

# ITALIAN GRACE

## SONUS FABER'S GUARNERI MEMENTO DOES HONOR TO ITS HERITAGE

BY ERNIE FISHER



**W**HEN IT COMES to culture, style and tradition, it's hard to beat the Italians. The loudspeakers under review here are ideal examples; I can't think of another loudspeaker manufacturer that has taken the time and effort to finish a product to the level of craftsmanship and refinement seen here. The Guarneri Memento is named in tribute to the art of the Cremonese violin makers of old, as are the other family members of the Sonus faber Homage Series of loudspeakers — the Amati Annicersario and the Stradivari Homage.

Sonus faber, loosely translated from Latin as “handcrafted sound,” was established in 1983 by a gentleman named Franco Serblin. The company's philosophy has always been based on a three-fold foundation: driver development, crossover theory and cabinet design. Serblin continues to work as the company's chief creative designer and this is likely the reason why the industry regards Sf products as high-end, both in system design and style.

### Assembly & Appearance

THE SFs ARRIVE in three large boxes containing the stands, the Vicenca stone bases and a pair of speaker enclosures. Assembling the speaker components wasn't difficult as bolts, washers and allen key are supplied. A pair of WBT terminals point to single wiring for these fine designs.

The enclosure finish is not only a work of art, as Sf states that it also has a “profound effect” on the final sound — a claim with which I agree as I researched this issue years ago. The gorgeous finish is accomplished by first sealing the cabinets with albumin to prevent the many layers of varnish from penetrating the wood. At least 10 coats of varnish are applied and hand sanded before the final

### FACTS

#### MODEL

Sonus faber  
Guarneri Memento  
Loudspeaker

#### MANUFACTURER

Sonus faber

#### WEIGHT

187.5 lbs/pr

#### DIMENSIONS

15" (h) 8.25" (w) 15.25" (d)

#### Speaker and

#### stands:

48.5" (h) 12" (w) 15.75" (d)

#### RATING

♪♪♪

#### PRICE

\$15,995 Cdn

\$12,995 US

#### CONTACT

In North America:

Sumiko

2431 Fifth Street  
Berkeley, CA 94710  
(510) 843-4500  
sumikoaudio.net

Sonus faber builds speakers just like instrument makers behold—the Guarneri Memento.

[www.theinnerearmag.com](http://www.theinnerearmag.com)

polishing takes place. Sf employs a unique blend of organic substances including Venetian larch turpentine, linseed oil, propolis, wine alcohol, gamboges, copal gum and oliban in the finishing process. All work is done manually and the result is a mirror-like finish similar to that found on a violin. The Guarneri Mementos are available in both a piano gloss "Red Violin" or gloss "Graphite" finish. The grilles covering the baffles are unique as they are comprised of a series of silk strings. Strings (made of elastomer wrapped in silk) continue along the speaker stands, lending a well-finished, pleasing flow to the overall motif.

Each enclosure is constructed of 36 individual sections of selected solid maple in a constrained-mode damping arrangement designed to cancel undesirable resonance. The interior (side) walls are damped in specific areas with sheet copper, while small pieces of lead are used to further tune each cabinet and prevent resonances. The cabinet's visible sections are seamed with ebonized maple. The maple used for the enclosures is naturally dried for two years and then stabilized in kilns.

Each cabinet is hand-assembled using organic glue and heat-compression procedures identical to those used centuries ago in the manufacture of violins.

## The Sound

AS THE SFs have an efficiency rating of 88dB, I concluded that some amplifiers will not drive them to their full potential. This prompted me to connect them first to Simaudio's reference system, the A-8 power amp, the P-8 preamp and the Andromeda CD player (all reviewed in the last issue). This system combination resulted in very accurate sound, but not what I'd call perfect, due to the lack of some upper bass and high frequency harmonics. Some members of the listening panel disagreed with my deduction-but I stand firm and you'll understand why as you read on.

Thinking that my in-house single-ended Wyetech Labs Topaz amplifier (reviewed in Vol.13, No.2) might do a reasonable job, I connected it to the loudspeakers. BAM! I was right and, with this combination, most of the missing harmonics were recovered. The 18 watts/channel single-ended Topaz provided enough power to drive the loudspeakers to about 110dB without flinching — that's enough volume to disturb the neighbors and make your ears ring. The Topaz did what it does best: harmonics, detail, smoothness and beautifully executed tonal finesse. However, I wasn't entirely happy with the sound, thinking that there must be still another amplifier that

**The maple used for the enclosures is naturally dried for two years**

## TECHNOLOGY

**T**HE ENCLOSURE design of the Guarneri Memento is incredible, creating a nearly resonance-free environment for the driver complement. I verified this with the help of a pair of high-end stethoscopes that include positions for high and low frequencies. This revealed cabinet integrity second to none. I mentioned the immaculate finish in the body of the review, but I'd like to add here that it contributes to the overall sound, avoiding stray reflections from the body

of the cabinets, thereby allowing an unobstructed sound wave path. (I actually tested this years ago with a pair of equally well-finished loudspeakers).

The Guarneri Memento is a two-way system featuring a six-inch midrange/woofer and a one-inch tweeter. A small port located on the narrow rear section of the enclosure makes the speaker a bass reflex design which takes the back wave from the driver and couples it (in phase with the front

wave) to the outside air. In large enclosures this translates to higher efficiency, whereas in small enclosures, such as those under review, efficiency is kept rather low.

