

Review

Standmount speakers + stands

Franco Serblin ACCORDO

Price (per pair, together with stands): 6500 euro **Manufacturer:**

Laboratorium Srl

Contact: Franco Serblin Via Sardegna

52 36100 Vicenza Italy

Manufacturer's website:

www.franco-serblin.it

Country of origin: Italy

Product provided for testing by:

[Grobel Audio](#)

Text: Wojciech Pacuła | **Photos:**

Wojciech Pacuła, Franco Serblin
(photo no. 20)

Translation: Andrzej Dziadowiec



Published on: May 1. 2012, No. 96

As we read in company materials, the latest speakers designed by Franco Serblin, Sonus Faber founder and director (between 1983-2005), in their form allude to their designer's sources of fascination – mini-monitors. Although they have much in common with the Ktêmas that we have reviewed. They resemble the latter in their curved side and front panels, and the engineering technology.

The new speakers from Mr. Serblin are two-way designs permanently attached to their dedicated stands encasing the crossovers. The cabinets are made of hard wood, decoupled with aluminum-magnesium components to obtain resonance control. They use two drivers - a new to the market, 29-mm soft dome tweeter, designed by Ragnar Lion, and the already known, but highly modified 150-mm Scan-Speak mid-woofer from the highest Revelator series. Its sliced paper cone features characteristic slices – going from the middle coil to the outer suspension.

Mr. Serblin dedicated particularly long time to phase optimization of the drivers – starting with the crossover, most likely of the first order, through damping the bass-reflex to finish off with the cabinet shape. And the fact that bass-reflex is not directed to the rear but into the space between the drivers is not coincidental either. Listening sessions fully confirmed this particular aspect of sound reproduction.

Additionally, woofer application is such that the bass is very clean, fast; it resembles a sealed enclosure.



The speakers look out of this world, that is completely unlike anything we are familiar with. And while rubber "strings" in place of the front grills are a direct reference to Franco Serblin's older designs, and the large, chrome-plated stand bases resemble the cabinets of both the Ktêmas and the new Sonus Faber designs, the combination of all these elements is absolutely innovative. However, it is so unusual that you will need to decide on your own whether such a combination is kitschy or unique.

SOUND

Krakov Sonic Society - a false start

My encounter with the newest Franco Serblin's "baby" began like a Hitchcock film – from an earthquake. This was the plan: first, a listening session during the Krakow Sonic Society meeting, followed by a test review in my house. KSS was supposed to compare the Accordos to the Sonus Faber Guarnieri Homage monitors and the Electa Amator (I) (KSS meeting comparing these speakers <http://www.highfidelity.pl/artykuly/0502/sonus.html>),

because both designs, each in its own way, are a good indicator of what Mr. Serblin can do with small speakers. They were to be driven by the top Ancient Audio Silver Grand Mono power amplifier, delivering 18W per channel from two 300B tubes in parallel, in this case the Takatsuki TA-300B (KSS meeting dedicated to these tubes <http://www.highfidelity.pl/@kts-1076&lang=>). As rumour had it, the Accordo model was specifically designed with low power systems in mind, namely 300B tubes. Hence, the speakers' quite high efficiency and custom tweeter, specially design for them. It was confirmed by Mr. Serblin's Polish distributor, Grobel Audio, which sent the company materials contained in the press in the news sections, including "High Fidelity" she said this: "The Accordos do not require lots of amps. They need 20 watts to be fully driven and will therefore make an excellent match for many tube amps of moderate power output as well as solid-state amps, especially those working in pure class A. It should not come as a surprise to anybody, since Franco Serblin can perfectly use the "first watts", essential for accurate reproduction of acoustic instruments, so much valued by him."

After the meeting at Janusz place and after our attempt to drive the Accordos with 18 watts of high-end I have to assume that the distributor based his description only on marketing materials from the manufacturer, not on his own experiences with these speakers; that he simply had never listened to them. With low-power amplifier, no matter how good, the Accordos sound tragically. Unequivocally and irrevocably.

