

Sonus Faber Venere 2.0 loudspeakers

by Alan Sircom

Since its acquisition by Fine Sounds, Sonus Faber faced something of a conundrum. Its higher end models, like the *Homage* series, retained – and in some cases, improved upon – the sumptuous finish and refined sound quality that was always a function of the brand, but the lower end has to deal with new buyers coming to the brand, and their demands have changed significantly in recent years. Sadly, at that end, the days of wood and leather are coming to a close.

Although also available in a walnut finish and a gloss black, the white lacquer finish on the review pair of Sonus Faber Venere 2.0 standmounts would have been unthinkable a decade ago. But far from cheapening the brand, this is proving a popular choice among new generation music lovers. In fact, a lot of the old design cues are gone (it's not a rectangular box wrapped in bits of tree, and the top-plate slopes down toward the listener, thereby making the loudspeaker neither a plant-pot holder nor a lookout tower for a cat) and – in part because these design elements are not simply there for show – the speaker's are all the better for that.

As has been long-held at Sonus Faber, the Venere follows the lyre shaped body type, with the cabinet expanding out at the sides and then tapering off to the rear, to help eliminate internal standing waves from parallel cabinet walls. But recently, to help minimise the problem still further, the top plate of the cabinet has been raised fairly significantly. To make this look less like either a bishop's mitre (or a ski jump), the Venere 2.0 is backtilted slightly on the custom stands (more on these later).

The larger of two standmounts in the Venere range, the 2.0 is, as the name suggests, a two-way design, with a letter-box port at the front and bi-wire terminals at the rear. The company doesn't make its own drive units, but 'specs' units to its requirements from drive unit manufacturers of repute; this means Sonus Faber can take advantage of the skills of the driver maker, while getting a 29mm soft dome tweeter and 180mm composite polypropylene 'Curv' cone woofer. The DKM-derived tweeter sits in a very deep oval horn, but this oval is wider top and bottom, yet again to allow better dispersion when slightly back-tilted. The product development follows an increasingly common trend of starting on the computer and ending in the listening room, but Sonus Faber takes this common concept a stage further to ensure the products





▶ on the production line receive a degree of fine tuned listening to ensure they are both consistent and consistently good. Not that there's much to tweak; just a simple first-order crossover.

In short, the Venere project is the result of a team effort, distinct from the lone designer or the giant corporate plans of a committee design from a huge company. The result is a lot of loudspeaker in a relatively inexpensive box, and that is only possible through the medium of audio's most oft-repeated mantra today; designed in Europe, made in China. The Venere range – like so many products today – is built in a Chinese factory using SF-trained staff, in a manner not dissimilar to the training method used by B&W – engineers are flown to the original factory in Italy, trained up on the company's top lines and when shown to have the skill set needed to make good speakers the Sonus way, they return to China in order to build us excellent loudspeakers at relatively reasonable prices.

This is not that Sonus Faber you lusted after years ago, it's a far more polished and consistent design in many ways. That doesn't mean this is a bland, soulless design, but that it is the kind of loudspeaker that appeals to a very wide audience. It's also a distinctly high-end loudspeaker in terms of soundstage and overall refinement. That tweeter especially is a real honey, making a sound that's extremely smooth and very accurate right up into the upper registers. The acid test here for me is Stevie Wonder's 'Superstition' – nothing takes away from the sheer groove of the track, but Stevie Wonder's drum work in the opening bars is one of the most varied hi-hat beats ever recorded and that is easy to get wrong. It can be masked, can be randomly too toppy, too flat or too extended. Here it is just right.

And it can keep up in some very good company. This is the kind of speaker you can listen to having spent some time in the company of extremely expensive high-end models. Yes, the high-end model is going to be better in terms of absolute detail, clarity (especially in the bass) and frequency extension, but the Venere ▶

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▶ doesn't make you reach for the volume control or the off button. When you play something distinctly audiophile in performance – *The Astounding Eyes of Rita* by Anouar Ibrahim (ECM) for example – the sound retains all the spatial information and tonal beauty of the CD. That it doesn't quite have the precision or the ability to play as loud as things that cost 10x as much are some of the only concessions to price.

The bass is good too, given the relatively small size of the loudspeaker. It does have a distinct limit (Sonus Faber quotes 45Hz, but fails to state whether that's 3dB down or more) and it doesn't pull up those deep bass lines. It does seem to have a slight bloom in the upper bass around the 80Hz mark, but this just makes the speaker seem like its bass is deeper than it is in reality.

So where's the big downside? Put simply, it's sitting between the speakers and the floor. The tall, spindly-legged speaker stands are as elegant as the speakers themselves, but the elegance quickly gives way to frustration, because the MDF uprights are held in place top and bottom by three push in screw threads and bolts. My advice would be to consider a more rigid stand; I used the Kudos S50, which was not too far from an aesthetic match and sonically pulled the better part of half an octave back into the bass. It didn't have the same height, but this was a trade-off worth making.

In terms of partnering and placing the loudspeakers (assuming a good stand), it really couldn't be simpler. It's about as fuss-free as you can get from a good speaker and although infinite care and attention will bring improvements, you'll get 95% of the way there with even something like an Arcam A19 and just putting the speakers in a basic triangle, with the speakers at least half a metre from rear and side walls. Ultimately, the 'move the speaker the length of three carbon atoms to the left' is not important here. Care in toe-in is slightly more important, and – although it might not fit with the elegance of the design – does seem to work best by adjusting both toe-in and rake angle of one speaker, then using that as an 'anchor' to fine-tune installation. This is the way Sumiko (Sonus Faber's US distributor) sets up loudspeakers, and it works well here. The only caveat to that is partnering it with a system heavy on the syrup. The 80Hz in-fill that gives rise to it sounding deeper in the bass than it really is can sound both too fat and too slow when used with something that has similar traits. The Sugden A21se for example is a fine amplifier in most cases, but sounded thick-set here. On the other hand, the so-detailed-it's-almost-lean Devialet D-Premier sounded perfectly balanced.

There is something intrinsically right about this speaker and its sound. The Sonus Faber Venere range may be essentially the brand's starter components, but it doesn't look and it certainly doesn't sound like it's on the nursery slopes. This is the loudspeaker that fits two types of customer

perfectly; those wanting a taste of the high-end who never plan on upgrading, and those who are planning a touch of downscaling or second system designing without compromising those high-end ideals. Too many high-end entry points act as a sweet taste of the good stuff, enticing the listener to upgrade and spend more. This doesn't... the Venere is all you need. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

System: Two-way vented standmount
Tweeter: 29mm fabric dome
Mid-Woofer: 180mm Curv cone
Crossover Point: 2.5kHz
Frequency Response: 45Hz-25kHz
Sensitivity: 88dB SPL (2.83V/1m)
Nominal Impedance: 6 ohms
Suggested amplifier output: 50W-200W
Dimensions: (HxWxD, speaker only):
 45x24.6x33.9cm
Weight: 7kg each:
Finish: Black or White High Gloss
 Lacquer. Walnut Wood cost option
Price: £1,349 per pair (standard finish)
 Stands £349 per pair

Manufactured by: Sonus Faber
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