

Sonus Faber Minima Amator II review

Beautifully crafted and sonically



Pros

- + Expressive, entertaining and expansive presentation
- + Superb midrange
- + Luxurious build and finish

Cons

- Demanding of partnering equipment and positioning
- Dedicated stands are essential and pricey

Everybody loves a sequel, especially when the original was good. This applies to hi-fi as much as it does to movies, and that's why we're glad that Sonus Faber decided to resurrect the Minima Amators. We are three decades on from those classics, but that feels like a mere blink of an eye, so faithfully have the company's designers managed to echo the visual signature of those lovely originals.

Build

The cabinets grab our attention, of course. How could they not? Those of this new generation look just like the beautiful curved creations of the past, with immaculately finished solid walnut panels complemented by a soft leather-covered front and back. The Minima Amator II also feature brass as an inlay just above the cabinet base, for the rear



panel plate around the nicely shaped speaker terminals and for subtle branding on the front baffle. Classy. The whole look is recognisably classic Sonus Faber in the same way that tweeter pods make us think of Bowers & Wilkins speakers or huge blue power meters can only mean a McIntosh amplifier.



The pleasing thing is that it's not all for show. Those solid walnut panels combine with the cabinet's compact dimensions – 325 x 200 x 275mm (hwd) – to give an immensely stable platform for the two drive units to work from. The drive units, while less attention-grabbing, are hardly run-of-the-mill items either.

That tweeter is a 28mm silk dome with a distinctive phase plug design that echoes the unit seen on the Minima's pricier Electa Amator III sibling, and that's no bad thing considering just how talented that bigger standmount model is.

The mid/bass is modestly sized at 15cm, but the small frontal area of the Minimas doesn't really allow the use of anything much bigger than that. The drive unit's cone uses what Sonus Faber describes as cellulose pulp combined with natural fibres, and the chassis is a thoroughly up-to-date cast aluminium design that's as open as possible to reduce unwanted reflections. The mid/bass's low-end performance is tuned by a rear-firing port.

The overall performance of a standmounter is hugely dependent on the quality of its support. This is an area where many speaker manufacturers have something of a blind spot, preferring to leave the job to third-party stand makers. That's never been Sonus Faber's way, and so we're pleased to report that there are dedicated stands for the Minima Amator II.

It may not surprise you to learn that the stands are a little different. There's a choice of two designs but the ones supplied to us use hollow aluminium columns that are filled with damping material and join with a heavy base made of Carrara marble. The columns and marble base are separated by a thin, engraved brass plate, mirroring the inlay on the base of the speaker cabinet. This just goes to show just how much attention Sonus Faber gives to cosmetic details. The stands don't come cheap though, priced at £1450 / \$1500 / AU\$2995. Expensive, certainly, but they match the speaker well, locking the Minimas into place thanks to a pair of thumbscrews that go through the stand's top plate.

Any good speaker at this level is going to be demanding about partnering equipment and these Sonus Fabers are no different. In fact, we find them a little pickier than normal thanks to the combination of their impressive transparency and relatively demanding electrical nature. You'll need to drive them with an amplifier that's refined and has plenty of poke, but also something that's articulate. Anything that combines all those qualities is never going to be cheap. We suggest something like the Krell K-300i or Luxman L-509X integrated amplifiers as good starting points. Any source needs to be similarly capable.

For this test we use our reference system, comprising the Linn Klimax DS3 music streamer and the Technics SL-1000R record player feeding the Burmester 088/911 MkIII amplifier. We also have the aforementioned Krell to hand as well as a Naim SuperNait 3 integrated to see how the speakers perform with different flavours of amplification.

It pays to take time to get the Minima Amator II's positioning just right. While they will tolerate being close to a rear wall, we feel that their performance becomes a little cluttered and less spacious when used this way, even if doing so adds a fair bit of bass weight. We prefer the speakers around 75cm from the wall behind them and well away from the sides. This way we get a lovely soundstage that's focussed, layered and

spacious, particularly once we take the time to hone the toe-in angle of the speakers. In our set-up, they work best when pointed straight at the listening position, and when placed roughly the same distance apart as they are from us.



Sound

Once up and running, the Minima Amator II prove to be incredibly charming performers. They're way smaller than most of the competition so it's no surprise to find that these speakers don't dig as deeply at low frequencies, or have the same sense of authority as the likes of the Dynaudio Contour 20i. Yet the surprise is that these Sonus Fabers still manage to sound balanced, bold and expressive. It's through the midrange that they really excel, delivering Nick Cave's *Carnage* set in a truly spell-binding manner. Cave's gravelly tones come through with nuance and texture, the Minimas conveying the emotions in his voice superbly. There's a lovely sense of palpability here that eludes most rivals, and that draws us into the music.

While there's a good degree of insight, that's not what marks these standmounters out as special; it's the ability to organise that information into a coherent and entertaining experience that stands out. We're swept along with the music in a way that isn't particularly common, even at this level.

Tonally these speakers are more full-bodied and robust-sounding than you'd expect given their modest dimensions. They have a slightly rounded tonality that isn't strictly neutral but remains balanced enough to convince. While there's a good degree of refinement here, these are speakers that don't hide shortcomings further up the chain. If your source or amplification isn't good enough, they will tell you all about it.

We play Dave's We're All Alone In This Together and the Minima Amator II have no issue punching out the smooth-flowing beats and generating a pleasingly meaty amount of bass given their size. Lows are taut and relatively powerful but also blend seamlessly into the presentation. We like the clarity on offer and are once again taken in by the Minima's ability to deliver voices with clarity and purpose. Dave's rapid-fire delivery is easy to follow and the emotional communication is excellent.

Things are sure-footed rhythmically, too, with the speakers conveying the energy of music well. They sound composed yet enthusiastic with tracks such as this, and remain comfortable even when pushed hard. We would still point you elsewhere if you routinely listen at 'party' levels, but for most people who have small to medium-sized rooms these Sonus Fabers will go loud enough. A listen to Beethoven's 9th Symphony shows that these little gems can generate a sound of impressive scale. They handle larger dynamic shifts well, without sounding like they have to strain to do so. Their impressive control comes to the fore when it comes to tracking a multitude of instrumental strands without losing sight of the music's whole. These are the kind of speakers that put the spotlight on the music and allow the mechanics of hi-fi to fade into the background.



Verdict

Could you buy a more detailed, tonally neutral and authoritative sounding alternative for similar money? Certainly. But the musical thrill of listening to these Sonus Fabers is hard to ignore. Add the luxurious build, compact size and the rare aura of 'specialness' they have and we've no choice but to give the Minima Amator II a warm recommendation.

SCORES

- Sound 5
- Build 5
- Compatibility 4