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Sonus faber's 5th-gen  
Amati flagships



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# Sonus faber Homage Amati G5

With an impressive back-story, impeccable engineering and glorious finishes, these imposing '5th generation' Italian speakers promise much – so do they deliver? *Certo!*  
 Review: **Andrew Everard & Paul Miller Lab: Paul Miller**

The Amati G5 sits at the top of a four-strong new 'fifth generation' range of the company's Homage speakers, so-called because they pay tribute to the tradition of musical instrument manufacturing in Cremona, Italy. And they do so not just in name, but in the way they're made, with extensive use of selected woods, handcrafting based on the work of traditional luthiers of the past, and even a lute-shaped profile, which first saw the light of day in the previous Homage series [HFN Oct '17].

But there's even more resting on this latest lineup: it is, after all, 30 years since the original Guarnieri standmount speaker was launched. In its latest iteration, the Guarnieri is now £13,000, with a pair of dedicated stands at £3200, while the Serafino G2 is £22,000, and the Amati G5 we have here at £30,000 a pair. A dedicated centre speaker, the Vox G3, completes the range at £14,000, and

the speakers are available in red [pictured here], wenge (a very dark chocolate brown) and graphite finishes.

### CROWNING CARPENTRY

It should be acknowledged that 'finishes' has a slightly different meaning here to that in more conventional speaker designs, where the finish is usually a thin layer of veneer over an MDF enclosure. In these Sonus faber speakers, multiple layers of wood are used, with the production process having been refined in recent years following the company's 2021 acquisition of the Di Santi woodworking company, previously a supplier for 35 years.

That was a logical development for the company, known in more recent times for its luxury

take on fairly conventional speaker design, handcrafted in solid wood. Using its now in-house expertise, Sonus faber has been able to retain and refine that lute profile (most visible when viewing the speaker from above) and improve the bracing and porting of the cabinet, which is made up

from 'slices' of solid wood rather than the more usual one-piece panels. In practice, nine layers of wood are used in the cabinets, before sanding and hand-finishing with multiple layers of lacquer.

The lute-shaped braces are constrained in place all the way down the 'tower', contributing significantly to the strength of the speakers [see pic, p40].

Completing the stiffening job here is the use of aluminium 'dampshelves' at the top of the cabinet, further increasing its rigidity and reducing resonance without resorting to the long TMD (tuned-mass damper) used in the Amati Tradition.

All this explains why these speakers may not be huge, at just over 117.5cm tall, but still weigh a substantial 55.5kg apiece.

New for this generation are smoothed edges trimmed with graphite grey anodised metalwork, while those internal bracing and porting changes aim for greater sensitivity and bass output. But it's in the treble and midband sections of this 3.5-way design that the changes are greatest, not least in the adoption of the company's latest 'semi-balanced Paracross' crossover. That design has been developed

'Sonus faber has retained and refined its lute profile'



### STEALTHY BASS

The Amati's 220mm woofers [inset] have been comprehensively refined for this 5th-generation model although they remain aesthetically similar to those fitted to earlier Amati designs, including the 4th-generation Amati Tradition [HFN Oct '17]. The brand's rear-facing 'Stealth Ultraflex' bass loading has also been tried-and-tested from as way back as the Lilium [HFN Jun '15] and is implemented here, via two shaped alloy slots, exiting through the speaker's spine. Reflex-loaded speakers are 'tuned' by a combination of the mass of air in the port tube and the compliance of the air in the cabinet delivering a desired Helmholtz resonance. Below this resonance frequency there's a 4th-order (24dB/oct) roll-off in the combined driver/port output but the technique typically offers an increased sensitivity and reduced distortion over an 'equivalent' sealed box design. It's not all plain sailing, however, because turbulent airflow within the port can create distortions of its own – hence why so many current loudspeakers employ 'aerofoil' ports of one form or another – just as tube modes (resonances) can occur within the port itself, depending on its length. Sonus faber's Stealth Ultraflex system is dubbed a 'para-aperiodic interpretation of the tuned load' which claims a reduction in cabinet volume and 'elimination of spurious wind noises'. Has Sonus faber been successful? See our Lab Report, p45. PM

**RIGHT:** Nine layers of grain-matched wood are pressed into shape and reinforced with an alloy spine, plus top and bottom plates. Highly polished Graphite, Wenge and Red [pictured] finishes are offered. The leather-coated baffle and 'polymer string' grille are familiar features





through a combination of simulation and listening, as have the efforts to ensure all the drivers are time-aligned and phase-compensated for improved integration and on/off axis response [see PM's Lab Report, p45] – as you'll see from the little Arrow Point phase bar/damper applied to the apex of the 28mm DAD tweeter.

## PLUGS AND PORTS

This last strategy – the phase plugs used on both mid and tweeters – is at the heart of the G5 upgrades. The Amati is a big and complex design, with that tweeter handing over to the 150mm midrange at 2.2kHz, and the midrange handing down to the upper 220mm bass unit at 270Hz before the lower bass driver kicks in tandem below 200Hz. Nonetheless, the Amati G5 manages to pull off that clever trick of sounding like a much smaller high-quality loudspeaker – just one with an awful lot of bass weight and clarity to back up its midrange/treble refinement.

