

## REVIEW: SONUS FABER SONETTO II 2-WAY STANDMOUNT LOUDSPEAKERS

by David Price, 14th October, 2019



Sonus faber's new family of loudspeakers, Sonetto, are handmade in Italy, inspired by the history of Italian literature and made in traditional Sonus faber style. We take a closer look at the Sonetto II, 2-way stand mount loudspeaker.

### **Sonus faber - Sonetto II, 2-way Stand Mount Loudspeaker, \$3,995 RRP**

It can't be easy being a loudspeaker designer. You face enormous challenges getting a realistic sound out of relatively small, hollow boxes – and then you have to make them look good too.

Speakers don't just need to perform well, they play an aesthetic role as pieces of furniture in people's listening rooms – whether the designer likes it or not.

Historically, Sonus faber has understood this better than most. It has always brought flair and artistry to the way its products are designed and built. For decades, while many US, UK and Japanese manufacturers were punching drive units into random oblong-shaped fibreboard boxes and slapping vinyl wrap around them, Sonus faber was practising traditional Italian artisan woodworking – with stunning results. This at a time when beauty was not a guiding principle for most loudspeaker makers...



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Because of this, Sonus faber has come to be pigeonholed by some hi-fi purists – themselves perhaps not the most immaculately turned out of objects – as “all show and no go.” There was a sense that the brand's products were perhaps a little too preoccupied with looking like something a billionaire would buy for his ostentatious country house or *bijou* riverside city apartment. Sonus faber's \$3,995 RRP Sonetto II goes to show that this isn't so.

Interestingly, the hi-fi world has witnessed the company move from its traditional svelte and lyrical sound – one that was especially pleasant with classical music – to something with far wider appeal. I've auditioned a number of modern Sonus fabers and in the past few years and come away surprised by how good they are with a broad cross-section of music. These days it's not only Bach's *Brandenburg Concertos* that they sing with, but also Laibach's *Dogs of War*...

The Sonetto II is the brainchild of Paolo Tezzon, Sonus faber's Chief of Acoustic R&D, and the company's resident industrial design boffin Livio Cucuzza. These people represent the future of the marque, yet don't seem to have forgotten its past. It must be hard to imbue a smallish, 370x250x334mm, 6.8kg box with any kind of style, but they have succeeded. With its lute-shaped cabinet, it's a visual and tactile delight, seeming far more exotic than your average gloss lacquered box. Even the top is natural leather, and not faux, 'leather look' vinyl as with some rivals. Made in Vicenza, Italy, the company has actually moved most of its production back from China, with only the entry-level Principia line still being made there.

The quality is more than skin-deep. There's a new 29mm soft silk dome tweeter, its diaphragm produced by DKM of Germany; this is hand-coated and enhanced with the company's Damped Apex Dome technology. The 165mm mid/bass driver is also new and uses a natural fibre cone with air-dried cellulose, previously only seen on the more expensive Olympica, Homage and Reference ranges. Crossover is at 2,650Hz. The cabinet is fifteen litres in volume, and uses 22mm high-density fibreboard and an integral front baffle, with no seams between the curved sides. With its front-firing laminar reflex port tuned to 45Hz, the claimed frequency response is 42-25,000Hz. Sonus faber rates its sensitivity at 87dB, which means you'll need a decently powerful solid-state amplifier to really tickle its transducers.



## Sound quality

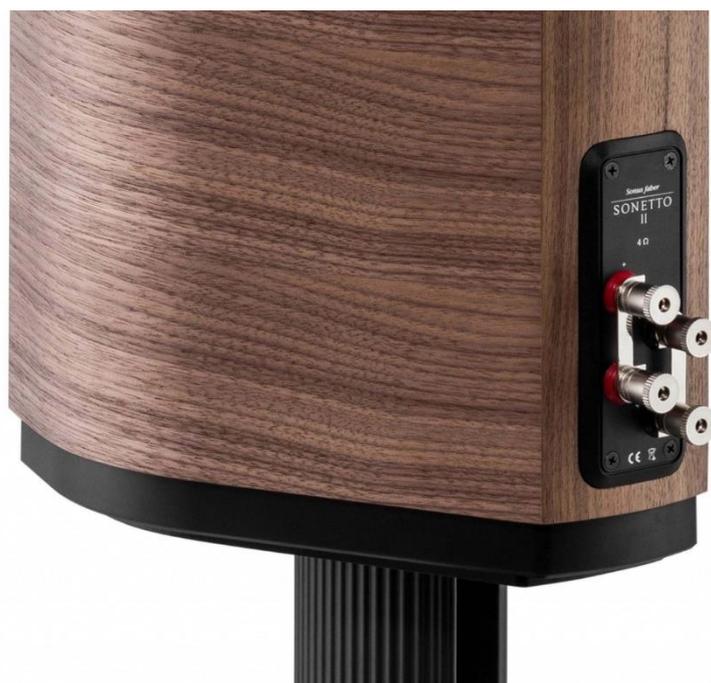
I tried the Sonetto II on its optional \$895 RRP stands, but any decent design should work well, between 400 and 500mm in height. In my room, it worked best around 300mm from the boundary wall, just a little toed in – although this, of course, varies from room to room. Driven by an Exposure 3010s2-D integrated amplifier and a Chord Hugo 2 DAC, this speaker really sang. It is affable, friendly and accessible. Any type of music you play is handled with relish, as if it enjoys the challenge. There's still that trademark Sonus faber smoothness and sophistication, but the Sonetto II is far more animated than its predecessors.

