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SPEAKERS! Little to large, we've got models to suit any budget...

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► of the speakers, but there's the disparity of scale too. My eyes keep telling me that the two can't be connected, my brain keeps telling me that they are, my ears keep telling the eyes and brain to just shut up and listen. I heartily recommend the latter course...

Perhaps there's a natural affinity between Italian speakers and opera, even opera where the composer isn't himself Italian. Perhaps it's all a conjuring trick, the speakers designed to blow listeners away with the one thing they do supremely well, hoping that they won't realise all the things they don't do until after the cheque has cleared. It wouldn't be the first time... But no,

these speakers are just as adept whatever you throw at them,

large or small, acoustic or heavily amplified, they take it in their stride. They are the Cremona Auditor Ms – and they are more than a little bit special!

Back in Issue 26, CT raved about the original Auditor, which despite its (relatively) modest price tag we've since considered one of the stars in the Sonus Faber range. The Auditor M takes the performance of the original and extends it significantly – which is no mean feat. Along the way it also tidies up the aesthetics, applying a few finishing touches to what was already one of the most attractive speaker/stand combinations on the market. What's been done? Well, let's start with the drivers. Both come from Scanspeak, the tweeter still being the ring-radiator design, but a different version, one with the sharply tapered,

conical phase plug in place of the original's brass bullet. The 150mm bass-mid driver dispenses with the radial damping slots of the old model, using a plain paper cone instead. In turn, these changes have necessitated a revised crossover, which between you and me is I suspect

largely responsible for the sonic improvements.

The speaker retains the beautiful proportions and cabinet of the original, and is still single wired. But the back panel now features a symmetrical, curved contour that looks far more elegant and also places the rear firing reflex port directly behind the driver it loads. The base of the matching stand is now cut away to create a more sculpted and far less clumpy appearance. All told, the aesthetic changes are subtle but in concert produce a more complete and visually congruent (as well as dramatic) product. Which is pretty much the sonic effect too.

The Auditor M is a significantly more lucid, tactile, expressive and less visible performer than its predecessor.



Individually, the changes are not large, but in combination their impact on the music and its presentation certainly is. Tellingly, CT preferred the original with the grilles in place. Sure enough, they bring a sense of rounded integrity to the broad mid-band of the Auditor M too. The difference is that that rounding now

sounds sluggish and artificial, as well as robbing the sound of immediacy and air. The new version needs no help to seamlessly integrate its drivers, the easier, more articulate response of the bass-mid combined with the extra air and extension of the revised tweeter revealing all too clearly the detrimental sonic aspects of the grilles. The Auditor was always an engaging and articulate, warm and inviting speaker. It still is; but the increase in clarity and its micro-dynamic response have given it a new agility, an ability to step away from the music so that you hear more of the artists' performance and less of the speakers'.

Of course, there's a catch. There's always a catch when you get this much music out of boxes this small. However, in this case it's a price that's easy to pay. Added clarity means additional care when it comes to set up. Toe-in and lateral spacing are critical, but so too is the forward tilt of the speaker. With my slightly lower than usual listening seat it was necessary to wind the rear cones fully down to achieve the correct tonal balance and proper weight. Tilt the speakers back too far and they start to harden and shout, losing their bottom-end foundation and glazing over. Don't worry, you'll ►

► know when you've got it right! The other things they need are space and power. You can drive the Auditor Ms with any competent integrated and I can imagine some pretty special systems based around the likes of Prima Luna or Pure Sound amplification. Good solid-state will work just as well. But as you add power the speakers just seem to grow and grow, the sound getting bigger and bigger. Although I used a number of different amps with the Auditor Ms, I was fortunate enough to have c-j's LP275M mono-blocs at the same time as the little Sonus Fabers: I just couldn't resist – and I wasn't disappointed.

Give these speakers enough, quality power and they just disappear, leaving behind a huge and wonderfully coherent acoustic space. It's not the tangible volume that a full-range speaker delivers; the Auditor Ms don't do or even attempt fundamentals – which probably helps explain their extremely tactile and articulate sound. Instead, this soundstage is all about mid and high frequency reflections mapping its boundaries. Within them, instruments are held stable and voices soar. I've already spoken about their impressive performance with opera, but put on something small, intimate and acoustic like the Stewboss *Leep* EP and the naturalness of the guitar's shape and harmonic body, the voice's character and phrasing are uncannily convincing and involving. The difference with the old model is not so much on the note by note level, but more the way in which this latest speaker starts and stops phrases, times pauses and hesitations in the music, ties the various elements together. So, not only are singer and instrument lifesize, but when Greg Sarfaty eases the tempo

and weight of playing entering the chorus of 'I Didn't Notice' the transition is so natural it's almost expected, the hesitations between those quieter, more reflective lines adding to the contrast, underlining their delicacy and fragility. They are working at a different level but these are the very same qualities



that make Despina so flirtatiously independent, Dorabella so coy.

What we have here is a speaker that possesses all the refinement, tonal honesty and presence that have made Sonus Faber a benchmark in compact loudspeaker performance, but with even greater clarity and lucidity, a more coherent and explicit presentation of the performance. It's not just about the notes themselves but about the sense that binds them together, rough and ready as that might be (just wait until you hear what comes out of these babies when you stuff The The's *Mind Bomb* through their terminals, propelled by quarter of a kilo-Watt). If you really want the rough edge of a Woolworths guitar then you might find the Auditor M a little too polite, but for all other purposes they just need a bit of encouragement to get down and get dirty. Oh, and they play loud too, despite their limited efficiency.

This is, dare I say it, in many respects the most balanced and as a result impressive speaker I've heard from Sonus Faber. Unlike previous favourites from the marque it doesn't demand power to work properly, but it works with it if it's available. It is warm and sweet without being clogged or smeared, it is refined without sounding stilted or constipated. It does bass, but not so much as to get itself into trouble or wind up musically constipated. Imagine Jeeves crossed with a Chinese gymnast and maybe you'll get the picture. If that's too much (or just too much information) get a listen to the Auditor M. Like a far from reluctant debutante it's a picture of poise but it's got a wicked glint in its eye... ➤+

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type:	Two-way reflex loaded
Driver Complement:	1x 29mm Scanspeak ring radiator 1x 150mm Sanspeak paper coned bass-mid
Bandwidth:	50Hz - 30kHz ± 3dB
Efficiency:	88dB
Impedance:	4 Ohms
Connections:	Single-wired
Dimensions (WxHxD):	190 x 350 x 320mm
Weights:	9.2kg speaker 11.3kg stand
Prices –	
Auditor M:	£2450
Matching Stand:	£520

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