The Sonus faber-designed bass/midrange driver is unique in its ability to handle dynamics and provide proper linearity. The tweeter has extraordinary excursion linearity and boasts a ring radiator with a dual wave guide to assure proper dispersion. The crossover point is 2.5kHz, operating at 6dB

per octave. Frequency response is quoted from 39Hz to 30kHz; impedance is four ohms nominal; sensitivity is 88dB SPL, 2.83V/1m. Although power handling is quoted from 30 watts to 200 watts, the Sfs can handle much more power and I recommend at least 100 watts to get these babies to sing. Advances in metallurgy have led Sonus faber to adopt a structured silver-palladium alloy on all connector conductors to provide a totally coherent signal path.

could heighten the all-round performance even more. And there was.

Enter, the Bryston 28B SST monoblocks (reviewed in the last issue). Not only did this 1000 watts/channel solid state design drive the Fs with ease, the sound took on weight, body, texture, dynamics, detail and all the other good things reviewers (including this one) look for in a synergistic system set-up. Note that the Brystons are rated at 1000 watts with an 8-ohm load or 2000 watts into a 4 ohm load, which is the Guarneri Memento's impedance rating.

To test the Sf's ability to cope with a variety of music, I used classical, jazz, blues and rock'n roll albums. Cope it did, although more successfully with some music than with others. Classical music, including baroque ensembles and string quartets, for example, was handled very well, clearly revealing the timbre, or personality, of the instruments. Large orchestral works — music from Wagner, Beethoven, Rimsky-Korsakov and Tchaikovsky — really brought the Guarneri Mementos to life and they managed dynamic passages without constraint. Most impressive, although not entirely evident with all amplifiers I tried, was the Bryston/Sonus bass. It was rich, full-bodied and, though resolution suffered somewhat below about 42Hz, it was very gratifying.

The Guarneri Mementos perform remarkably well when driven hard, with volume levels up to 115dB. That's enough

to recreate sound pressure levels comparable to a live rock concert or a large orchestral arrangement with kettle drums, cannon shots and the kitchen sink. At lower volumes, the Guarneri Mementos sound well tempered and relaxed; easy on the ears. The overall voice of the loudspeakers is soft and subdued, never in your face even with driving dynamic musical program material; yet, musical spirit is maintained.

One note about the grilles: as they consist of small silk strings, they can, and will, resonate ever-so-slightly at high volumes and I recommend removing them on those occasions. However, the resonances are inaudible at low volume levels.

### Synopsis & Commentary:

ALTHOUGH IT MAY take patience, the most important issue is to find the type of amplification that suits the loudspeaker and personal taste. As you can see, I have tried to "extract" the best sound from the Sonus fabers by seeking a synergistic coupling with other components. If you follow my system recommendation, you will get what I consider the best sound. I realize that my opinion may be construed as subjective, and others may not agree. However, I think I have a good understanding of high-end audio and, as I regard synergy as a primary concern for achieving the best possible performance, I selected well-matched components and took great care in the system set-up.

I trust that the North American distributor is cognizant of the importance of choosing dealers who are qualified to accomplish the



The Guarneri Memento enclosures rest on solid Vincenca stone bases to assure firm footing.

task of matching components. However, even the "qualified" sometimes fail to offer the best system solutions as they can only use components they sell. I sell no components and I have a number of amplifiers, cables and source components in-house with which to experiment. Based on this, a very time consuming process, I envision a logical and, hopefully, a synergistic amplifier match.

I believe that most single-ended vacuum tube amps will not drive the Sfs, but if you have one already, I recommend you take it to the dealer and test how it handles 88dB sensitivity — some will (like the Wyetech Labs Topaz), many won't. Any powerful solid state amp (around 100 watts/channel) will do the job. However, more powerful ones, such as the Bryston 28B SST, will result in significantly better control of bass frequencies, clearer midrange and greater body to the music. The Bryston monoblock amps provide a stunning image when coupled with the Sonus fabers, and they will never run out of steam. If tube gear is your passion, you will have to find a high-current amp with beefy power supplies that delivers loads of voltage to the speaker terminals.

In my final reflections I'd like to connect the Guarneri Memento's sound quality to their appearance. These speakers simply cannot be ignored either by listeners or by interior decorators. They sound great, they look great and they will affirm their proud owner's concern for music and style.

### Footnote

**GUARNERI** — FOR WHOM the model under review is named — was a pupil of *Nicolo Amati*, the famous violin maker (1596-1684). The founder of the Cremona school was *Andrea Amati* who lived from 1520 to 1578 and whose earliest violins date from c.1564. His labels bore the name *Amadus* and he is credited with the basic design of the modern violin. His sons were *Antonio Amati* and *Girolamo* or *Geronimo Amati*, who worked together and closely followed their father's patterns in making violins of graceful shape and sweet tone with a characteristic amber-coloured varnish finish. *Nicolo Amati*, son of *Girolamo*, brought the *Amati* violin to its height after 1645. Among *Nicolo's* other pupils was another great violin maker, *Antonio Stradivari*.

# Subscribe

## save up to 42%

### off the newsstand price



#### Subscription Rates

1 yr	(4 iss.)	\$16.00
2 yrs	(8 iss.)	\$30.00
3 yrs	(12 iss.)	\$42.00

Canadians add 6% G.S.T.  
US subscribers pay in US dollars  
Rates are for US & Canada only  
Cheque or Money Order

The Inner Ear  
24 Hermitage Blvd., Markham,  
Ontario, Canada L6E 2H5  
Tel: (416) 297-7968  
Fax: (416) 297-0311  
email: innerear@rogers.com  
www.theinnerearmag.com

T  
H  
E **inner ear**  
DISCOVER HIGH END