Sonus faber's R&D manager, Mario Passarelli, and Chief Design Officer Livio Cucuzza [see PM's interview sidebar, p43],

leveraged their experience in pro audio transducers to take these Amati drivers up a notch. The midrange, in particular, was comprehensively redesigned with a larger 'mushroom-shaped' phase plug, modelled extensively in software before prototypes were built, tested and auditioned. The mid unit is now loaded into a redesigned sub-enclosure, called Intono, that isolates the driver from the woofers while also linearising back pressure and impedance [simplifying the crossover, see PM's boxout p41] using a controlled 'leak'.

Meanwhile, the two G5 bass drivers, with their 'ultralight CCAW voice coils' and neodymium-boosted magnet, work into a larger vented enclosure, but even this is unusual. Its use of 'Stealth Ultraflex' bass tuning, realised as long alloy slots that exit via the speaker's spine, aim to reduce the size of bass chamber required for a given LF extension while also smoothing out the airflow [see PM's boxout, p38].

They're handsome beasts, these Amati speakers, taking their name from Nicolò Amati, active in the 17th century as part of a dynasty of violin makers stretching back to his grandfather Andrea, who first formulated the modern shape of the violin, viola, and cello. Nicolò is acknowledged as the greatest of the family, and later had as his student Andrea Guarneri, and possibly Antonio Stradivari (though this is disputed).

## CLASSICAL TRIBUTES

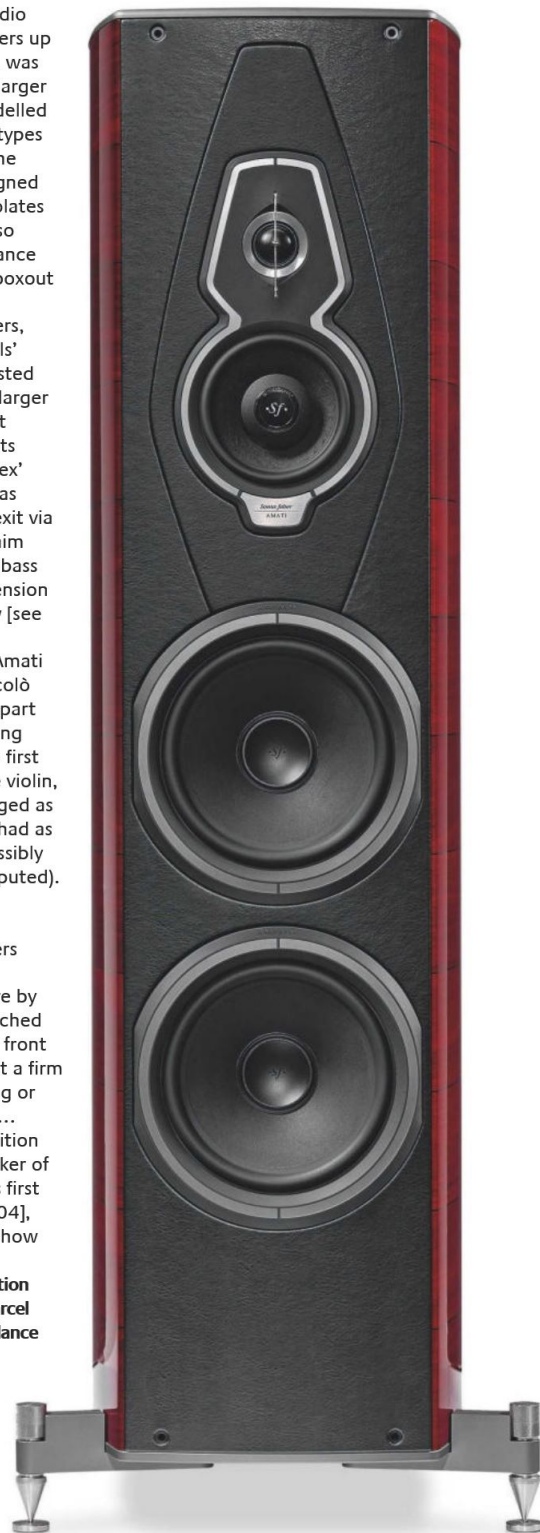
Completing the idea of these speakers as homages to these great names, conventional grilles are replaced here by tensioned black elastic 'strings' stretched between two black alloy retainers in front of the drivers. They look the part, but a firm grip is required when either removing or tensioning the 'strings' into position...