We tried to position them in every possible way, they had been playing for several days before the meeting, set up in the same place, and it was only getting worse, i.e. Janusz – which he admitted to us after the meeting – was more and

more fed up with them and suffered terribly. In a large room, well away from the rear wall, where the Guarnieris and the Electas sounded just awesome, the Accordos sounded like a broken radio. For some time we thought that we had not connected the mid-woofer, so bright, so shrill was their sound. There were about eight of us and every single person left the meeting displeased and confused. And yet, after all, the speakers were designed by a person who has truly gifted hands, who knows a lot about monitors, the speaker design that he loves above all others. And here, his most recent design turned out to be "junk". We did not even discuss specifically what we heard, because there was nothing to talk about.

Careful diagnosis, just based on certain assumptions, said that:

- either there was something wrong with speakers positioning in the room,
- or the amplifier was not a good match for them,
- else the speakers were damaged.

Honestly, I was close to sending them back, saying thank you, and forgetting. As I have repeatedly said, "High Fidelity" policy is that of positive message. That is, I test review, in longer listening sessions, the products that are good and that I like (preferably both). I do not have time for others. The Accordos were a hair's breadth of getting the boot.

But yet you are reading their test review, aren't you? It means that something went well. As it turned out after many long attempts in my system, the speakers require very careful and deliberate placement in the listening room, definite toe-in, a short distance from the rear wall and the listener, and also – this is most important, because it discredits all claims that the Accordos are ideal with tubes – a very powerful amplifier, preferably a little warm.

When it comes to placement, the Italian speakers should not be further away from the listener than about 2 meters. What happens above that distance is that the sound's tangibility drops dramatically as does connection with events before us. I think that the Accordos can be spaced as wide as the distance from the listener do their "base" line (the line connecting them), or even wider. What is very important is their toe-in. In the manual you can see a drawing in which the speakers' axes are directed at the listener's ears. The model logo seems to suggest something similar (Serblin created separate logos for the Ktêmas and the Accordos). But there is also a note that "if you prefer a lower tweeter intensity you can change the direction of the front baffle so as to create the "point of intersection" outside the listener." After many experiments with speakers' distance and their toe-in I can say that if we want to get the right tonal balance, if we want to control their quite strong treble, the axes point of intersection IN FRONT OF the listener is not optional, but MANDATORY.



The Accordo with power at speaker terminals

I was able to carry out all these things only at my house. And each one is equally important. But if I had to point out something that is fundamental, it would be the choice of amplifier. As I said before – the Accordos sound shrill and inconsistent with everything that cannot output true 80-100 W, and preferably more. The point is that the amplifier has to be a true current source, i.e. to be capable of stably doubling its power output while reducing the load impedance by half – down to 2 Ω. Otherwise we will get “rubbish”.

Well - positioned, well toed-in and driven, Franco Serblin’s speakers offer something that their designer probably had in mind, writing in the manual: “Perhaps it is not enough anymore when music reproduction is credible and realistic; through the performer the music must[now] connect the soul of the listener with transcendent reality.”

Accordingly, the speakers are not especially “faithful”, their tonal balance is not “even”. Their design precludes any serious bass presence, as well as part of the lower midrange; part of upper midrange is modeled so as to understate this and emphasize that. Franco Serblin’s Accordos seem to realize their designer’s vision, without regard for the so - called measurement “fidelity”.

As I said, the speakers do not have strong bass. That is, they sound well, but over around 100 Hz. This means that we get not very large spatial sound images, and the sound volume is not high. It is therefore important not to sit too far from the speakers and not to place them too far from the rear wall. This distinguishes the Accordos e.g. from the Electa Amator, which next to them sound like large floorstanders. Literally. Even if slightly coloured at the bottom, a little contoured. The midrange of the speakers under review is not warm or saturated, in which it differs again from the ultra-smooth and rather warm Guarnieri Homage.

But the higher midrange and treble play an important role in

Mr. Serblin’s new speakers and it is here that the sound character largely rests.

And that character is very, very, very clean and smooth. This could be heard even next to the Guarnieris and the Electas at Janusz. It is the kind of sound where there is no more “details” or “aspects”, as it offers something more; it offers rendering of the musical instrument. Its body is not deep and well-enhanced, these speakers do not draw the scene far back, but it has great texture and clarity.

They are speakers with fantastically developed microdynamics. Along with great clarity and sound textures we get a kind of smooth silk before us, with instruments and vocals painted on. It’s tour de force, where we “get” these details after the fact, separating them from music after listening.



