



Poetry in motion

This Italian firm knows how to design speakers with style and its latest makes music sound *magnifico*, says **David Price**

It must be great to be Italian. For all the country's quirks, it's one of the richest seams of European culture and so much beauty has come from within its borders. Whereas we Brits can congratulate ourselves for inventing most of the essential tools for modern life – from the steam railway and the jet engine to the worldwide web – Italy has made things of great beauty, in so many forms. The sonnet is one such example – 14 lines of verse in iambic pentameter. So as not to offend our more discerning readers, I shall not attempt to pen one here...

Sonus faber is, of course, an iconic Italian company – you can almost feel the warmth of the Italian sun and

It has a fine tonality, great rhythmic bounce and decent dynamics for its size

taste cool Prosecco as you unwrap its uniquely styled loudspeakers. The Sonetto II here is one of the latest models to come out of the company's headquarters in Vicenza, Italy, launched at the Munich High End Show in May this year. Described as "affordable high-end", it is more the former than the latter by the standards of the marque, sitting between the company's Venere and Olympica collections. The new range includes two standmounts, three floorstanders, two home cinema centre speakers and an on-wall speaker, all of which come in a choice of wood, piano black or matte white finishes. The Sonetto II is the second smallest model in the new collection that spans from £1,450 for the Sonetto I standmount to £5,698 for the Sonetto VIII floorstander.

As well as a distinctive sonic character, the company produces

loudspeaker designs which are invariably elegant and use great materials, even in its relatively low-priced ranges. The Sonetto II is no exception, and the eye-catching design with a lute-shaped cabinet and real leather top is inherited from the Olympica range.

Chief design officer Livio Cucuzza has employed new technologies for enclosure tuning, made new drive units and integrated new materials, as well as refining the production chain, the company says. This compact standmount sports a new 29mm dome tweeter and 165mm mid/bass driver. The former's diaphragm is made from a soft silk dome produced by DKM Germany, hand coated and enhanced with the company's Damped Apex Dome technology. The latter is a proprietary natural fibre cone with air-dried cellulose, previously only seen on Olympica, Homage and Reference collections. The two units crossover at 2.65kHz. Claimed frequency response is 42Hz to 25kHz. The 15-litre, 22mm-thick high-density fibreboard cabinet has an integral front baffle with no seams between the curved sides. Gunmetal finished aluminium frames add visual drama, and there's a front-firing reflex port.

Sound quality

Even for a relatively small standmount, the Sonetto II is surprisingly simple to position – whether you choose to use Sonus faber's elegant optional £430 stands or your own, it's easy to achieve a nice sound. Placed just 20cm from the boundary wall and slightly toed-in, it has a pleasingly open sound that is inviting. It makes music with relish, celebrating what it is being asked to play rather than just serving it up to you with a decidedly disinterested look. Being a standmount design it obviously has limited bass, yet it has been voiced to sound fairly full down below too and

has a decent amount of body. At the other end of the frequency spectrum, things are smooth and ever so slightly sweet. This makes for a very companionable listen – it's not as much a speaker you respect as one you like or even love.

Alongside the aforementioned butter-smooth tone, this speaker's general get up and go is its most impressive facet. The Police's *Wrapped Around Your Finger* sounds really good, yet it isn't the hi-fi aspects I most enjoy. Instead I find myself focusing on Stewart Copeland's drum work – which is an exercise in controlled aggression. Brilliantly syncopated with the guitar and bass, it's lightning fast and razor sharp – especially the snare and hi-hat. It doesn't get the last bit of dynamic accenting, but still does well and times more tightly than I imagine.

The result is a pleasure to behold. Although not quite caramel coated, the sound has a subtle warmish sepia tint to it, yet the litheness of the midband and treble make for real fireworks. The bottom end is very good too; snappier than I expect, allowing Sting's bass guitar to propel the song along with gusto. Via a lesser loudspeaker, it can meander, rather losing the will to live, yet here the Sonus faber seems very much

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Sonus faber
Sonetto II

ORIGIN
Italy

TYPE
2-way standmount
loudspeaker

WEIGHT
6.8kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
250 x 370 x 334mm

FEATURES

- 1x 29mm high definition DAD tweeter
- 1x 165mm natural fibre mid/bass driver
- Quoted sensitivity: 87dB/1W/1m (4ohm)

DISTRIBUTOR
Absolute Sounds Ltd.

TELEPHONE
020 89713909

WEBSITE
absolutesounds.com

The lute-shaped cabinet and gun metal aluminium driver surrounds add a touch of design flair



Q&A

Paolo Tezzon

Chief of acoustic R&D, Sonus faber



DP: Who designed the Sonetto II?

