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**What struck me most upon my first listen to both the Amati and Serafino speakers was their overall coherence and impressive dispersion.**

measures of Sonus faber's proprietary technologies for delivering high-end sonics and the design aesthetics and precision construction that draw on centuries-old Italian traditions of handcrafted musical instruments—the lute and the violin, in particular—the *Homage Tradition Collection* combines form and function beautifully.

The Italian marque, one of a handful of heritage high-end audio brands (along with McIntosh and Audio Research) under the auspices of the World of McIntosh Group (WOM), hosted the event for select members of the hi-fi press and international distributors and sales folks. The affair was held at the circa-1890s five-story WOM Townhouse on Lafayette Street in Soho near Nolita. Reflecting high design to the hilt, the multi-functional space strikes a stylish balance between industrial-looking original details (such as exposed brick and pipes) and modern, luxurious comforts (such as the lushly landscaped rooftop terrace with outdoor speakers, etc.).

I'd attended a WOM event there once before at which the McIntosh Group's brands were introduced and the company's intention to market to a broader, luxury-minded customer base was emphasized. Now, under the leadership of a new CEO—Charles Randall, CEO of McIntosh Laboratory, Inc., who took over after Mauro Grange stepped down at the end of 2016—the primary focus seems to have returned to the core audiophile market, though other areas, such as high-end lifestyle and car audio, are still important. Indeed, an automotive project involving two of the WOM brands is slated to be announced soon. Additionally, per information shared at the event, 22 new products are to be launched within the next year across the Group's three core brands—McIntosh, Sonus faber, and ARC.

### **Speakers...and the Speakers**

But let's get back to the primary reason we were there—the *Homage Tradition Collection* loudspeakers, which are a revamping of the *Homage Collection* and include three updated models—the two-way *Guarneri* stand-mount (\$15,900 with carbon-fiber monocoque stands), the three-and-a-half-way *Amati* floorstander (\$29,900), and the *Vox* horizontal three-way (not shown at the event)—plus one brand-new loudspeaker, the *Serafino*, a three-and-a-half-way floorstander (with dimensions slightly smaller than the *Amati*'s) that will retail for \$21,900.

Before the new loudspeakers were unveiled, four speakers (the human kind) took the floor in a round-robin presentation on different aspects of the lineup's evolution. Marta Veciello Reane, Marketing Manager with Sonus faber, provided some company history and context, including the ongoing study of the Italian violin and lute-making traditions that inform Sonus' acoustic designs. In fact, the new *Serafino Tradition* loudspeaker is named after legendary

## **INDUSTRY NEWS**

# **Sonus faber Introduces New Loudspeaker Lineup**

## **Homage Tradition Collection Unveiled at NYC Event**

Julie Mullins

Whether it's designing and making cars, shoes, art, fashion, furniture, or even loudspeakers, you can count on the Italian commitment to doing things with style. Such was the case at the Sonus faber world-premiere launch event February 2<sup>nd</sup> where a trio of gorgeous-looking and -sounding new loudspeakers was unveiled. Formally christened the *Homage Tradition Collection*, the new lineup largely builds upon the sonic and technical foundations of the existing *Homage Collection* and features gloriously striking, custom, real-wood cabinets with contrasting wood inlays and aluminum accents in a titanium finish. Offering equal



# INDUSTRY NEWS

18<sup>th</sup>-century Venetian violin (and lute) maker Santo Serafino. Not just for looks, the curves of the Serafino's sides change and double, and this shape is said to allow the cabinet to better control internal resonances. Taking this inspiration and its aesthetics to the next level, the Homage Tradition speakers are available in either a rather vibrant red with walnut wood and black inlays combined with brushed black aluminum and black leather, or Wengè/coffee finish with maple inlays and brushed aluminum coated in a titanium finish with brown leather.

