

Sonus faber Venere 5.0 review

By Ed Selley



Add a touch of Italian style to your cinema room with this floorstanding speaker array



Let us for a minute consider the thorny issue of 'style' – the indefinable quality of a product beyond the more understandable virtues of performance, build and features. In the UK, much AV gear tends toward form following function, and while this can result in stylish things, it's often a by-product rather than the intention.

British loudspeakers can be handsome, impressive and seriously good value. They are, however, rarely described as stylish or beautiful. The Italians have historically taken a slightly different approach to the design process. While the country's speaker-makers

are capable of exceptional engineering, I often feel that beyond raw ability they believe a product must be beautiful, too. This means that if you are looking for a speaker that is more than a

musical box, you could do a great deal worse than looking at Sonus faber. The Italian manufacturer has consistently produced models with a visual flair that eludes many competitors, and the Venere range you see here is one of the more affordable avenues into the company's range.



Five alive

The quintet of speakers auditioned comprises a pair of the Venere 2.5 floorstanders (£2,200), a pair of the 1.5 standmounts (£950) and the Venere Center speaker (£550). Sonus faber doesn't make subwoofers, leaving you to decide on a suitable bass solution from a manufacturer that does. For my system, I had the Veneres running in tandem with a Tannoy dual-driver 12in TS2.12.

All of the speakers make use of a 1.1in silk dome tweeter partnered with a midbass driver that uses Sonus faber's 'Curv' technology, where the driver is crafted from a thermally-moulded polypropylene material combined with a paper dust cap. This driver is made in 6in and 7in sizes (the latter is used in the two-and-a-half way floorstander for both the mid and bass units) but otherwise the complement across all five speakers is identical.

There are other design aspects that are shared. The most important of these is that all the Veneres are front-ported, employing a distinctive slot that is intended to reduce

the amount of audible energy it produces. This is useful in terms of positioning, because the speakers aren't too fussed about being placed close to a rear wall. The Center is happy being placed on a semi-enclosed rack shelf. Given that the Center and the 2.5 in particular are decidedly large speakers (the latter stands over a metre high and over 30cm wide), this means that they can still be used in smaller spaces without completely dominating them.

The Veneres are never going to disappear in your viewing room, however, because the industrial design wasn't created with that in mind. The distinctive profile of the cabinet mimics a lute, says Sonus faber, but also helps with standing wave breakup and cabinet strength. Meanwhile, the distinct rearward lean of the floorstanders and the standmounts once placed on their dedicated stands/baseplates provides time alignment of the driver assembly, as well as slightly reducing the height of the floorstander.

Construction appears faultless. Everything from the binding posts to the foot for the Center, magnetic speaker grilles and the baseplates are all of high quality, even though the Venere range may use less expensive materials than pricier members of the company's output. Furthermore, the Venere ranks as one of the small number of speakers that I think actually looks quite good in white. A black iteration is also available, as is a rather striking walnut finish for a price premium.



Beauty that's more than skin-deep

It is unlikely you are going to drop £3,700 on a set of speakers (and save some extra for a subwoofer) because they look elegant. The good news, though, is that the Veneres are more than just a pretty face. Connected to a NAD Masters Series M17 processor and M27 power amplifier (which I'll be reviewing in our next issue), this Sonus Faber package demonstrates a number of impressive performance attributes.

The first is that the Veneres are extremely self-effacing speakers. With the wide spread of effects in the rain-drenched final race in Formula One drama Rush (Blu-ray) there is a tremendous amount of information ranged across the room from front to back. The positioning of effects is extremely good, but with these cabinets it doesn't feel directionally linked to any single speaker. Instead, there is a holographic and completely believable soundfield that is devoid of any gaps or breaks. The Veneres have that natty ability of sounding like there is more of them in the room than there actually is.

And this invisible impact is something that they offer at low listening levels as well as high volumes, making them effective and enjoyable as everyday speakers.

'Refinement' is another term that springs to mind. Even with levels up firmly into anti-social territory, the Sonus fabers push forward a sound that is smooth and unfatiguing. They manage to walk the balance between a performance that almost seems relaxed without trading off any detail or high-frequency impact. With the bank-safe-dragging lunacy at the climax of [Fast & Furious 5](#) (Blu-ray), the Veneres keep everything under control without compromising on the sheer silliness of the action on screen. Indeed, for speakers that are so visually elegant, they pack a hefty punch. Those 7in bass drivers that flank the front soundstage are rated down to 40Hz and provide a fulsome low-frequency ledge for your subwoofer to grip on to.

This punch is also fairly easy to achieve. Nothing in the specifications of the speakers screams that they are especially sensitive (the Venere 2.5 is rated at 89dB/W, while the Venere 1.5

standmount claims 85dB/W) but in practice I found them easy enough to drive to high levels – admittedly with a rather tasty pre/power combo on the AV rack. They will be revealing enough to show up limitations in your amplification but they certainly won't set out to break it.

Amongst this impressive range of abilities, one appreciable weakness of the Sonus faber package is that, compared to the astonishingly competent 2.5 floorstander, the Center has to make do with merely being pretty good. Movie dialogue is clear and easy to follow but some of the weight and presence that the fronts – and even the fairly compact rear speakers – manage with a degree of effortlessness is not always present with the Center. On the assumption that it was brand-spanking new, I ran it in for a period but it never sounds quite as big a speaker as the sizeable dimensions suggests it should.

The strengths of the Venere 2.5 floorstander, on the other hand, mean that if you need a package to perform in stereo, this is one that is too good to ignore. The same spaciousness that works well with multichannel mixes crafts a stereo soundstage that is simply vast, while accurate and packed with detail, particularly with high-quality recordings. And the same refinement and tonal balance that they demonstrate with multichannel is present here, too – the Venere 2.5 is right at the top of its game at the price point. Being hypercritical, they can suffer from a slightly dominating low-end, but I found most of this could be managed with a thoughtful toeing-in of the cabinets.



Appealing combination

The multichannel speaker buyer is faced with plenty of choice. High-end sub/sat arrays, lush on-wall systems and style-ignorant THX packages are all options at this price point, and Sonus faber's Veneres are another – a glamorous-looking system that combines hi-fi styling with technical savvy.

This array delivers scale, precision, bass depth and considerable impact and does so without ever sounding ragged or out of breath. While none of the cabinets could ever be described as small, they still manage to sound bigger than you'll at first expect, and the £3,700 ticket gets you a system that will work in almost any room on an aesthetic level, and will treat your disc collection (and music library) with utmost care. Overall, it's an excellent all-rounder.