

Sonus Faber Cremona Auditor Loudspeaker

Wayne Garcia

At first glance, Sonus Faber's Cremona Auditor looks very much like a whittled down version of the floor-standing Cremona I reviewed in Issue 143. And indeed, the commonality between the two speakers runs deep, both sonically (both are beautifully warm and musically inviting) and conceptually (same lute-shaped cabinet and similar, if not identical, drivers). But to label the Auditor as merely a smaller Cremona, or to suggest that you're settling for second fiddle if you can't afford the larger, costlier version, is to do this terrific little speaker a huge injustice.

For one thing, though it lacks the Cremona's depth of bass, a tad of its richness, and ultimate volume capability, the Auditor brings with it advantages that 2-way designs typically have over 3-ways (things, I'll remind you, that the Cremona does remarkably well for a multi-driver tower). To wit: a greater sense of top-to-bottom coherence, sharper imaging, and lower levels of cabinet resonance. And though I would imagine that the gap might be more evident in rooms larger than mine, the Auditors' dynamics are unexpectedly explosive, and they will also play loud enough when asked to, as a recent late night spree through Rhino's *No Thanks! The '70s Punk Rebellion* box set made obvious. So don't mistake the Auditor for one of those polite, dynamically challenged mini-monitors.

Of course, the Auditor can be a rather refined gentleman too. The speaker's tactile presence brings a lovely intimacy and ideal sense of scale (as in size and dynamics) to something like Narciso Yepes' *Spanish Guitar Music of Five Centuries, Vols. 1 and 2* [DG LP]. And though midrange naturalness is the hallmark of any great speaker, and something we take for granted with smallish monitors, what I most want to convey here is the Auditor's ability to project a nearly full range of frequencies (from about 50Hz on up) with the kind of expressiveness and "cut-from-whole-cloth" voicing that separate the best audio components from the pack. With the Auditor, this translates into highly involving, and frequently lengthy, listening sessions. One of our household traditions after dinner parties, and one that my wife Sher started (eat your hearts out,

guys), is gathering guests in our listening room for a musical nightcap. With rare exception, no audiophiles—a notoriously antisocial bunch, ya know—are among us, but one and all are music lovers and a few are accomplished musicians.

And whether we're listening to Bach cellos suites, Hank Williams, Charles Mingus, Led Zeppelin, or cheesy 70s or 80s pop (I'll admit only to *early* Rod Stewart) no one leaves until the session has been called to a reluctant halt, typically around 2:00 a.m. The point is, first with the Cremona and now with the Auditor, people respond to the Sonus Faber experience more than with any other speakers we've had in our room.

The man largely responsible for our friends' pleasure is Sonus Faber's founder and chief designer Franco Serblin (see this issue's Industry News for more on Franco and Sonus Faber's new factory). Franco views each of his speakers as musical instruments, obviously without meaning you can actually play them, but rather as instruments of musical *expression*. As with the Cremona, the Auditor has a beautiful Stradivarius-inspired lute-shaped cabinet, with non-parallel walls, a faux-leather covered baffle, and a very cool-looking silk-wrapped string arrangement for the front grille, which I'm sorry to say should be removed for the best performance. The tweeter is a one-inch Scanspeak-sourced fabric-dome "ring radiator." Sporting a metal phase-plug in the center, this design allows only the outer "ring" portion to move, and lowers mass while increasing high-frequency dispersion. As with its big brother, frequency response reaches 40kHz. And though it won't handle quite as much power as the Cremona tweeter, this driver delivers similarly clean, silky, and airy highs. The 6" midrange/bass driver is rear-ported, and yet it lacks the tell-tale colorations normally associated with vented enclosures, while allowing for a visceral punch and dynamic liveliness that a sealed enclosure would not. Available finishes are stained "graphite" and gloss-lacquered maple.

Although the Cremona Auditor's "mermaid" stands are optional, I consider them integral to both the speaker's appearance and performance. The curvy matte black stem is made of a heavy frame that screws to a spiked metal platform, which can be adjusted for proper tilt-back relative to your listening position. In turn, the Auditor is secured to a damped metal top-plate to ensure a stable foundation for the speaker.


Directly comparing the Auditor to another speaker I love, the MartinLogan Acon i reviewed elsewhere in this issue, was a



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fascinating study in contrasting yet equally successful approaches. On Stevie Ray Vaughan's "Tin Pan Alley" [*Couldn't Stand the Weather*, Epic LP], the Aeon i was faster, in that the leading edges of midrange and high-frequency transients were incredibly responsive as well as more revealing of low-level details. Not surprisingly, the Aeon i also had a larger soundstage. The Cremona countered with a warmer and more textured presentation, more dynamic sock, a more seamless integration of bass notes (though they weren't as deep), more

"bite" to SRV's Fender Strat, and a more tightly focused and deeper soundstage. As the saying goes, *give 'em difference!*

Some audiophiles (and critics on our masthead) may prefer a cooler, more analytical approach to sound reproduction, and that's fine. But it's hard to imagine any music lover not responding favorably to the Cremona Auditor. Combine its beautiful tonal and textural richness, a lively dynamic quality at all volumes, with a precise, open, and layered soundstage, and you've got a speaker you can love and live with for a long, long time. 

SPECIFICATIONS

2-way bass-reflex hybrid loudspeaker
 Driver complement: 1.1" tweeter, 5.9" bass/midrange
 Frequency response: 46Hz-40kHz
 Sensitivity: 88dB
 Impedance: 4 ohms
 Recommended amplifier power: 50-250W
 Dimensions: 13.7" x 7.8" x 12.5"
 Weight: 20.5 lbs. each (stands 28 lbs. each)

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

See MartinLogan Aeon i review, page 68.

DISTRIBUTOR INFORMATION

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Price: \$3595/pair in graphite or natural;
 stands \$650/pair