

Franco Serblin Accordo

Christiaan Punter | 12 February 2018



For the longest time, Franco Serblin was the owner and chief designer of Sonus Faber. In 2006 he decided to sell the company but in 2010 he started a new company named after himself. Unfortunately, Franco passed away in 2013, not too long after he finished the design of his new speaker line. Fortunately, the company is continued by his son-in-law Massimiliano Favella, and so his creations live on.

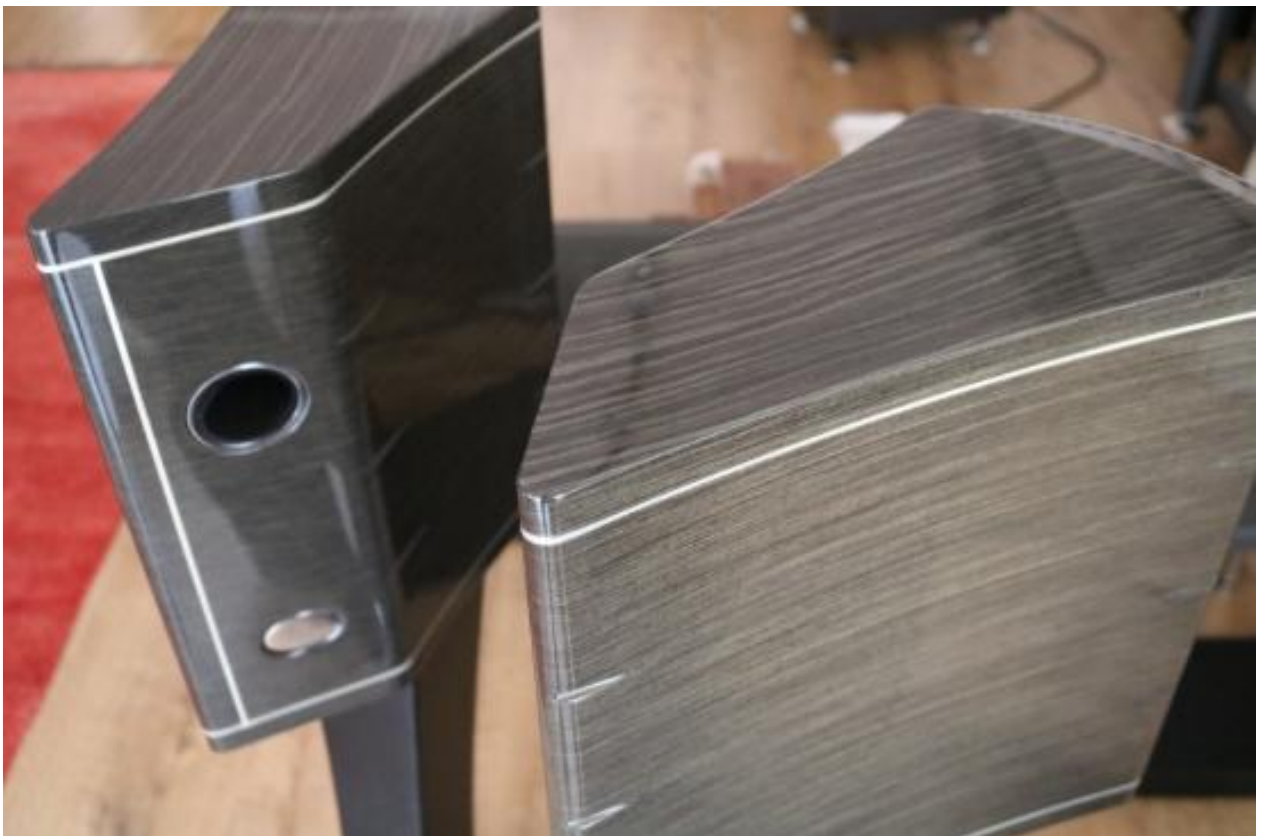
As Franco states on the website: “Lutes and violin, through the use of wood, strings, their forms and harmony of their constitution, have inspired my systems”. This inspiration literally oozes from the speakers and the detail that went into their design. The Franco Serblin speaker line consists of three models: the large Ktema, the small Accordo and the smaller Ligneia. It is the mid-model that I am reviewing here.

