

Sonus faber Venere 3.0 Speakers
**ROLLING OUT
THE RED CARPET**

By Rob Johnson



I always look forward to the arrival of houseguests. And, as far as visitors go, the Sonus faber Venere 3.0 speakers make a great first impression—even before the music begins.

With these speakers, priced at \$3,498 per pair, Sonus faber made some compromises, but did so without losing brand cred. To achieve the speakers' reasonable price, Sonus faber moved production offshore to China, in a factory closely resembling its Italian facility. The 3.0s are the flagship of the Venere series, which abandons the classic Sonus faber look, borrowing instead the lyre-shaped cabinet of the company's top-of-the-line Aida speakers. The 3.0s are available with a glossy finish, in either black or white, as well as with a walnut-wood finish for an extra \$500 per pair.

After escorting the speakers up to my listening room and unboxing them, I feel under-dressed in my T-shirt. My review speakers feature white side panels, complemented by a black top and front. I'm tempted to ask the speakers if they prefer their martinis shaken or stirred—the cocktail party music would soon follow. *(continued)*



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REVIEW

You Look Maaaaarvelous!

Sonus faber describes the speaker as having a "lyre shape." I describe it as being shaped a bit like a pear when looking at it from above, with the narrow part at the back raised slightly. The speakers are squared off at the front to create a flat plane for the drivers. Ultimately, this combination of angles, curves and lines gives them a sculptural aesthetic—or perhaps a look similar to those of the robots in Bjork's "All is Full of Love" video. But let's stick with the former descriptor.

The Veneres are sizeable floorstanders: about 4 feet tall, with enough room to house a silk dome tweeter, a 5-inch midrange driver and two 6-inch bass drivers, plus a rectangular port at the bottom. The base is made of strong glass with aluminum connectors at the edges, where you affix the tapered, spiked cone feet. This combination provides a solid anchor for the Veneres, but take note that the spikes are quite sharp at the business end; they will easily pierce carpet or leave noticeable scratches on your wooden floor—or your foot. Consider yourself warned.

Two sets of binding posts facilitate bi-wiring or bi-amping, and the included jumpers make it easy for those of us with only one set of speaker cables.

Strike a Pose

Eager to see if the speakers' sonic capabilities match their good looks, I begin the setup process. The Veneres are fairly easy for one person to move. I appreciate their 47-pound weight (as does my back) after having lugged my reference Piega P10 speakers out of their usual position, which is where the Veneres' placement process begins. After trying to fine-tune their placement in my 17-foot-by-20-foot listening space, I find that the starting point ultimately offers the best acoustics—about 4 feet from the back wall, 2 feet from the side wall, and about 8 feet apart.

(continued)



REVIEW

After some toe-in experimentation, I determine that the Veneres require only a small amount for best imaging. Like two polite and conversational party guests, the speakers are not too finicky about where they stand, and their oration inspires active listening.

The *Best Of Chesky Classics & Jazz & Audiophile Test Disc* offers some helpful tracks for speaker setup, demonstrating the ways in which surround sound can be simulated using a pair of speakers. In one example, David Chesky walks around an omnidirectional microphone tapping on a tom-tom drum. In another example, the experiment is simulated using digital-processing technology. When placed well, good speakers can make Chesky and his drum appear to travel a circular path around the listening room. Very good speakers placed optimally can make it seem as if Mr. Chesky is walking behind the listening position, which is especially noticeable with the digitally processed track. The Veneres prove very capable of this auditory illusion.

Start the Show!

Once optimized, I'm excited to fire up the speakers—and am quickly impressed. It's clear that Sonus faber put its biggest investment into the Venera 3.0 where the money belongs: the sonics.

First of all, these speakers do a shockingly good job of extending the perceived width of the stage on which the musicians are playing. Aimee Mann's "One," from the soundtrack to P.T. Anderson's 1999 film *Magnolia*, starts very simply, with her voice front and center, which the Veneres render



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very well. Later, with the onset of additional instruments, the song explodes out to each side of the soundstage. The speakers manage to bring those bits of music around the edges of the room into the listening area. The same is true with larger orchestral pieces, like Vivaldi's "Four Seasons" concertos. These speakers incorporate that broader stereo image seamlessly into my listening space, with sound floating beautifully around the room.

