalist song casts. This was even more pronounced in Mahler's play „Revelge“ from the self-same SACD, where the grand piano intimidates the listener by growing into almost supernatural dimensions.

But the Amati can also produce more amusing sounds with great gusto, such as Yellos for our sister magazine stereo-play exclusively produced remixes (no. 1/2010): „The Race“ seemed to race a bit more quickly than usual through the listening space, and the full rich synthia basses were opulent, but still also contoured and rhythmically precise. The sounds produced by the two Swiss electric artists surprised even listeners who knew the tracks well, time again - almost without preamble the sound image presented itself suddenly and dramatically close to the listener. Not a trace of slow-

ness or inertia could be detected in the speakers, while remaining unstrained at the upper end of the frequency band. Quite the contrary: those who like slim voices or high enders that strive explicitly for slowness will find the agility of the Futura quite uncanny.

A French Canadian production was best suited to their character: the organ symphony of Saint-Saens, well known as a listening test track. Of course the mighty organ and piano did not lose their effect and drove the finale to ever new heights. This can be achieved by other speakers, but the Amati Futura provided not only enormous playing pleasure because of the smooth dynamic of the conductor in the preceding three movements, but also a very great bow. Even the most hardened tester did not want to skip forward after a few passage, but felt the urge to listen to the whole piece. And it was precisely this that rendered the question of whether money was being wasted on externals irrelevant: With the Sonus Amati Futura one experiences great moments of art. In one way or another. <



Test SACD

Saint-Saens:
Organ Sym-
phony

There are many recordings of the most powerful symphony, but Nezet-Seguin manages to achieve a light, opulent and and at the same time rapturous drive in the finale. An audiophile moment of true magic.



The Author

Malte
Ruhnke

As a child was privileged to enjoy violin lessons and sang in the chorus of the State Theatre. In his youth he discovered hard rock and the electric guitar. He built his first amp by himself, and numerous speakers were to follow, the guiding principle being: the louder the better.

Sonus Faber Amati Futura

List Price: 26,900 euro

Warranty period: 5 years

Dimensions W x H x D (cm):

40,5 x 116 x 63,5

Weight: 56 kg (piece)

Finish:

Piano finish cherry red, graphite

Connections:

Bi-Wiring

Distribution:

Audio Reference

Alsterkrugchaussee 435

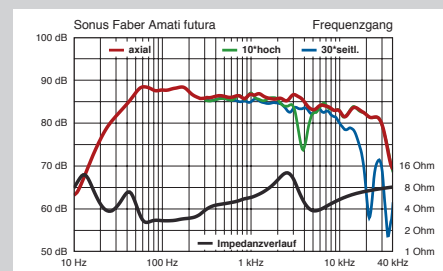
D-22335 Hamburg

Germany

Phone: +49 (0) 40 / 533 203 59

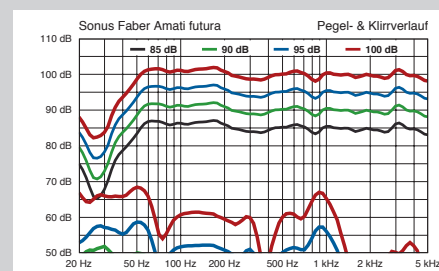
Internet: www.sonusfaber.com

The Diagram: Frequency Response



Strong bass, very deep (26 Hz/-6dB). In the midrange perfectly balanced. The level decreases detectably in the highs, but this is not acoustically noticeable. Efficiency is quite high. With 2.6 Ohm impedance in the upper bass the Futura draws a lot of current from

The Diagram: Distortion&Compression

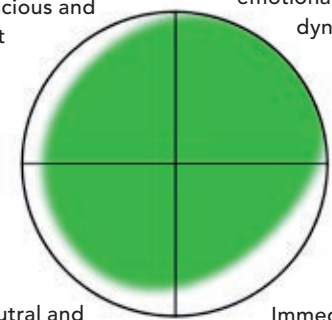


the amp. With increasing SPL the Futura stays amazingly clean and transparent: Even at 100 dB there are only moderate traces of distortion. It is only at 108.5dB that there is anything like audible compression in the upper bass, and the Sonus is very dynamic for its size.

AUDIOphile Character

Effortlessly
spacious and
soft

Grippingly
emotional and
dynamic



Neutral and
authentic

Immediacy
high resolution

AUDIOphile Potential



Recommendation

Superbly lacquered, the Futura is designed for those who delight in musical liveliness and fine dynamics. It can handle everything from chamber music to metal with ease.

A fairy tale world

Almost no speaker manufacturer in the world can afford a casing finish of the sort made by Sonus Faber. But the Italians don't just want to typify beauty.

by Malte Ruhnke

Even the roof of the building in Arcugnano (Veneto) has the shape of a lute, which has provided the rounded curves of many Sonus Faber speakers. The art of cabinet construction and finish perfection within the firm is attended to by Sonus Faber like pretty well nowhere else in the world. It begins with extensive machinery for the production of raw casings and is not finished with

an in-house workshop for lacquering and leather work by a long way. So, even the smallest Sonus Faber, the Toy (reasonably priced at 650 Euros) is benefited by the in-house 'saddlery'.

In 2010 the so far most luxurious speaker of the Italian company saw the light of day. The prestigious box, simply called 'The Sonus Faber' was produced as a limited edition at a price of 160,000 Euros a pair and is sold out by now. The engineers wanted to prove that even

with their concern for design and production quality they can turn out a product that regarding driver technology and reproduction quality belongs to the world's top class. This can be considered an unqualified success. Those who wish can experience the musical qualities of this super converter e.g. in the show room of the German distributor Audio Reference in Hamburg who secured a pair for their own needs, so to speak. If you draw your conclusions from monu-

mental dimensions of the speaker - on the side there is after all a 15 inch sub-bass - and expect a fat and boomy sound, then you're in for a pleasant surprise. 'The Sonus-Faber' produces an elegant and rhythmically exact reproduction.

Its greatest strength is presumably its capacity to integrate apparent opposites: It can react incredibly fast and almost pouncing, but also delicately and restrained, according to the requirements of the music. Its bass power never overpowers the performance, but reserves its ability to move larger amounts of air for music with a correspondingly dynamic and fundament. Among the amazing characteristics of this construction belongs an additional dipole at the back, which can influence the tonality, intensity and direction of indirect sound spread throughout the room. No ex-



Swung: The building takes on the elegant curves.



Metal head: Floor and cover of the largest model are milled from solid metal and then nickel-plated in an immersion bath.



Pressing instead of bending: The round forms of many Sonus boxes consist of multi-plex with self-chosen admixture.



Under high pressure the acoustically different, pre-sorted layers are treated with adhesive and pressed in a form.



The genuine piano finish needs up to 20 layers, which have to be smoothed and polished individually.



Vera Pelle: The acoustic baffle of the better quality Sonus Faber speakers, such as the top model here, is encased in hand worked finest genuine leather.



pense has been spared for the midrange: Not only did it get its own chamber, but also an acoustically separated leather-damped baffle. Outstanding and unique is the construction of the super-box' cabinet, which contains the outer wooden walls between two aluminium

elements cut from massive pieces and connected by a central strut plus a massive edging for the acoustic baffle. These last two construction characteristics are also found in the Futura - it unmistakably carries the genes of the absolute top class model. <



The largest model 'The Sonus Faber' was the inspiration for the Futura.

A metal bar with mass dampers secures all casing parts.