





FRANCO SERBLIN
ACCORDO ESSENCE

By K.E. Heartsong

FRANCO SERBLIN ACCORDO ESSENCE

For quite some time, I sought to assemble the “system that never was.”

This represented a determined search for my next stereo system, which was to have tubed amplification. I was leaving behind a decent solid state stereo system, though I can only remember the Mark Levinson No. 39 CD player, and the B&W 804 speakers. The Mark Levinson No. 39 CD player was one of those components, beautifully constructed, stylish, sleek, and solid, that I long believed I should never have sold. There have been perhaps a handful of those “should have kept” components over the course of what has been a long stereo journey

The “system that never was” consisted of the Meridian 506 CD player, the EAR V20 Integrated amplifier, and a pair of Sonus Faber Grand Piano speakers. I had listened to the system in a San Francisco audio store back then, and also in a New York audio store while travelling on business. It was definitely

the system to beat at the time, as each piece on its own was quite good, but the synergy, as I remember, was wonderfully musical, with good detail, and it was a real looker. The Sonus Faber Grand Piano, a gorgeous

speaker, was my first introduction to a speaker designed by Franco Serblin. The Grand Piano featured glossy black side panels and leather-wrapped front and back panels that cried opulence, despite its non-opulent price tag. Ultimately, I would never own that system, as my software startup was in the throes of its first funding and disposable income for such a purchase was neither advisable nor practicable.

Subsequently, I would listen to just about all of Sonus Faber’s beautifully made monitors—the Electa

Amator, Minima Amator, Liuto Monitor, etc.—loving some while merely liking others. Mr. Serblin’s speakers, however, have always held a respected place in my memory, and their styling has always been luxurious.

This brings me to the review of one of the late Franco Serblin’s more recent speaker





Vincent Van Gogh - Pine Trees against an Evening Sky, 1889

FRANCO SERBLIN ACCORDO ESSENCE

inspirations/creations, the Accordo Essence. Like its predecessors, the Accordo Essence is a beautifully constructed work of art that may well find its way into a modern art museum soon, perhaps as staged in a model Mid-Century Modern home. But how does the Franco Serblin Accordo Essence sound?

REFRAIN: Unlike most other reviews, this review will be non-sequential, as it will start with how the component actually sounds and not the process of physically “undressing” it and/or laying out its various parts, specifications, etc. Think of this review then, as a non-linear movie—*Memento*, *Kill Bill*, *Arrival*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, etc—that, likewise, starts at the end and winds its way to the beginning.

THE SYSTEM - TWO CHANNEL

- Grimm Audio MU2 Streamer/DAC/Preamplifier
- AIR-TIGHT ATC - 5s Preamplifier
- AIR-TIGHT ATM - 1E Amplifier
- ATMA-SPHERE - GEM Integrated
- LYRIC Ti 100 Single-Ended Integrated
- Franco Serblin Accordo Essence Speakers
- Fern & Roby Raven III Speakers
- Kubala-Sosna Interconnects (XLR, RCA), Speaker Cables, Power Cords
- Grimm Audio SQM Interconnects (XLR, RCA)
- TORUS AUDIO Power Conditioner

- RSX BEYOND, MAX Power-cords
- SEISMION Amplifier Stand (powered)

THE SETUP

My new listening room's dimensions are 17 feet (5.18 m) by 24 feet (7.32 m). The system is placed along the short wall, with the left side of the room open. The floor is carpeted, and while I prefer area rugs, the carpeting works very well with regard to taming reflections and other unwanted anomalies (there is concrete underneath the carpet). The speakers were placed 3 feet from the front wall, 9 feet apart, and 2.5 feet from the right side wall. Toe-in saw the speakers pointing almost directly at the listening seat.