Oh yes – vocals. Light bass, with roll-off relatively high, very quickly imposes the kind of music we can comfortably and with pleasure listen to with these speakers. The approach in which audio equipment, most often the speakers, are chosen for a particular type of music is regarded to be erroneous. But we cannot dispose of this concept in its entirety. As Srajan Ebaen said when he visited me, and it is hard to disagree with him, our audio systems are usually set up in such a way that they best reproduce the music that we like the most. They are thus a reflection of their owners’ musical preferences. Even if they think that their systems are “universal”.

And in case of the Accordos matching them with our own expectations is especially important. I think that they are best suited for tracks featuring guitar – acoustic or classical – vocals, small ensembles. The double bass is usually shown well, but rather with older recordings, where its depth was limited by the recording equipment - such as the albums *Chet Baker Chet Baker Sings and Plays* from 1955 or *Joe Pass’s For Django* from 1964. Moving to Paul McCartney’s latest album *Kisses On The Bottom* we can clearly hear that double bass recorded with close mic placement and beefed-up in the studio is not shown very well; it is thinned. As I say, the idea is that the musical material was not specifically deep in bass.

Because Beatles' albums such as *Revolver* sounded great; they had beautifully arranged scene, great dynamics, especially micro-dynamics, and sounded very consistently. For the bass is incredibly fast, smooth and "free", that is, we can hear the instrument rather than "bass", if you know what I mean.

What is additionally very important in this case is the sound stage and spatial reproduction. This is Mr. Serblin's apple of the eye and he puts a lot of emphasis on it in the manual, saying: "Precise, but over-refined reproduction of music, if it is not combined with 3-D, articulate, spacious, lively soundstage will dampen listener's enthusiasm". Yes, both the size and the shape of the Accordos clearly imply what they are about – and I can confirm that in addition to the fast impulse response it is the scene.

The speakers vanish right before our nose. For once, optically, due to their unusual shape but also because Mr. Serblin's speakers can reproduce the sound in such unlikely places that their "disappearing" is their least merit. All good speakers disappear in a reasonably made up room. One of the first reactions that I hear from my guests who listen to my Harbeths, with their cupboard-like proportions, is their amazement at the fact that they cannot "hear" them; that the speakers completely disappear. For me this is normal. But I don't think I have ever heard at my home anything like what the Accordos can do.

It's about their ability to show a continuous sound stage, a holographic image not only in the window between the speakers, but also far away to both sides. Although I know that some particular recordings were mixed using counterphase tricks, etc. It is just that the sound stage is wider than that indicated by the speakers' placement. The scene depth is pretty good but not better than what I have with my Harbeths. The Italian speakers more accurately show the instruments, more precisely differentiate them among themselves; they better show even a slight shift to the left or right.

Conclusion

Looking at the new speakers from Franco Serblin you cannot remain indifferent. The participants in the (failed) KSS meeting who had an opportunity to see them were divided into those who mentioned something about Korean designers and those who fully appreciated the speakers' slender lines and delicate curves, the leather on the front baffle, etc. Likewise, I think, the sound.

To properly evaluate them and adapt them to our needs first we need to clearly say what the Accordos are NOT. They are not a successor to the Guarnieri Homage, or even the Electa Amator. Each older Franco's speaker, in my opinion, sounds better; in various aspects, but still better. Franco Serblin's speakers are NOT designed for large rooms, and even less so for low-powered amplifiers. If you need to pair them with a tube amp, it needs to be something like the Reference 150 or

210 from Audio Research. But they will perform better with a powerful solid-state amplifier, preferably slightly warm, like the ASR Emitter II, or the Burmester 082. The speakers will not play a more powerful symphony or even a large choir – they are small, they lack low bass and do not create large virtual sources.

Make up for it a very clean sound, very clean, consistent and above-average diameter of the soundstage. In small areas, with matching amplifier will create a heart touching spectacle. Although it is not my "story", I appreciate what Mr. Serblin achieved with them.