Like Sonus Faber speakers, the Franco Serblin speakers are incredibly artful pieces of furniture. As far as I can judge without hearing any two models of these brands in the same room, I’d say that there are some parallels between the typical classic Sonus Faber sound and the current modern Sonus Faber sound. For example, the Accordo’s have the typically pure, communicative and natural midrange of the older Sonus Fabers along with the resolution, fluidity and openness of the current Sonus Fabers. A perfect marriage so to say.



Positioning

Any speaker benefits from careful positioning but the Accordo's tend to sound highly involving even with little effort. It is really not hard at all to get them to produce beautiful music. They *do* like to have some free space around them but precise placement and the amount toe in are not critical to the overall sound balance. Soundstage width is affected by their relative position but



this is quite easy to get right. If you want to extract the maximum from them in terms of imaging however then it really pays to carefully find the best positions and this means accuracy to the centimetre. This will yield gains in focus and depth of imaging.



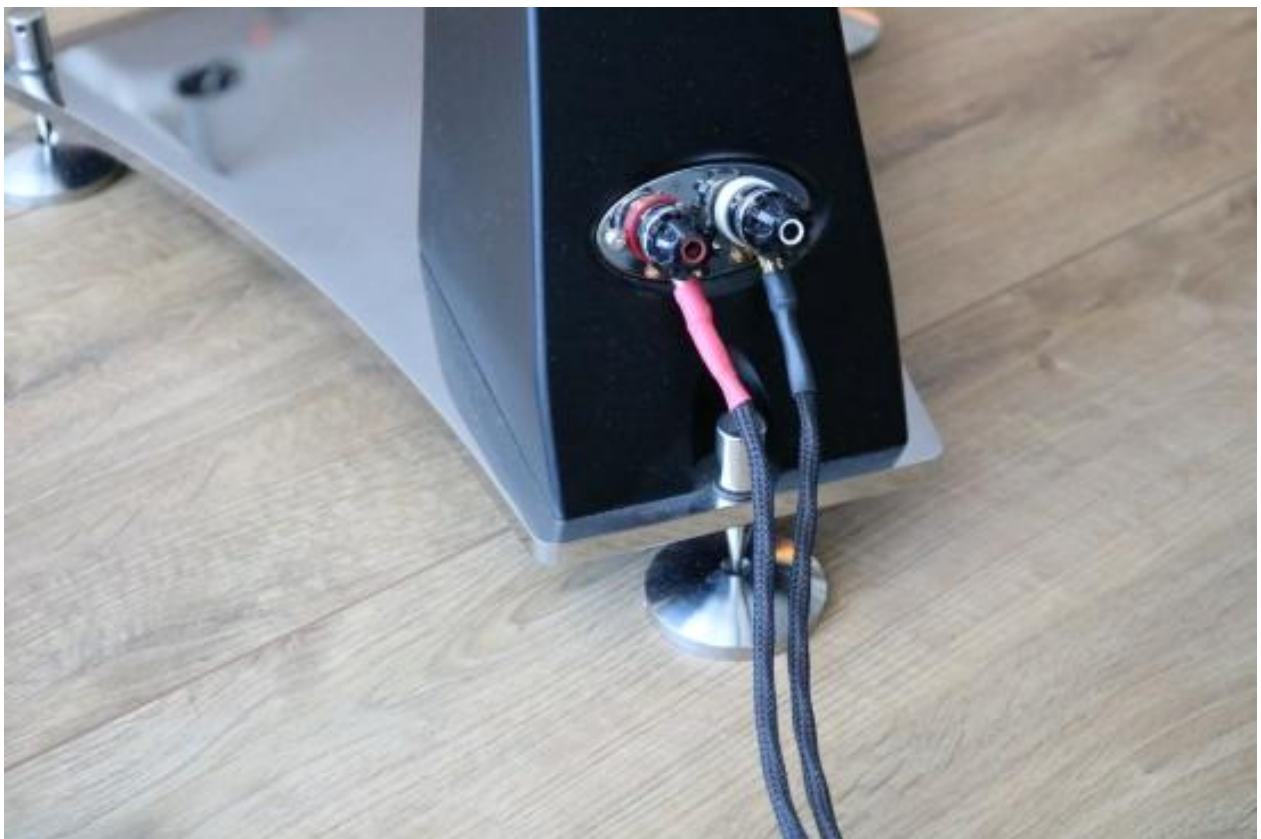
Listening

For me, they sound best with some toe-in, but not too much. The speakers already have this aspect built in, courtesy of their angled front baffle. They sound neutral from top to bottom, with no audible peaks or dips and with very gentle bass roll off. Naturally, the small woofers and



