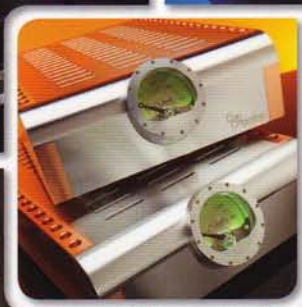


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Sonus faber

Amati futura

Electrifying speakers to enhance the enjoyment of any living room

Italians have a knack for making beautiful things, be they cars, clothes or women. The Amati futura does nothing to undermine this observation. In our humble opinion this is among the most gorgeous audio products ever made. The contrast between bright, polished stainless metalwork and deep, lustrous veneer is breathtaking in its elegance. It is no exaggeration to describe this speaker as drop-dead gorgeous.

The Amati futura is the first fruit of the project that created the company's statement of intent, The Sonus faber, a massive, technologically ambitious and immensely capable megabucks design that put the company at the top of the European high-end tree when it was launched last year. That speaker was a limited edition with a price that put it out of reach for all but the fattest cats, but the development of The Sonus faber has resulted in a raft of innovations which is trickling down into more realistic products.

The Amati futura incorporates three ideas from its big brother. Firstly, you will notice the plinth has two steel layers. These are separated by compliant spacers in what Sonus faber calls its low vibration transmission system. The idea is that less energy is transmitted into the floor, meaning that the rest of the system doesn't have to cope with large amounts of resonance. This speaker also uses the stealth reflex system, a para-aperiodic port that is significantly quieter than traditional reflex ports. The third element that comes directly from The Sonus faber is the tuned mass damper, a system which consists of a three-part non-magnetic cone that's broken up by rubber gaskets. The idea is that this mass absorbs vibration and turns it into heat, thus reducing energy produced by the cabinet. These systems combine to reduce the noise floor of the speaker by minimising cabinet resonance which is the enemy of low-level resolution. The final part of the equation is the speaker's exoskeleton which is formed by the nickel-plated plates on top and bottom and the fins that run up the back. These are also designed to eliminate vibration in a manner not far removed from the torsion bar inside the Sonus faber – not just for show, then.

This isn't a huge speaker, standing 116cm high. Combine this height with its boat tail cross section and phenomenal standard of finish and you have an extremely room-friendly speaker on your hands.

The driver selection consists of a large 29mm soft dome tweeter designed by Scan-Speak co-founder Ragnar Lian, a 179mm midrange with a cellulose fibre cone and two 220mm woofers with aluminium/magnesium alloy cones. The latter are unusual for having a particularly long 1.5-inch throw. These are fed by a crossover with a dual staggered transfer function at low frequencies and a hot/cold tweeter high-pass filter. It also incorporates Mundorf Supreme capacitors and Jantzen inductors.

SOUND QUALITY

The impressive spec sheet is all well and good, but doesn't explain why this is the most musical and effortless loudspeaker we've heard for years. For starters, the way it seems to bypass all the mechanical aspects of sound reproduction and bring you the music is simply spellbinding. Then there's the tone:

whatever you play – be it a singer, an orchestra or a band – the timbre of voices and instruments is as deep as the gloss on the flanks of the loudspeaker.

This is not the only quality that shines through, of course: the way that musicians play and sing is also placed front and centre, the tempo, the phrasing and the vibe all combine to lure you into the glory of the musical moment. If you love music, you may find it difficult to tear yourself away for the everyday distractions of food and sleep, as absorbing this speaker's magic is just too much fun.

The Amati futura is supplied with spike receptors to stop those sharp points from ruining the floor and these were used even though the floor in question is carpeted. However, removing the receptors and letting the spikes grip the floor had quite a dramatic and positive effect, specifically on leading edges which tightened up the sound and added definition throughout. Basically, if your floor isn't too shiny, the nailed down approach is the way to go.

“The most musical and effortless loudspeaker we've heard in years”

Playing hi-res music files proved extremely gratifying. The transparency is staggering, giving the performers a palpability that is 'reach out and touch' real. Unlike some high-end designs, the Amati futura achieves this in an entirely musical fashion, making for a powerful result that will have you seeking out more big files to stream.

Going from this Sonus faber to speakers that previously seemed revealing is a painful experience; what was once smooth, clean and refined now seems gritty and lacking in finesse. The Amati futura raises the stakes in no uncertain fashion when accompanied by a top-notch vinyl front end. The SME 20/3 turntable, van den Hul Condor cartridge and Trilogly 907 phono stage is just such a source and, boy, does it sound sweet via a Krell FB1 integrated and this Italian beauty. Electrifying barely begins to describe the sound of clean vinyl through this speaker.

Jason **Kennedy**