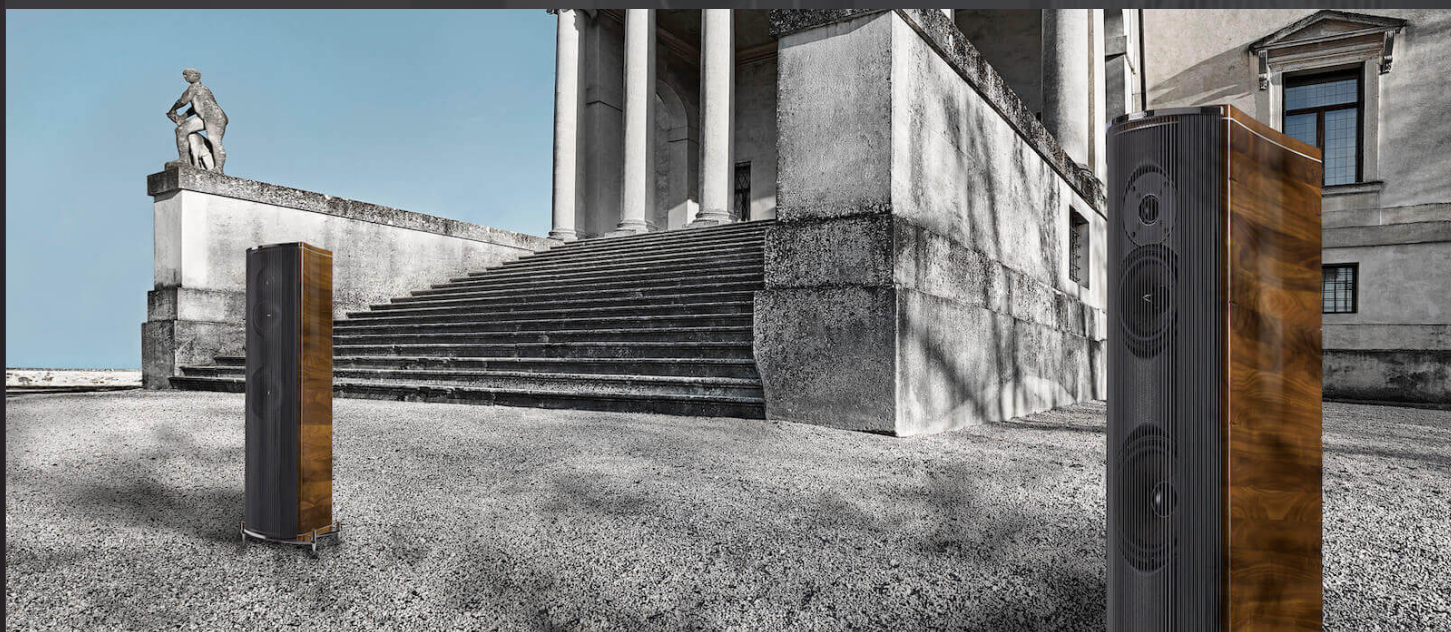
The Franco Serblin Accordo Essence speakers were relatively easy to place and subsequently tweak to solidify the centre image, provide the widest and deepest staging, and tighten the bass.

THE SOUND

The research or “scuttlebutt” on the Franco Serblin Accordo Essence is that it takes a goodly amount of power—100-plus watts—to drive the speakers to reasonable listening levels, though optimum room size or volume level are rarely if ever considered in these pronouncements. The last two points—room size and volume level—are quite important, as they are the true arbiters—“decision-makers”—with regard to the power required of nearly any speaker.

The room that houses my reference gear is not necessarily small, nor is it a large room, but would best be described as a medium-sized room, on the verge of meeting the “golden ratio” requirements, but not quite. I have never really listened to music at stadium

The reference integrated—Lyric Audio Ti 100 MkII (20-watts)—given my proclivities, drove the Accordo Essence well, providing a wide, deep soundstage with quite good dynamics, exceptional tone/timbre and texture, with good bass, a superb midrange,



concert levels or air plane engine equivalents, but at medium to low volumes. And with my preference for jazz, blues, folk, classical (chamber, solo performances), opera, and choral music, I was very curious to test the “soundness” of the claims. I am a bit of a contrarian.

So for this contradictory review, I assembled several low-wattage amplification systems—the Air Tight ATC-1 preamplifier/ATM-1 amplifier (36 watts), Lyric Audio Ti MkII Single-Ended Triode integrated (20 watts), and Atma-Sphere GEM integrated (5 watts).

and first-rate treble response. The Air Tight ATC-1s preamplifier and the ATM-1s amplifier combo, however, via the additional 16 watts, improved on all aspects of the Accordo Essence’s performance, with a much tighter and deeper bass response. And in truth, the Atma-Sphere GEM integrated, with its 5 watts, seemed, well, gratuitous and incompatible, and it was. The Air Tight combo, the optimum low-wattage amplification in-house, would be used for the majority of the Accords Essence’s review.

If the Accordo Essence speakers demonstrated anything, and they did in fact

FRANCO SERBLIN ACCORDO ESSENCE

demonstrate much, of note were its transparency, exceptional resolving abilities, and its capacity to easily present detail in abundance. Further, its staging brought forth great width and depth and a persuasive sense of intimacy when called for. Separation of performers across the stage and at depth was also very good, and air and ambiance always gave dimension to the venue in question. And I remind you that this was done with 36 watts of power, in a medium-sized room, and at medium listening levels (8:30-9 o'clock on the Air Tight ATC-1s volume dial).

The Air Tight ATM-1s amplifier and its quartet of EL34 tubes imparted a texture for which EL34 tubes are well known and which the Accordo Essence aptly portrayed. This gave the vocals gravitas, palpability, a richness that found Andy Bey's "Angel Eyes" (*American Song*, Savoy) the most moving and accurate portrayal that I have ever heard. I once sat several feet from Andy at Pearl's Jazz Club in San Francisco when he sang "Angel Eyes," and this combo of

components had me there once again. Beautiful!

As mentioned above, the Franco Serblin Accordo Essence's volumetric cube—its soundstage—is quite wide and deep, with good height. Spatial recreation—horizontal positioning, layering to depth, relative spacing, air, and ambiance—are superb.

