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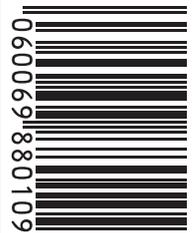


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Sonus faber

CREMONA M

Beautiful, floorstanding speakers to enhance the enjoyment of any living room

Price £7,037 **Contact** Absolute Sounds ☎ 020 8971 3909 🌐 www.sonusfaber.com

Sonus faber has built itself an excellent reputation as the foremost Italian loudspeaker company, manufacturing a broad range of beautifully designed loudspeakers from its base near Vicenza. A nice place to be both commercially and geographically, but it was not enough for the new owners who bought the company in 2007 and went on to acquire Audio Research. The new management had bigger ideas and, in June, Sonus faber revealed one of its most ambitious loudspeakers, the Fenice (or Phoenix). This substantial and groundbreaking design looks likely to inform all future Sonus faber creations, with its €150,000 price tag putting the company in the ultra-fi league.

The Cremona M is a rather more real-world loudspeaker by comparison. It's a good size, standing 112cm high on its custom-made spikes, and its elegant cabinet work would grace even the most select of interiors. It's available in either solid maple (as shown) or maple graphite finishes, but that doesn't do justice to the way that Sonus faber's craftsmen have inlaid contrasting stripes to such stylish effect. This maple covers a sandwich construction cabinet that is substantially braced to keep it as 'quiet' as possible.

The Cremona M is lute-shaped and supplied with heavy 9mm steel plates that need to be fixed to the base and equipped with large, but not overly sharp, spikes. The front ones are about twice as long as the rear in order to tilt the speaker upwards, presumably to aid dispersion and produce a larger soundstage. Sonus faber helpfully supplies spike receptors to protect hardwood floors and has created the beautiful cable terminals to enhance the already attractive back spine of the speaker.

The spine has two reflex vents in it, revealing that the bass and mid/treble sections are internally divided to stop the relatively high pressure of the larger drivers affecting the midrange cone. The driver array consists of two 180mm woofers with aluminium/magnesium cones, although you'd not guess it by looks alone; a 150mm midrange; and a 25mm ring radiator tweeter with its distinctive phase plug.

The midrange cone is the most unusual driver here because it has what Sonus faber describes as a 'black wood fibre' cone and is exclusive to the company. The crossover is a second-order type that has been designed to minimise resonance and deliver optimal space/time performance, it helps deliver a sensitivity of 91dB with a four ohm impedance, so looks like an average load.

SOUND QUALITY

It doesn't sound like an average loudspeaker, however – far from it. Some previous experiences of Sonus faber designs gave the impression that they were designed to reproduce the violins whose makers they are named after: they had highly refined mid and treble performance but were lacking in terms of power and energy. Something has happened in the intervening years: the Cremona M is refined, dynamic and extremely engaging with all manner of music.

First, it has rather decent bass which is well extended and times superbly. On the ball seems an apt phrase for the way it

latches onto bass lines and lets them give the music its substance and drive. This is the case whether it's a bass guitar, piano or kick drum – or all three, as is the case with jazz trios.

Naturally it's not just about bass. There is something rather special going on in the midrange that must be related to the unusual cone material. This part of the spectrum is revealing, well timed and simultaneously effortless. It makes a lot of otherwise good loudspeakers sound a little crude or coarse by comparison. This has the effect of revealing recordings in their best light. Some speakers manage to draw your attention to the shortcomings of the production, which detracts from the enjoyment of the music, but the Cremona M

"Refined, dynamic and extremely engaging with all manner of music"

does the opposite. It doesn't seem hugely detailed but reveals an awful lot about the recording without pulling it apart. You can appreciate all the important qualities of the musician's compositional and playing style without being distracted by technical limitations in the studio or thereafter. This is a very rare skill and one of the key means of differentiating between loudspeakers: do they bring the music to you in an effortless and engaging fashion or do they unearth loads of detail to the detriment of the musical experience?

In short, this is a fabulous loudspeaker. It isn't incredibly fussy about partnering electronics: you can easily hear it when a better source or amplifier is used, but it doesn't need state of the art ancillaries to deliver top notch results. We got most of the results detailed with the Leema Pyxis and Hydra II, which is obviously a great pre/power amplifier combi for the money, but not in the same price league as the Cremona M.

Another appealing quality is that music sounds great at lower levels: you don't need to turn it up to hear the magic and feel the communication. This is part of what makes this Sonus faber such an effortlessly musical loudspeaker – and what makes it stand out from the crowd. That quality, combined with the world-class craftsmanship that's gone into the build and finish, makes the Cremona M extremely desirable. #

Jason Kennedy

