

Sonus faber II Cremonese Floorstanding Speaker Reviewed

November 6, 2017

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Sonus faber, a speaker manufacturer with a 34-year heritage and now part of the **McIntosh Group**, is based in Arcugnano, Italy, where all design and manufacturing take place. I have heard numerous demos of Sonus faber products and have always come away impressed. I recall, at various audio shows and audio stores, appreciating their non-fatiguing, laid-back, organic sound. But those auditions were snapshot listening sessions, in unfamiliar settings.



Lucky for me, I now had an opportunity at an extended audition period with **the II Cremonese** (\$45,000/pair) from Sonus faber's premium Reference line of speakers, which also includes the Aida (\$120,000/pair) and Lillium (\$70,000/pair). Sonus faber offers speaker lines at a wide variety of price points, including more entry-level products like the **Chameleon B bookshelf speaker we reviewed last year**.

In 2015, Sonus faber developed a 300-year tribute to Antonio Stradivari, the iconic Italian violin designer/craftsman, and his creation, the Cremonese violin, which he produced in 1715.

To honor the famed luthier, Sonus faber produced the II Cremonese speaker. Notable design cues give hint to the violin, such as speaker grilles that are an elaborate set of strings that reach from top to bottom on three sides of the speaker. It looks very cool. Two wood facets of the rhombus column have horizontal, three-inch-spaced black lines that further reinforce the violin theme.



Common for Sonus faber is the belief that speakers should be built with the same materials used in the manufacture of musical instruments--specifically, the violin and lute.

As such, this speaker is described as a wood, five-sided rhombus or diamond-shaped column that features non-parallel cabinet walls, with a back-tilt posture. I could argue that it actually has six sides, since the rear of the speaker has a flattened three-inch-wide panel where the two rear larger sides meet, but that's just me being picky. For the purpose of this discussion, we can go with the five-sided narrative.



A departure from the company's traditional all-wood design is an upward-angled top with a glass insert, and a horizontal plinth, both made of black anodized, CNC-machined aluminum that offers structural strength and vibration control. Sonus faber refers to the metal top and plinth as damper shelves, which assist in the quest to diminish (if not eliminate) distortion and increase linearity.

Exquisitely finished, decorative wood panels are attached on two sides of the five-sided structure, immediately to the right and left of the front speaker baffle. Sonus faber offers two finishes: high gloss natural or red stained walnut. I am partial to natural walnut, so I felt fortunate when my samples arrived in that finish. Not only are these panels' fit and finish amazing, but they also enhance the strength of the cabinet. The front baffle is home to the tweeter, midrange, and two bass drivers, surrounded by Italian leather upholstery.

The remaining two rear sides of the column are also covered in leather, and the outer side of each speaker is where two sub-bass drivers are positioned. These drivers are meant to face the sidewalls when you position the speakers in your room. The leather-finished surfaces get the aforementioned stringed speaker grilles. I was really torn between using the ingenious grilles or sticking with the luxurious leather. I ended up splitting my time between both options.



Sonus faber refers to its tweeter as an Arrow Point Damped Apex Dome, which is 28mm (1.1 inches) in diameter and handles the audio spectrum of 2,500 Hz and above. Designed by Sonus faber, the driver has a neodymium motor, which creates linearity. A mechanical interface helps decouple the tweeter from the cabinet; it sits in its own complicated maze-like wood enclosure, further enhancing its flat frequency response.

The midrange driver covers the bandwidth from 250 to 2,500 Hz, and it is another Sonus faber design using a neodymium magnet motor system. It is a 180mm (seven-inch) diameter driver with a natural fiber cone made from a mix of cellulose pulp, kapok (a cotton-like substance from the ceiba tree), kenaf (a jute-like fiber from the tropical mallow plant), and other natural fibers encased in a clear coating that has damping characteristics. The entire driver is isolated from the front baffle and sits in its own acoustic chamber within the cabinet structure.

Twin 180mm (seven-inch) bass drivers, located just below the midrange driver, are given the frequencies from 250 down to 80 Hz, and they are constructed with an advanced foam core material and flanked by cellulose pulp outer shells. These drivers are of a long-throw motor design, and they share a reflex structure ported underneath the plinth. Special attention was given to ensure perfect blending with the midrange driver while retaining high definition and detail in the bass audio spectrum.

Sonus faber calls the sub-bass drivers "Infra Woofers"; as you might guess, they handle the frequencies below 80 Hz and represent the ".5" in the Il Cremonese's 3.5-way design.

These drivers measure 220mm (8.7 inches) in diameter and are located in the lower portion of the outer rear surface of the five-sided column. With the same cone structure as the woofers, they blend well with one another. Continuing the theme of the other drivers, these sub-bass woofers are in their own reflex enclosure, which is ported underneath the plinth.

The crossover design goals are to improve volume and phase response in order to improve time delays, using the highest quality Mundorf capacitors and Jantzen inductors. The low-frequency impedance management creates an improved amplifier load.

Each speaker has four oversized spike structures on the bottom that use an updated version of Sonus faber's Zero Vibration Transmission (Z.V.T.) technology. Made of metal and synthetic polymers, the spikes are threaded into the plinth and decouple the speaker from the floor. If spikes are not appropriate for your flooring, Sonus faber provides protective, machined-aluminum discs upon which the spikes can sit. Four heavy-gauge speaker terminals allow for bi-wiring or bi-amplification.

The frequency response of the entire system is 25 Hz to 35,000 kHz, with an average impedance of four ohms. Sensitivity is 92 dB, indicating that the speaker is amplifier-friendly; however, Sonus faber recommends at least 100 watts per channel, but no more than 800 watts per channel. Note that the average impedance suggests that, on occasion, the speaker could create a lower load, which demands a high-quality amplifier.

At 57 inches tall, 15.68 inches wide, 24.5 inches deep, and 185 pounds, the II Cremonese commands your immediate attention and will not go unnoticed.

The Hookup

The speakers arrived in a wooden crate, with the bottom side being a pallet to which both speaker columns were bolted. Each speaker has a reusable fabric bag. A one-piece foam crown connects and surrounds both speakers. Four walls and a top connect to each other with screws to form the rectangular wooden crate. My demonstration speakers were not new, but they were still in excellent condition--a real testament to their packaging.

I installed the Sonus faber speakers in my living room, replacing my existing Vienna Acoustics Schonberg speakers for the left and right channels of a surround sound system. I retained the existing center and left/right surrounds, which are also part of the Vienna Acoustics Schonberg line. I set my MartinLogan BalancedForce 210 subwoofer to play 80 Hz and below. At the time of this installation, I was working with a new [two-channel amplifier from Bryston: the 14B3](#), rated at 600 watts per channel at four ohms--a perfect complement to the II Cremonese. An NAD M27 powered the remaining channels, and an NAD M17 surround sound processor controlled the entire system. I used an Oppo BDP-105D for Blu-ray playback and VUDU movie streaming. I also streamed CD-quality TIDAL through a MacBook Pro, using the Chrome browser.

Once everything was connected, I performed a calibration to balance the new speakers. However, for the MacBook Pro input, I set my processor to its pass-through setting to leave the signal untouched.