Post

After having written this review I received an email on the final, recommended amplification for the Accordo, which essentially confirms what I wrote above:

Let me clarify some issues related to amplification for the Accordo. These speakers have been designed to be as transparent and dynamic as possible. In order to successfully achieve this objective I have used a unique woofer with a long-stroke diaphragm and low resistance in bass-reflex application, designed to offer the best impulse response. Although the Accordo can be driven by any amplifier, we recommend driving them with amplifiers with low output impedance and middle power output (40/70 W into 8 Ω and 80/150 W into 4 Ω). Too much power may result in too long woofer cone travel and consequently deterioration of signal quality.

If we use the Accordo with a tube amplifier or a solid-state MOSFET with high output impedance we may end up with not fully optimal bass control, and this may lead to uncontrolled cone travel. Needless to say that tube amps are generally not too good in this respect.

I use the Einstein integrated amplifier, nice sounding, but with not such good bass as tube amps.

Sincerely,

Franco Serblin

DESIGN

The Accordo are stand mount speakers from the Italian company Franco Serblin. They have two-way design with bass-reflex. The high frequencies are reproduced by a 29-mm soft dome tweeter, designed by Ragnar Lion, the result of nearly 30 years of development work. The midrange and bass is handled by a custom modified top Revelator series Scan-Speak 150 mm midwoofer. The sliced paper cone features a number of precisely angled slices, dramatically reducing "break-up" modes in the diaphragm and preventing the formation of standing waves between the coil and the suspension. With the patented Symmetrical Drive (SD) motor system (using copper caps or rings in the magnet system which results in uniform magnetic flux density throughout the air gap and a symmetrical drop on both sides of the gap),

dynamic distortions have been significantly reduced in comparison to conventional drivers. In the cone centre, instead of a dust cap it features a long, metal phase plug improving driver's response at higher frequencies and improving cooling.

The drivers are mounted on the rounded profile cabinets, covered with leather (or its perfect copy). In the front we have rubber "strings" stretched on a chrome-plated frame – a very characteristic detail of former Sonus Faber designs.

The cabinet is made of hardwood staves, with the inside top and bottom plates made of aluminum and magnesium alloy, to make it more rigid. Very intriguing cabinet geometry, where the cabinet tapers sharply from the front baffle towards the back, and apart from the top and the bottom, no other walls run parallel to each other, adds further rigidity. The cabinet was clearly designed in such a way that looking at the speakers from the front you cannot see the side walls, no matter how much toed-in the speakers are. Bass-reflex port is not directed exactly towards the rear, more to the side. The port wall is dampened.



The speakers arrive with stands that form their integral part. The stand consists of a large metal base plate onto which we bolt a hollow "leg" made of MDF. On its top we bolt a small aluminum plate, onto which, in turn, we secure the speaker. I must admit that it is not a very stable design; there is always a bit of wobble between the base plate and the "leg" and hence the whole system is not perfectly rigid. And the stands are not too heavy. To complete the picture let's add that they sit on three spikes – two in front and one in the rear.

As I said before, speaker crossovers are housed in the stand "legs." They feature air core inductors, polypropylene capacitors and non-inductive resistors. The crossover is of low

order. It is connected to the drivers with a special (patented) Neutrik plug called Speakon – the best speaker plug that I know of, once used by Dynaudio and today only by professional companies. Regular speaker binding posts used in the audiophile audio, no matter how good, look like a joke next to the Speakons. And the posts located in the base plate are really good – a new design from Furutech. Internal wiring is supplied by Yter Audio (review <http://www.highfidelity.pl/@main-892&lang=>), a company run by Massimiliano Favell, Mr. Serblin's son in law of.

Technical data (according to manufacturer):

Frequency Response: 40 Hz-33 kHz (in-room)

Nominal Impedance: 4 Ω

Sensitivity: 87 dB / 1 W / 1 m

Minimum Amplifier Power Output: 20 W

Dimensions: 360 x 190 x 360 mm (HxWxD)

Stands Height: 740 mm

Weight: 16 kg + 16 kg (speakers + stands)

Recordings used during listening sessions (selection):

