



Sonus faber Venere Model 2.5 Loudspeaker

A Tiny Goddess Grows Up

Neil Gader

It was only a couple issues ago that I reviewed the smallest member of Sonus faber's newest series of entry-level loudspeakers, Venere. That particular compact, the \$1199 Model 1.5, which I dubbed "tiny goddess," might've been diminutive in stature but it spoke with such an authoritative and musical voice that it handily nabbed Product of the Year honors in the Affordable Loudspeaker category (Issue 229). So thoroughly taken was I with this suave two-way that I concluded my review with a cliffhanger—waiting in the wings was the Model 1.5's floorstanding sibling, the Model 2.5.

The \$2498 Model 2.5 is a 2.5-way speaker in a bass-reflex enclosure. A slotted, front-firing, foam port is positioned at the base of the baffle. As for drivers, the Model 2.5 retains the tweeter-in-waveguide soft dome of the Model 1.5 but departs from that monitor with a larger pair of 7" mid/bass transducers. The point five in the 2.5 designation indicates that one woofer rolls off acoustically (6dB per octave) around 250Hz while the other, designated the mid/woofer but otherwise identical, electrically crosses over to the tweeter at 2.5kHz.

If anything the Model 2.5 is even more architecturally graceful than the stand-mounted Model 1.5 and invites further comparisons to Sonus faber's exquisite \$120,000 Aida floorstander. It's all about flowing lines, arched side panels, and a raked, time-aligned front baffle. Designed to avoid diffraction artifacts, the Model 2.5's non-parallel surfaces not only increase structural rigidity but also reduce internal resonances. Graceful accents abound from the tempered glass floor plinth to the unequal-length footers that rest outboard of the cabinet to ensure stability. Familiar too is the "ducktail" top panel of tempered glass with the silver foil screen of Sf's logo. Like the 1.5 the speaker terminals are rear-mounted and nicely offset from one another for easy access. They are doubled up for bi-wiring or bi-amping. The quick-release, magnetically attached grilles are a pleasure to use. Available finishes are a glossy arctic white or a hand-rubbed piano-black lacquer. Newly introduced at CES is a classic walnut finish—a look more in keeping with Sf tradition.

One thing is certain, the Model 2.5 will never be accused of being a wallflower or a stodgy foot-dragger. It's dynamically lively and tonally well-balanced with a vivid midrange palette that permits music to emerge brimming with energy. Even if it overshoots the mark on occasion—a little dip in the presence range or a touch of added bloom in the bass—these are minor deductions in light of its overall performance.

While the Model 2.5 bears some striking similarities to the Model 1.5, in practice it's an altogether different animal. The key distinction is the weightier tonal signature and midrange voicing that give music a firmer and more grounded presentation. In many ways the Model 2.5 shares a larger percentage of family sonic traits with the appealing, up-market Liuto. "Sheer abbondanza" was my description in Issue 199. As applied to the Model 2.5 it equates to a comparable low-frequency warmth-quotient and a genial earthiness below 100 cycles, plus an uncanny ability to reproduce all kinds of music from a precision chamber group to a thrashing metal band. It pressurizes a room, and drives dynamics more forcibly and with greater linearity than the compact Model 1.5, in fact than most typical compacts. The Model 2.5 is warmly effusive in character so that during the Vaughn-Williams *Wasps* Overture [Previn, LSO, RCA] it conveyed the orchestra's lower strings and winds with rewarding heft and extension. String sections are tonally smooth, nicely delineated, yet appropriately powerful. Violins are pitched forward a bit more than they are with the Model 1.5, but this is mostly in keeping with the greater dynamic reserves the Model 2.5 possesses. Dynamically, transitions are nicely graduated—the sensations of strings and winds winding up in intensity and slowly softening during the finale of *Wasps* are elements that one hears in the live experience.

The track "Darkness" from Leonard Cohen's *Old Ideas* disc reveals a lively vocal presence, expressive and intimate but in no way aggressive. The female backing chorus is suitably ethereal and bewitching in a space well behind Cohen's vocal. As for bass resolution, the 2.5 just seems to reach down and grab the deepest rumble of the electric bass in a way that only a floorstander with a spine is able to do.