small cabinets do not allow truly deep bass but this is not at all evident unless you play music with unnaturally deep bass notes. The speakers image freely and widely, filling even my relatively large room easily. Their focus is good, better than with the old Electa Amators for example but not entirely as crisp as with the Wilsons. Likewise, imaging depth and layering in the depth plane are good but not state of the art. But that's not what these speakers are about. They are all about naturalness and about simply allowing the listener to enjoy all the music you care to play.

Timbrally these speakers are simply super-natural. They sound utterly lifelike, immediately credible and emotionally involving. With these speakers, you won't be hunting for audiophile aspects but you will simply be enjoying the music, certainly when they are driven by a fine tube amp such as the PrimaLuna DiaLogue Premium. As I am writing this I realise that I have not even for a moment thought about listening to the speakers using any of my other amps. That's a bit of a shame really, but alas the speakers are gone now. It does signify the extent of the satisfaction obtained from the Accordo's. They really make you want to listen to music, not fiddle with ancillaries.



Above: high quality, latest generation, WBT connectors.

Perspective

As illogical as it may sound, I can also draw some parallels with the Wilson Watt/Puppy 8's. It so happened that I was listening to the Accordo's while surfing on the iPad and forgot about the test altogether when my attention was drawn to the music again during a particularly beautiful passage. At this moment I thought that I was listening to the Wilsons and commented to myself out loud how great they sounded only to realize moments later that I was actually listening to the Accordo's. This not only confounded my initial impression of their superb naturalness but also made me realize that the Accordo's really are very neutral and have the resolution and imaging to make me think, if only for a while, that I am listening to very carefully set up Wilsons.



When switching back to the Wilsons the main difference is that they are even more neutral and especially more transparent. Naturally, the Wilsons have a much bigger enclosure and double, larger woofers but since I have them set up so that the room contributes much less to their sound via room modes, they sound much smaller than they are, in a good way. And this also brings them closer to the Accordo's, especially when playing acoustic or vocal music. Of course, the Wilsons are easily recognisable when playing.



Above: the grill can easily be removed by gently pulling off the top and bottom parts.

I keep coming back to the fact that the curvaceous Accordo's sound incredibly natural. I had already noticed this during my earlier concentrated listening but this aspect further sank in when listening from the next room behind the computer. They won't trick one into thinking that a big PA system is in the next room, but with acoustic music, they do sound as if the singers might actually be right there.



I mentioned the PrimaLuna amp. Recently upgraded with KT150 it compliments the Accordo's beautifully, providing a solid and sonorous bass that is much larger and more powerful than reasonably can be expected from these small speakers. They easily have enough bass to make the best of most music. They achieve this by sounding even and mature, not by having the bass port tuned to supply a hump further up to trick the listener into thinking there is more bass than there really is. Perhaps it's in part due to its felt-covering but the bass reflex port really is inaudible. The bass rolls off naturally and this is inaudible with just about any acoustical music. Only when playing heavy R&B, Dub-Techno or other electronic music with ridiculously low bass, one can hear that some of the lower notes simply go missing. But to be fair to some extent this is also the case with the Wilsons if the notes are deep enough.

The above assessments are made using the ideal setup in this room, not allowing the room's natural resonances to color the sound. With the Wilsons that would result in an annoying midbass boom, but when I tried the listening position closer to the rear wall with the Accordo's, this really added positively to their bass response.

Conclusion

Older Sonus Faber favorites can sound great but usually, I find them to sound a little too coarse, too rough, especially in the treble. Current Sonus Fabers are much more refined but somehow I also find that some of the purity and midrange magic of the classic models has gone. The Franco Serblin Accordos manage to strike a perfect balance between these two extremes. They sound



fluid and refined but are also hugely communicative and immediately emotionally engaging. They demand a serious investment but reward with a sensuous luxury as well as an incredibly natural sound that I have not heard from any dynamic speakers costing less. By always allowing the listener to focus on the emotional message, not the technical details, they encourage to stop the upgrade process and just enjoy the music.

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