- Beverly Kenney, *Lonely And Blue*, Cellar Door Records/Sinatra Society of Japan, XQAM-1022, CD (2007).
- Chet Baker, *Chet Baker Sings and Plays*, Pacific Jazz/EMI Music Japan, TOCJ-90028, HQCD (2008).
- David Sylvian, *Sleepwalkers*, P-Vine Records, PVCP-8790, CD (2011).
- Dvorák, *Symphony No.8/Brahms, Symphony No. 8*, Herbert von Karajan, Decca/Esoteric, ESSD-90036, SACD/CD (2008).
- Ella Fitzgerald, *Clap Your Hands, Here Comes Charlie!*, Verve/JVC, VICJ-011-4052, 2008, XRC24 (1998).
- Falla, *The Three Cornered Hat*, Ansermet, Decca/Esoteric, ESSD-90016, SACD/CD (2008).
- Joe Pass, *For Django*, Pacific Jazz/EMI Music Japan, TOCJ-90027, HQCD (2008).
- Johnny Holiday, *Blue Holiday*, Contract Records/Sinatra Society of Japan, XQAM-1014, CD (2007)
- Julie London, *Julie Is Her Name. Vol. 1*, Liberty/EMI Music Japan, TOCJ-90014, HQCD (2008).
- Mike Oldfield, *Incantations*, Mercury/Universal Music LLC [Japan], UICY-91795, 2 x SHM-CD + DVD (2011).
- Nosowska, *8*, Supersam Music, SM 01, CD (2011);
- Pat Metheny, *What's It All About*, Nonesuch Records/Warner Music Japan, WPCR-14176, CD(2011);
- Paul McCartney, *Kisses On The Bottom*, Universal International [Japan], UCCO-3038, SHM-CD (2012).

- Ralf Illenberger, *Red Rock Journeys*, Stockfish, SFR 357.1020.2, CD (2011).
- Sibelius, *Symphony No. 1 & Karelia Suite*, Maazel, Decca/Esoteric, ESSD-90020, SACD/CD (2008).
- The Beatles, *Revolver*, Apple/Parlophone/Toshiba-EMI, TOCP-51124, CD (2000).
- Vangelis, *Spiral*, RCA Records/BMG Japan, BVCM-34430, K2, SHM-CD (2011).
- W.A. Mozart, *Piano Concertos No. 20 & No. 27*, Clifford Curzon, Decca/Esoteric, ESSD-90014, SACD/CD (2008).
- Resonance control: Finite Elemente Ceraball under the CD, Audio Revive RAF-48 platform under the CD and preamplifier
- Pro Audio Bono platform under Leben CS300

Associated equipment

- CD player: Ancient Audio Lektor Air V-edition, review <http://www.highfidelity.pl/@main-216&lang=en>
- Phono preamplifier: RCM Audio Sensor Prelude IC, review <http://www.highfidelity.pl/artykuly/0711/rcm1.html>
- Cartridges: Miyajima Laboratory SHILABE, review <http://www.highfidelity.pl/@main-233&lang=en>, Miyajima Laboratory KANSUI, review <http://www.highfidelity.pl/@main-233&lang=en>
- Preamplifier: Ayon Audio Polaris III [Signature Version] with Re-generator Power Supply
- Power amplifier: Soultion 710
- Integrated amplifier/headphone amplifier: Leben CS300 XS Custom Version, review <http://www.highfidelity.pl/@main-487&lang=en>
- Loudspeakers: Harbeth M40.1 Domestic, review <http://highfidelity.pl/@main-223&lang=en>
- Headphones: Sennheiser HD800, AKG K701, Ultrasonics PROLine 2500, Beyerdynamic DT-990 Pro; 600 Ω version, review <http://www.highfidelity.pl/artykuly/0612/akg1.html>, <http://www.highfidelity.pl/artykuly/0508/ultrasone.html>, and <http://www.highfidelity.pl/artykuly/0406/beyer.html>
- Interconnect: CD-preamp: Acrolink Mexcel 7N-DA6300 (article <http://www.highfidelity.pl/artykuly/0904/kts1.html>, preamp-power amp: Acrolink 8N-A2080III Evo, review <http://highfidelity.pl/@main-163&lang=en>
- Speaker cable: Tara Labs Omega Onyx, review <http://www.highfidelity.pl/@main-47&lang=en>
- Power cables AC (all equipment): Acrolink Mexcel 7N-PC9300
- Power strip: Acoustic Revive RTP-4eu ULTIMATE review <http://highfidelity.pl/@main-602&lang=en>
- Stand: Base; under all components





























Adam M.