PT: Livio Cucuzza's team for everything related to the industrial design side and my team for everything related to acoustic performance. I have been at the company since 2004 and became research and development manager in 2006 – my first design was the Elipsa speaker. Livio joined in 2010 and his first complete design was the Amati Futura.

Who is the Sonetto II aimed at?

Anybody who loves music enough to desire very high-quality audio reproduction, and is seeking elegant, easy-to-accommodate and realistically priced loudspeakers. Sonus faber customers are typically interested in high-quality audio, with a desire to achieve a natural and realistic 'live' sound. Yet we have a passion for beautiful design and uncompromised quality, so he or she will enjoy the Italian culture of high-end craftsmanship. We aim to achieve a natural sound, with transparency, speed and articulation but also a sense of musical warmth.

Why is the collection made in Italy?

This is something that is valued by our customers – it benefits overall product quality and we are extremely proud about it. Thanks to the experience gained in the last six or seven years we were able to move back – in this crucial segment of the market – from producing in China, like we did for the Venere Collection, to manufacturing in Italy again. Our lowest-cost line, Principia, is still produced in China.

What type of bass port is used?

It's a laminar design tuned to 45Hz, and front-firing because we wanted to enhance the listener's perception of deep bass, and the laminar/rectangular form factor helps to reduce chuffing noises due to the air flow moving in and out from the port itself. This solution also makes the listener's life easier when it comes to speaker placement – indeed they even work well on a bookshelf. The main thing is to get the height right, at around 70 or 80cm.

IN SIGHT



- 1 29mm soft dome DAD tweeter driver
- 2 Bi-wireable binding posts
- 3 165mm natural fibre cone mid/bass driver
- 4 Front-firing reflex port

engrossed in the recording, as am I. In strict terms, there's a little looseness to the bass, although it's only subtle. There are no nasties like a booming cabinet or chuffing port, yet it can't quite deliver the tightness and 'thwack' of more expensive designs. Importantly, though, the bass is always tuneful and bouncy – and that's what really matters.

Tryouts For The Human Race by Sparks is a long-forgotten late-seventies gem, with a big Giorgio Moroder production. Here the Sonus faber shows its surprisingly capacious character, setting up a wide recorded acoustic with lots of space inside for the listener to peer around. Its midband is most impressive, showing the different layers of sounds in a clean and insightful way, while keeping everything tightly defined in space inside the mix. It allows, for example, the thick, crunchy Moog synthesiser sound that dominates the front of the mix to appear completely independent from the layers of backing vocals behind.

Feed it modern electronica and it becomes clear that this is a very detailed loudspeaker indeed. Manix's *Any Kinda Music* has a fruity piano lead with a sampled string glide in the background, under which a super deep bassline does its stuff, as looped hi-hats and rim shots fly around. This standmount is able to pick through all this like a hot knife through melting parmesan, letting you hear all the constituent parts of the mix without sounding in any way like it's deconstructing it. Impressively, it's

able to do a lot yet not sound like it is trying particularly hard. Only when you really ramp the volume up to get massive 'gobs' of sub-bass, does it begin to sound constrained. Nothing is beyond the laws of physics, yet the Sonetto II still wants to have a go.

Conclusion

Overall, the Sonetto II proves a highly impressive standmount. It has an endearing character that makes music fun, whatever you choose to listen to – and yet it doesn't sacrifice basic accuracy in doing so. It has a fine tonality, great rhythmic bounce, decent dynamics for a smallish standmount and commendable soundstaging with especially impressive depth perspective. There are rival designs around with a tauter, crisper low end, but its overall package of strengths is highly compelling. Factor in its obvious style and quality, and it's hard not to love ●

HOW IT COMPARES

Now selling for around £1,950, PMC's UK-designed and built twenty5-21 standmount (HFC 421) is a close rival to the Sonus faber. There's definitely a clash of cultures, as the PMC is far less fussy and ornate to look at – which can be a good or a bad thing depending on your taste. It's a compact two-way of similar dimensions, but a little less efficient so needs more power. Sonically it's less 'spicy' than the Italian, but a tad punchier. It lacks the Sonetto II's warmth, having a tighter, drier and more controlled sound – less exuberant than the emotional Sonus faber. Hear the difference and decide for yourself which is better for your setup.

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★ **LIKE:** Snappy rhythm; sweet tonality; soundstaging

VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★ **DISLIKE:** Nothing at the price

BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★ **WE SAY:** Charming, stylish standmount with fine sound

EASE OF DRIVE ★★★★★

OVERALL ★★★★★