



Sonus Faber Sonetto VIII

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I have to say that I rather like the vintage B&O turntable that Sonus faber have chosen for the video that heads up their page for the Sonetto range, it's a beauty. Probably doesn't do justice to the loudspeakers but aesthetics count, especially if you're Italian. The Sonetto range is a good example of this, very elegant loudspeakers in a classic lute shaped section with a sleek piano black finish on our sample. I rather like the horizontal striped veneer of the 'wood' finish but they all look great.

Sonetto is one of many ranges in the Sonus faber catalogue today, the company has expanded dramatically since I last had one of their products to play with, it is now part of a large group of high end audio companies and has the backing to reach out to a much wider segment of the market. Sonetto is a mid ranking and relatively new range with two standmounts, three floorstanders and centre and surround channels to choose from, prices start at £1,450 for the Sonetto I standmount and rise to £5,698 for the largest Sonetto VIII. These are the least expensive Sonus faber models to be made in Italy at the Vicenza facility.

The Sonetto VIII stands an inch under four feet tall and weighs nearly 58lbs, so it's substantial but not back breaking. The driver array consists of three metal cone bass units, a smaller mixed material midrange and a larger than average soft dome tweeter. There is a large reflex port in the base placed there to enhance aesthetics and ease placement, a nicely executed outrigger stand in aluminium provides a defined space beneath the vent by virtue of conical spikes, the latter have knurled edge caps which enhance appearance and lock things in place. The specs include 90dB sensitivity which is higher than average but note that this is a four Ohm load so is not quite as easy to drive at that figure would suggest – it's probably closer to 87dB at eight Ohms. With solid state amplifiers this is not likely to be a problem but it may not suit single ended tube amps. The bi-wire terminals are sensibly placed at the bottom on the cabinet and finished in matt silver to match the rings on the drivers.

The tweeter is a trickle down from higher ranges and uses Sf's damped apex dome tech, the mid with its mix of paper and natural fibres is a new design as are the aluminium alloy



bass drivers. The latter have very open cast aluminium baskets for maximum ease of excursion and thus speed of reaction to signal variations. So this is not just an attractive speaker, it's built to high engineering standards which usually translates to longevity and consistency between samples.

Sound quality

The sensitivity of the Sonetto VIII mean that it sounds open and easy right from the off, it produces good scale and power with Radiohead's 'Burn the Witch' (*A Moon Shaped Pool*) and offers plenty of insight into the layers of reverb that producer Nigel Godrich uses to give the track a strong sense of depth. When 'Decks Dark' comes along the bass is positively visceral, deep powerful and er, dark it really brings the tension on this track alive and makes for an intense experience. I like the way the big Sonetto sounds so easy at average levels, it augers well for an ability to remain calm under fire with higher volumes. Another piece of electronically driven material in James Blake's 'Retrograde' is played at a suitably high level to find out, the speakers remain clean and in control whilst delivering this powerfully moving track. The relatively audiophile tones of Fiona Boyes on Reference Recordings are made clear right down to the damped nature of the kick drum behind her powerful vocals on 'Professin' the Blues'.

Depth is once again a strong point on Bill Wither's lovely 'Naked and Warm' where the backing vocals are particularly well served, this speaker does the centre of focus very well but



doesn't let that mask the quieter elements in the mix. It also keeps up the pace well when things get lively. I'm loving Gwenifer Raymond's acoustic guitar picking right now and the Sonetto VIII delivered an awful lot of its vitality and pace. The richer tones of Doug MacLeod are also well served, as is the quality of recording on Break the Chain which has tremendously quiet backgrounds. The Sonus fabers make the foot stomp good and solid and his voice sounds tremendously natural, it's a very polished sound compared to the Raymond but just as engaging in its own way. For best results I found that toeing these speakers in to face me directly gave the best results, but this will depend on the room and ancillary equipment. This is a transparent speaker and will sound its best with even handed and revealing source and amplification.



I tried another amplifier to see what it would do, going from my usual class A/B ATC P2 to a class D Didit AMP212, this really brought the Sonetto VIII to life and showed just how responsive it can be. The mid was a little more forward and the bass slightly thicker but with a small change to the toe-in I was able to dial in a balance that was simply thrilling. Never underestimate the importance of amp/speaker matching.

The Sonetto VIII seems to have been voiced to work well at sensible volume levels, they will play loud if you have a suitable amplifier but this isn't necessary to get engaging results. Some speakers only work well at high levels but these are equally at home at a less neighbour infuriating volume, which can't be a bad thing. It likes amplifiers with a bit of grip but the higher than average sensitivity means it should play nicely with lower powered amps as well. I didn't test its home cinema capabilities but the dynamics on offer with music and the bass extension provided suggest that it will fulfil that role with ease. But the heavy processing of surround sound will have to be well executed, this is a transparent loudspeaker that tells it like it is. Which is of course a major benefit with two channel music, an area where its qualities manage to outshine the gloss of its piano black finish, and that's saying something.