McIntosh Group Chief Design Officer Livio Cucuzza (on right in photo) followed with a discussion of the Homage Tradition line's design influences. Not surprisingly, these elements ran to iconic Italian cultural references—think Rome of *La Dolce Vita*, with sea waves inspiring the reflex port and, in a more direct reference to Italy in the 60s, the tops of the speakers designed to echo the look of the top panels of the Riva Aquarama wooden motor boat of that era (see lower-left photo to right).

A promo video was also shown celebrating *la dolce vita* featuring a glamorous woman driving an Alfa Romeo to meet her beau at a giant villa or grand hotel on the Italian coast, a pair of Homage Tradition speakers set up (most improbably) on a pier out on the water. To say this screams “lifestyle” and “luxury” would be an understatement.

Paolo Tezzon (on left in photo), Sonus faber R&D Manager and Chief of the Acoustic Team for McIntosh, began by warning us that his technical talk would be boring, but it certainly wasn't. Broadly speaking, a number of patents and technological solutions found in the Liliun and Il Cremonese models have been repurposed (the drivers in particular) and/or evolved in the Homage Tradition lineup.

The Stealth Ultraflex system, employed on all the new Homage Tradition speakers, comprises that wave-shaped external duct on the back panel and the surrounding wave-inspired forms, made of extruded Avional aluminum billet, designed to control airflow within the cabinet, to reduce distortion and coloration, and to support lower-end frequencies. The aluminum forms are also part of the Exoskeleton system that now has a vertical profile as opposed to Sonus' previous design, which was tilted backwards at an angle. This upright update reportedly improves phase relationships for better coherency. Aluminum dampshelves have also been added to the top and bottom of the speakers to further reduce resonances. The Homage Tradition loudspeakers are due in market starting in March.

## Listening

There were three demo rooms, one for each of the new speakers. What struck me most upon my first listen to both the Amati and Serafino speakers was their overall coherence and impressive dispersion. As I expected, given that they have driver elements in common, these two newbies shared certain sonic characteristics with the Liliun and Il Cremonese: big, full sound with quite high resolution, for instance. But the degree of verisimilitude varied. At times timbre would shift slightly towards the darker, richer side of the spectrum, depending on the source material—and the electronics.

In another room (which was not the most acoustically favorable, as it had one entire wall of glass panes facing the rooftop terrace), the Serafino three-and-a-half-ways were paired with McIntosh elec-



tronics and sources, including a D150 digital preamplifier, a C1100 tube preamp, a C1100 controller, an MPC 1500 power controller, an MCT450 CD/SACD player, and an MT5 precision turntable with McIntosh tonearm and Blue Point No. 2 cartridge. Plenty of female vocalists were on demo, from Lyn Stanley on vinyl to a version of Leonard Cohen's “Hallelujah” by Elisa that featured rich and full-sounding organ effects. Bass seemed quite deep reaching even if it could have benefited from a touch more control at times. But this warmer, more bottom-up sound was also quite lovely on the aforementioned female vocals.

In the room with the Amati loudspeakers driven by ARC's Reference electronics (Reference 6 preamplifier, Reference 250 tube monoblocks, and a Reference digital CD player), the sound was gorgeous and, by and large, highly resolved. It didn't hurt that Will Kline of the McIntosh Group had a wonderfully eclectic playlist that kept me guessing (and kept me listening), ranging from Leonard Cohen, James Blake, and Cesária Évora to Led Zeppelin, Yello, and Regina Spektor. OK, it was a CD-only playlist, but this system seemed to transcend the digital medium. On Leonard Cohen's “Never Mind” the degree of detail was astonishing—you could clearly hear every sound his mouth and lips made. This track also showcased the extremely dark, quiet backgrounds of speakers and electronics.

All told, with this launch Sonus faber seems to have succeeded once again in paying homage to the Italian traditions of fine woodworking to heighten musical performance coupled with the company's formidable modern technologies to ensure a true high-end sonic experience. **tas**