

# 7 AFFORDABLE SPEAKERS! the absolute sound

AUDIOVECTOR  
QR1  
PIEGA ACE 30  
M&K SOUND  
S150  
NSMT 15SE

BOWERS & WILKINS  
805 D4  
SONUS FABER  
LUMINA III  
ROGERS LS5/9



## GREAT SOUND, GREAT VALUE

16 PAGES OF MUSIC

New David Bowie deluxe box set, Yarlung interview,  
new releases from Tears for Fears, Tori Amos, and Joan Osborne.

Plus! Audiophile vinyl reissues of classic albums  
by Willie Nelson, Lee Konitz, and more!



# Seven



## Wonders

SEVEN GREAT SPEAKERS FOR ANY BUDGET

ALAN TAFFEL | NEIL GADER | DREW KALBACH | ANDREW QUINT | STEVEN STONE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHIL KLINE

DREW KALBACH

# Elegance and Performance

SONUS FABER LUMINA III

WAY back what feels like forever ago, when I was a younger and more vigorous man, I reviewed the Sonus faber Lumina I. I praised its gorgeous design, quality sound, and affordability. Seriously, I was extremely impressed—particularly by that last attribute, the affordability—and when I was offered the I's big brother, the Lumina III (\$2199/pair), I decided to find out if that same mix of strengths held true. The top-of-the-line towers cost over twice as much as the bookshelf versions I had in my listening room all those months ago, and I was excited to hear how the Lumina line sounded further up the chain.

The Lumina III are described as compact loudspeakers by Sonus faber, and that fits with my impressions. They're tall and thin, sit on a square black base, and consist primarily of a narrow tower wrapped in sumptuous leather and a beautifully finished hunk of multilayered wood for the front baffle. They need some floor clearance to allow the down-firing bass port to function properly, so I appreciated that Sonus faber included spikes and spike discs (to protect non-carpeted flooring). The Lumina IIIs are approximately 38.9" tall, which isn't huge, and only 9" wide. So, "compact" is dead on—for towers, these are extremely space-friendly speakers. Their hardware is surrounded by gleaming chrome, and the small details, such as the "SF" logo in the center of the midrange, give them a luxurious look. My review pair came in walnut, but they're also available in wenge with maple inlay and a glossy piano black. That first attribute mentioned above, the gorgeous design, certainly carries through the Lumina line.

In drivers, the Lumina III includes a 1.15" (29mm) Damped Apex Dome tweeter, a 5.9" (150mm) natural-fiber-and-paper-blend cone midrange, and two 5.9" paper-pulp cone woofers. The DAD tweeter comes from Sonus faber's higher-end Sonetto line, while the midrange and the two woofers were designed from scratch for the Lumina series. The III's sensitivity is rated at 89dB; its nominal impedance is 4 ohms. In my testing, I had no issues running

them with my 160Wpc Parasound HINT6 integrated amp and felt as though I had plenty of headroom. Somus faber suggests amps between 50Wpc and 250Wpc, and that sounds about right from my experience. Setup was a breeze: Lug them up the steps, plunk them down in place, get their spikes up on the included metal discs, and dial in their positioning. I found them relatively forgiving of placement and ended up with them a few inches back from my normal spot.

I started my listening with *Never Stop II* by The Bad Plus, the first album to include pianist Orrin Evans, and a sequel-of-sorts to their first album of all-original compositions. The third track, "Bofafadem," is an Evans composition, that opens with a solid bass line.

Through the Lumina III, the low end had heft, with nice tight slam in the upper bass. Next came what sounded like a toy piano and a piano playing simultaneously. The plunking uppers had a sharp metallic ring, which was shimmery and pleasant for a sound that could have come off as borderline harsh. The piano itself, and the midrange in general, was lush and gorgeous—overall fantastic. The latter half of the song picked up the pace, with the drums hitting harder, creating a very solid presence. I was surprised by the Lumina III's ability to create a feeling of space and size. These aren't large speakers, but they perform as if they weigh twice as much and are twice as tall. Kick drums had real force to them and towered above the composition, and all the while the bass continued its steady rhythm—a concrete floor above which the piano meandered. "Bofafadem" felt like a good analogy for the Lumina III itself: first half, bright and gentle with an undertone of lushness, followed by size, weight, and gravity.

While listening, I considered the ways in which Sonus faber describes the Lumina III. I find the language audio companies use to explain the sound of their products fascinating, because reviewers of those products must work with the same narrow vocabulary. In this case, Sonus faber supplied one descriptor: natural, the "Na" in LuMiNa. In my notes, I circled back to that word again and again.

In this context, what does it mean for speakers to sound natural?