The dual mid/woofer alignment doesn't just ground the speaker more solidly, it also enlivens dynamics in the octaves further up. And makes for a more fully and evenly weighted midrange. Part of the reason for this may be found in two allied areas. The mid/bass drivers are seven-inches rather than the single six-incher of the Model 1.5, plus the crossover point is 500Hz higher. The result is that the mid/bass driver is bolstered in the bass and lower mids by the second woofer, while the tweeter, operating now in a more comfortable range, is less likely to compress dynamically or hinder transient response. As in a three-way system it's a setup that usually improves dynamics and linearity of response.

Low-frequency extension is rock-solid to its published 40Hz level and rolls off swiftly below that. There's perceivable response below cutoff, but the roll-off is audible. Thus the very lowest pedal points of organ are expressed less as fundamental notes that can send seismic shudders through the listening room and more as components of the fundamental harmonic structure. On the other hand, heavy ambient reverb plays a significant role throughout Shelby Lynne's *Just A Little Lovin'* disc [Lost Highway]. Reproducing it is a thorny test of system's transparency and extension and noise floor. Ideally you should be able to follow its path like the tail of a comet as the reverberant information slowly fades into the blackness behind the system. This is an element that the Model 2.5 handled nicely.

While the quality of bass is very good, particularly as it relates to its immediate competition, the Model 2.5 grows less disciplined as it descends, and the specificity of individual images grows a bit lax and indistinct on the soundstage. The sound pressure forces within such a small enclosure are formidable. To my ear the Model 2.5 conveys a hint of cabinet signature that dampens bass speed a touch here and there. Also, and not unlike the Model 1.5, I still hear a small dip in the presence range that relaxes vocals somewhat. However, it's more vestigial in the Model 2.5. In addition, during Shelby Lynne's "Just A Little Lovin'," there were hints of extra sibilance on her voice, and the speaker didn't fully reproduce the air and openness of this cut as some top-tier soft domes do.

The evaluation period coincided nicely with the arrival of the newly remastered Beatles Box on LP. My interest in owning these albums (again!) was in comparing the differences, if any, between the new vinyl and the 2009 CD remasters. Since both were struck from Apple Records' archival digital masters (16-bit/44kHz for the CD and 24-bit/44kHz for the vinyl) I assumed they would bear more similarities than differences. I also thought this would



be a fine test for determining the full spectrum of resolving power of the Model 2.5. I wasn't wrong. The 2.5's were more than an excellent evaluative tool with sufficient transparency and lack of coloration to hone in on the most subtle distinctions. I began with *Sgt Pepper* switching between the new vinyl and the 1982 Mobile Fidelity version and then finally the CD remasters. In each case the Model 2.5 revealed changes in character of bass frequencies. For example, on a song like "Mother Nature's Son" from the Beatles' *White Album*, the Mofi seemed overweighted and a bit thumpy with a topky treble that magnified the vocal's edges, the CD a little over-controlled but tight with warmer mids and the new vinyl

had a more balanced combination of control and pitch—solidly packed but resonant with a more present, darker vocal range and a general improvement of dimensional components. It more strongly physicalized instruments and vocals in three-dimensional space. In the company of the Model 2.5, I was privy to enjoying an evermore intimate portrayal of the band.

Enthusiasm is infectious. When you are in its presence it's easy to get swept up in all the excitement, become impulsive, and perhaps come to regret the whole affair the morning after. This will not be the case with the Venere Model 2.5. It has its sonic priorities straight—not without some minor faults but always utterly musical. It's a speaker that will reward you for sticking to your budget. A true high-performance specialist that raises the ante in the sub-\$3k floorstanding sweeps. Bravo, Sonus faber! **tas**

SPECS & PRICING

Type: 2.5-way bass-reflex floorstanding loudspeaker
Drivers: 1" soft dome tweeter, 7" mid/woofer, 7" woofer
Frequency response: 40Hz-25kHz
Sensitivity: 89dB
Impedance: 6 ohms
Dimensions: 13.4" x 43.6" x 17.2"
Weight: 43 lbs.
Price: \$2498

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ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT
 Sota Cosmos Series IV turntable; SME V tonearm; Sumiko Palo Santos, Air Tight PC-3; Parasound JC 3 phono; Hegel H300 and Vitus Audio RI-100 integrated amplifiers; Synergistic Element Tungsten, Wireworld Platinum interconnect & speaker cables; AudioQuest Coffee USB & Firewire, Synergistic Tesla & Audience au24 powerChord, Wireworld Platinum power cords.