I will say that the front-to-back depth of the speakers' perceived stage is limited, as one might expect from any speaker in this range. *Live at Luther College*, from Dave Matthews and Tim Reynolds, is a great test for this, as individual audience members shout various requests and comments toward the musicians. Elements in the distant of the recorded space seem pushed forward toward the plane provided by the Veneres.

While tight and tuneful in the bass registers, the Veneres do not dip below 38 Hz, according to Sonus faber's specs, which is confirmed by my own test tracks. Madonna's "Drowned World/Substitute For Love" offers some very low notes, which are barely audible through the Veneres. But for most people, especially those living in small spaces or condos, limited low frequency is a desirable characteristic to reduce late-night complaints from sleeping neighbors. Those seeking very low, foundation-rattling bass punch may find the Veneres a bit light for their tastes. For most types of music, the bass of the Veneres balances well with the overall mix. (continued)

REVIEW



I enjoy Portishead's "Cowboys," but the vocal effects in this recording can make Beth Gibbons' voice quite fatiguing on an overly revealing system. The song illustrates the Veneres' extended but forgiving highs. The speakers let the overall musical experience shine through, as opposed to drawing the listener's attention to a single, hard vocal edge.

While some more expensive speakers reproduce more nuances, the Veneres tend to take the high road, as if you are sitting further back in the auditorium, where each onstage pick of the guitar, draw of the bow across the cello strings or squeak of the saxophone diminishes sonically over a distance. For example, Beck's "Lonesome Tears" features a single triangle strike with an extended ring; some of the immediacy, sparkle and ambient decay is lost with the Veneres' reproduction, but they still do a mighty good job of it.

Here Come the Papparazzi

It's obviously not fair or helpful for you, the reader, to compare the Veneres to my Piega

P10s, which start at \$9,500. In absolute terms, the Veneres give up some transparency, realism and detail compared to higher-end speakers. But for \$3,498, the level of balance these speakers offer is stunning.

Sonus faber's voicing choices for this speaker are well thought out, being more musical than analytical. The Veneres are well balanced for many types of music, including rock, classical and jazz, as opposed to excelling only at one genre. They reproduce vocals wonderfully, bringing them to the front instead of recessing them into the mix. The bottom line is that the price is right and the speakers provide countless hours of listening pleasure.

It's very exciting to experience wonderful products like these, which can fit realistically into many audiophiles' budgets. It's hard not to give the Veneres 3.0 speakers an enthusiastic recommendation. A few compromises aside, they offer very impressive audio performance. Combining this with their attractive, modern look and bargain \$3,498 price tag makes these a stellar value and very much worth your audition.

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Additional Listening

By Jeff Dorgay

After spending some quality time with Sonus faber's flagship Aida, I found it very intriguing to see just how much of this lineage could be achieved in such a reasonably priced speaker. All of the style cues suggest that this new speaker has come from the same brain in terms of style. For those not intimately familiar with the top of the Sonus faber range, you'd be hard pressed to tell the Venere 3.0s were made in a Chinese factory—they are that good.

Instead of trying to make the speaker cover a wider range while sacrificing quality, Sonus faber settled for a bit less ultimate bass weight to help keep the range in top shape. Unless you are playing Deadmau5 at club levels in a big room, I doubt you will find these speakers lacking.

The Venere not only has a heavy dose of Sonus faber heritage, it is also a nice balance between the warmer, more forgiving SF of old and the resolution that the Aida brings to the table. The Venere's 90-dB sensitivity rating makes the speaker an excellent match for just about any amplifier, tube or transistor with more than 25 watts per channel on tap. Whether I mated the Veneres to the PrimaLuna Prologue Premium power amplifier recently in for review, (35wpc/EL34 tubes) or my vintage Pass Labs Aleph 3 (30wpc/solid-state Class A), I couldn't find myself ever requiring more power than this within the 13-foot-by-16-foot confines of room two.

This combination of beautiful sound, timeless visual style and high build quality wins the Sonus faber Venere 3.0 speakers one of our Exceptional Value Awards for 2013. These are top performers in their price range. Those wishing for a wood cabinet can step up to a walnut wood finish for \$3,998 per pair. ●



Sonus Faber Venere 3.0 Speakers

MSRP: \$3,498/pair
(gloss white or black)
\$3,998/pair (walnut wood)

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