The standout feature of this speaker is its well-judged tonal balance; it tries to be all things to all men – and largely succeeds. Starting with the bass, and there's more of it than you might expect from a smallish stand mount. Thanks to its size of course, the extension isn't great, but the upper bass has body and shape, and yet isn't overdone. Classic rock in the shape of Rush's *The Camera Eye* came over with more low-end weight than I had expected, yet didn't sound overcooked. You could really get into bassist Geddy Lee's fretwork, and enjoy how it underpins the rest of the mix.

Midband is nicely judged. The Rush track can sound a little nasal through some speakers, thanks to dense layers of cranked-up electric guitar work, but the Sonus faber proved surprisingly transparent. There's a slight sepia tinge to it, but this can actually be a good thing as it takes the edge off some brighter pop recordings like Dodgy's *In a Room*. The tweeter does the lion's share of the midband and is never less than courteous and calm. Right up top, ride cymbals and hard-struck hi-hats have a pleasingly accurate metallic 'zing' to them, but it's never grating.

The second item of headline news is the way this speaker copes with rhythms and dynamics. It's much better than average for the price, and also in another league to earlier Sonus faber designs. It delivers a truly animated sound, one that seems to relish musical starts and stops, rather than just going through the motions. The mid-nineties drum 'n' bass strains of Manix's *You Held My Hand* showed just how deft this speaker is dealing with transients; its electronic bassline pummels at the listener, yet the Sonetto II held on tight, recovering fast from large excursions. Further up, the midband was grippy, making light work of the rim shots and looped hi-hats from the vintage drum machine. Vocal samples

were nicely syncopated with lead keyboard stabs, and this torture track of a song came over surprisingly unscathed.



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Dynamic articulation is really good too – for a small, pint-pot of a stand-mounted loudspeaker. Other similarly sized speakers can compress at depressingly low sound pressure levels, but the Sonetto II showed real grace under pressure. Kate Bush's *The Big Sky*, played with the volume control pushing towards three o'clock, was surprisingly listenable. This speaker kept itself together, didn't harden up tonally and did a sterling job of handling the song's dynamic peaks. Of course, there was a sense of the absolute loudest points being slightly 'sat upon' in the way that the larger Sonetto III floorstander would not – but still it was something of a Herculean performance. Few stand mounters at this price can mix it with this.



Soundstaging proved good too. My well-played copy of *Number One Song in Heaven* by Sparks was enlisted here thanks to its vast, cathedral-like recorded acoustic, and this speaker didn't disappoint. It has a surprisingly spacious nature, with all elements of the stereo mix accurately locked down around their correct places. It was able to separate out all the various strands and let them play independently from one another, in their own separate compartments within the mix. The crunchy Moog synthesiser that dominates this track was kept well apart from the multiple tiers of vocal overdubs, for example, and the overall effect was ethereal.

Downsides? Well, they're few and far between – especially considering the price. Some might say that the Sonetto II's subtle sepia-tinged tonality takes away some of the finest details, but I'm not so sure. Its soundstaging abilities, although very good, cannot compete with dual concentric/coaxial designs that produce more of a point-source. Also, inevitable of course for a speaker of this size, is that it's a prisoner of its own physical dimensions. If you want high volumes and/or deep bass in a large room, you simply need to buy something bigger.

### **The Verdict**

Sonus faber's Sonetto II is lovely – and puzzlingly cheap at the price. As a loudspeaker, it is highly competent, and as a piece of furniture is a thing of beauty. If you're in the market for a serious-sounding, classy looking affordable stand mount loudspeaker, this is hard to beat.



For more information, visit [Sonus faber](http://www.sonusfaber.com).