On the 2017 CD reissue of *Automatic for the People*, Michael Stipe's voice sounded crisp and clear on "Drive," with a bit of reverb giving it depth and size, and that slight warble came through with realistic clarity. The guitar on "Sweetness Follows" had

## SEVEN GREAT SPEAKERS FOR ANY BUDGET

a tight, full-bodied sound, with palpable sparkle on the upper edges. In the background, the organ provided a deep soundstage, surprising in its clarity. Was that natural? It felt natural. The Lumina IIIs had a sense of scale that surprised me coming from such compact speakers. The low end was for the most part tight, though at some points a touch bloomy, and overall pleasant with a good impression of heft, and the attacks on the guitar strumming made the beat palpable. Frankly, it sounded like a guy sitting in my room, plunking away.

Still searching for the smoking gun that would make me understand what it means to say a speaker sounds natural, I spun a vinyl copy of *Android Domina* by Ars Nova, which sounded like black metal performed by a synth-pop group. The synth in the title track pulsed with tangible depth, even as it shifted from one section to the next. The later organ solos were suitably massive, the notes shimmering with no discernable boom on the lowest pitches and a pleasant shine on the highest. Percussion was solid, fast-paced, with a room-shaking touch of rhythm and dynamics. Did it sound natural? It'd be hard to describe this music that way—unless natural was a stand-in for true to the source material. In that sense, no single spectrum of the sound stood out to me. No distorted uppers, no booming lowers, no veiled mids.

THERE WAS A STRONG SENSE OF CADENCE, AND I FOUND MYSELF TOTALLY ENGAGED WITH THE ENCOMPASSING DARK, EXPERIMENTAL POP PUMPING FROM THE LUMINA IIIs.

When I listened to *Crisis Talk* by Spike Helis, the opening track's crunchy, deep synths sounded huge and grew in intensity and pitch until the drums dropped in. Altered voices spoke and sang over the hard beat, and while none of it sounded *real* in any meaningful sense—definitely not acoustic instruments in space—there was a strong sense of cadence, and I found myself totally engaged with the encompassing dark, experimental pop pumping from the Lumina IIIs. For me, this was natural—the ability to drop into the music and to forget about the sound.

Another record, this time the Tone Poet reissue of *Katanga!* by Curtis Amy and Dupree Bolton with Jack Wilson, Ray Crawford, Vic Gaskin, and Doug Sides. Not to ruin anything, but this record sounded unbelievably good—on par with some of my other favorite Tone Poet releases. Jack Wilson's piano in "Amiable" sounded slightly veiled, which I suspect was an artifact of the recording. Gaskin's bass was a hard floor that added weight and impact and never became muddled as the full band came in. This had to be that natural sound Sonus faber was referring to. Real instruments playing music in real time in physical space, filtered through microphones, mixing, mastering, plating, pressing, and time. On the next track, "You Don't Know What Love Is," Curtis Amy's saxophone had a rich tone with a beautiful, lilting finish that kept me engaged through a tune I've never connected with before. The Lumina IIIs were revealing and accurate in a way that allowed the music to move past the recording.

That was satisfying. My quest for the natural sound completed, I thought again of the Lumina IIs. I found those to be lush and gorgeous, and exceptionally well-priced for their quality. I had the same impression here. For comparison, the Lumina IIIs stacked up beautifully against the much larger and equally well priced (\$3498/pr.) Polk L600s, particularly in the midrange and the uppers. The Lumina IIIs couldn't match the L600s in the lower end, but it was a close bout—impressive, considering the Lumina IIs are much smaller and more affordable. I also felt like they were a step up from the Zu Omen Dirty Weekends (which are, unfortunately, discontinued, to the dismay of budding audiophiles everywhere), particularly in the bass, and matched them in mid-

46 April 2022 the audiophile sound



SONUS FABER LUMINA III

### SPECS & PRICING

DRIVER COMPLEMENT: 1.15" Damped Apex Dome tweeter, 5.9" paper-cone mid/woofer, 2x 5.9" paper-cone woofer  
FREQUENCY RESPONSE: 40Hz-24kHz  
IMPEDANCE: 4 ohms  
SENSITIVITY: 89dB SPL (2.83V/1m)  
CROSSOVER: 350Hz and 3.5kHz  
DIMENSIONS: 9" x 38.9" x 10.9"  
WEIGHT: 35.1 lbs. each  
PRICE: \$2199

SONUS FABER S.P.A.  
36057 Arcugnano (VI)  
Italy  
info@sonusfaber.com

## SEVEN GREAT SPEAKERS FOR ANY BUDGET



range tonal purity. The Lumina IIIs were the kind of speakers that could easily perform on par with most gear in their price range, and some beyond.

In the end, I was pleased and happy to have the Lumina IIIs in my listening room. I had high expectations, considering that I was blown away by their little brothers. The Lumina IIIs stepped up and blew past my expectations. They're physically beautiful, compact, forgiving on gear, easy to set up and place, and sound fantastic. Anyone looking for speakers in this price range for whom looks and size are important should check them out. Scratch that—anyone looking for loudspeakers should give them a listen. **108**