BASS

One of my go-to bass review tracks is Delfeayo Marsalis' "Secret Love Affair" (*The*

Last Southern Gentleman, Troubadour Jazz Records), which is a dynamic, superbly constructed piece with a good measure of low-end drive from an "extended" drum kit and an upright bass, to which the Accordo Essence responded very well. Dave

Holland's upright bass on "B-40/M23-6K/RS-W" and "Emerald Tears" (*Emerald Tears*, ECM) was fast and tight, its tone and timbre beautifully differentiated, and the Accordo Essence, with all of 36 watts, did not miss a beat. To reiterate, the Air Tight combo's 36 watts brought superb renderings of all the bass-rich pieces with which it was presented in relation to my specific listening requirements.



MIDRANGE

As I mentioned earlier, Andy Bey's "Angel Eyes" is exquisitely presented via the Accordo Essence. Andy's voice is rich, textured, palpable, with a clarity, transparency, and fine resolution of detail that had me once again at Pearl's Jazz Club, just a few feet from his piano. I had to repeat this track and just listen for a while. It was a wonderful night, followed by Chinese food at a nearby "dive" in North Beach with excellent food and good company.

Joan Shelley's "We'd Be Home" (*Joan Shelley, No Quarter*) plays now, and the guitars that precede Joan's voice have invited themselves into my listening room. They are soon followed by Joan's sonorous voice, which finds her seated between them and also in-room. The clarity, the inherent detail, the fine resolution is brilliant. The Accordo Essence and the Air Tight combo and of course, the Grimm Audio MU2 have again rendered into three dimensions what many stereo systems render as two, un-engaging, thin, distant portrayals of the same. Bravo.

TREBLE+

Yes, it's time for that track again, Dave Brubeck's "Take Five" (*Time Out*, Columbia-Legacy). Why? There are so many systems, regardless of their price tag, that can turn Joe Morello's cymbals into something frying under the high heat of a gas stove on a too humid midwestern day, and that ain't pretty,

folks. This is not what the Accordo Essence does by any means, as it is at the other end of the spectrum. The Accordo Essence brings very good treble extension, clarity, and resolution via its 29 mm silk-dome tweeter. Joe Morello's cymbals are beautifully and clearly resolved, with air and ambiance aplenty giving spatial/dimensional detail to his drum kit and richness, texture, and tone that scream out "in-room," as if you were expecting something else.

DESIGN LOOK AND FEEL

Absolutely gorgeous. This is an exceptionally beautiful speaker, probably one of the most beautiful speakers that I have, to date, reviewed. No, make that the most gorgeous speaker. Made of solid wood, a Franco Serblin trait, the front expertly wrapped in leather, fitted with aluminum-magnesium parts "to control resonance" and chrome, everything speaks to master furniture design in the form of a speaker, which is stunning.

The Franco Serblin Accordo Essence would work well, better than any previously mentioned speaker, in a San Francisco or Paris pied-à-terre, an isolated designer home in the Santa Barbara (CA) hills, or an inner-city mansion in, say, Chicago.

CONCLUSION

Well, this contrarian review has uncovered an important truth with regard to the Franco Serblin Accordo Essence speakers. You don't need a lot of power to drive them, especially

FRANCO SERBLIN ACCORDO ESSENCE

if you listen at low to medium volume (like most audiophiles, music lovers) have a small-to medium-sized listening room (like most audiophiles, music lovers), and don't listen to large orchestral pieces, ponderous rap/hip-hop, acid rock, or the like (like most audiophiles, music lovers).

That said, the Franco Serblin Accordo Essence speakers easily go with the flow of the accompanying amplification. They played beautifully with the single-ended Lyric Ti 100 MkII (20 watts), with an expanded soundstage, beautiful midrange, and soaring highs in my medium-sized room at medium volume. The Air Tight ATC-1 preamplifier/ATM-1 amplifier (36 watts) combo extended low-end weight and gravitas while providing exceptional midrange tone and texture, and nicely extended highs.

Lastly, the Franco Serblin Accordo Essence speakers are supremely musical, refined, and technically accomplished, featuring an outstanding design motif that will eventually be curated for a modern art museum.

Therefore, we give the Franco Serblin Accordo Essence our GOLD KEYNOTE AWARD for technical excellence, profound musicality, and a physical beauty that few speakers can even hope to attain.

Pros: Incredible midrange, with exceptional resolution, clarity, detail, tone, timbre and

texture. For the right audiophile and the right room, even at low wattage, perfection.

Cons: Its ability to scale relies on the power at hand, given the above caveats.

THE TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Franco Serblin Accordo Essence

- Frequency response: 35Hz - 22KHz, in-room
- Nominal impedance: 4ohm
- Sensitivity: 88dB/2.83V/1m
- Minimum power amplifier: 20W/channel
- Dimensions: 1100 x 230 x 430 (HxWxD)
- Weight: 60 kg/pair speaker unpacked 70 kg /pair packed
- Finish: Solid walnut - Metal parts of chrome and aluminum

THE DISTRIBUTOR

AXISS AUDIO USA, LLC

Franco Serblin Accordo Essence: \$18,975

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