Incidentally, Sonus faber's recognition of perhaps the best-known violin maker of all continues. In 2004 it launched its first Stradivari Homage model [HFN Apr '04], and at the recent Munich High End show

**LEFT:** The internal bracing and segregation of the Amati's cabinet is also part-and-parcel of Sonus faber's 'Intono' pressure/impedance management regime for the mid unit

**RIGHT:** This imposing 3.5-way design combines two 220mm 'dual-motor' woofers that crossover to the 150mm midrange at 200Hz (lower woofer) and 270Hz (upper woofer). The bass drivers are loaded via a 'Stealth Ultraflex' port

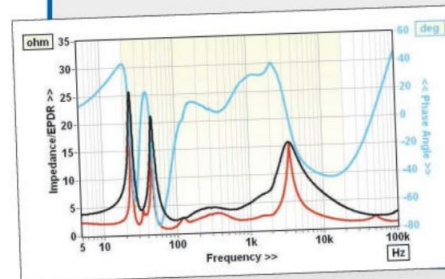
*'The mid unit is loaded into an enclosure, called Intono'*



## DRIVE HARD

Sonus faber's 're-tuning' of the Amati's bass performance has been achieved by combining its latest 220mm woofers, boasting increased magnetic field strength and improved suspension, with the new Stealth Ultraflex slot loading. The hybrid crossover – a mix of the 'semi-balanced' Paracross layout where some capacitors and inductors are placed on the negative rail of the circuit, with its latest 'Interactive Fusion Filtering' – also plays a key role. However, while the Amati G5's 36Hz bass extension (-6dB re. 200Hz) clearly bests the 42Hz we measured for the previous Amati Tradition [HFN Oct '17], its reduced bass impedance makes the newcomer a tougher drive.

Where the Tradition presented a minimum of 3.2ohm/16Hz and a worse-case EPDR (Equivalent Peak Dissipation Resistance) of 1.7ohm/28Hz, the G5's minimum impedance is 2.36ohm/93Hz [black trace, inset Graph] following aggressive +43°/-74° swings in phase angle [blue trace] that deliver a super-tough EPDR [red trace] of 0.86ohm/75Hz. In practice the Amati G5 tasks its partnering amplifier with a sub-2ohm EPDR from 55Hz-110Hz and sub-3.3ohm from 52Hz right up to the 2.2kHz crossover. Above 10kHz it falls below 2ohm again. So the Amati G5 may be usefully sensitive, but it'll still need a lusty amp! PM



it marked the company's 40th anniversary with a second-generation version of the design, yours for £45,000 a pair.

## STRINGS ON SONG

Set up for listening in PM's main room [see p37], a number of aspects of the Amati G5 speakers make themselves apparent in pretty short order. The first is that these artisan-crafted towers have an imposing, if not dominating, presence in the room. On the other hand, the unusual porting strategies make them a lot less sensitive about their position in the room, even if PM's findings about the load they present means some care must be taken about the partnering amplification [see boxout, above]. In our case, a pair of Constellation Inspiration monoblocks [HFN Oct '19], driven via a dCS Vivaldi One APEX and Aurender W20SE [HFN Mar '23] streamer, proved more than adequate!

Our listening took us through some familiar landscapes, the eponymous Dire Straits debut album [MFSL UDSACD 2184] perfectly illustrating the Amati G5's penchant for very direct communication while also retaining a balance that's ever so easy to enjoy. The same was equally clear with Rick Wakeman's 'Henry Suite' from 'Six Wives Of Henry VIII', here on his *The Other Side Of...* solo piano album [Classic Media Group DVD5037X], which combines both a great sense of the scale and tone of the

piano blended together with the intimacy of the live event.

This balance of smoothness and openness, allied to the weight delivered by those dual bass drivers, is also heard in John Challenger's excellent, atmospheric *Salisbury Meditation* [AJM; 96kHz/24-bit download]. The Amati G5s ensured a stunning sense of the instrument in the cathedral space, both with the notes hanging in the air and the ability of the larger pipes to pressurise the volume within the walls. All this was aided by the speakers' combination of fluidity and a wide-open treble, delivering all the ambience we could want.

Yes, you can also use these speakers to turn on a big, powerful bass, as with Bonobo's 'Otomo' from his *Fragments* album [Ninja Tune ZENDNL 279; 44.1kHz/24-bit download], where they sound fast and clean while revealing all the layers going on above the driving

**RIGHT:** The Amati's iconic 'lute shaped' cabinet is supported on a stabilising 'ZVT' (Zero Vibration Transmission) base that combines steel and elastomer layers







**ABOVE:** Both the 28mm soft-dome DAD 'Arrow Point' tweeter [left] and new 150mm cellulose fibre midrange driver, with neodymium magnet [right], include proprietary plugs to manage anti-phase behaviour, improving both response extension and off-axis dispersion

rhythm section. But this is really a design all about the timbres of real instruments, while everything else, from weight and space to effortless soundstaging and focus, is just the supporting cast. The Amati G5s are predictably fine with strings – as you might expect given their heritage – but also agreeably toothsome with brass, for example on the Tredegar Town Band's *Vaughan Williams On Brass* [Albian Records ALBCD052], whether with the folk song arrangements, or the stately music for 'Henry V', with its dramatically martial flourishes.

#### MIND YOUR MANNERS

The speakers also deliver a superb sense of orchestral scale on the Eiji Oue/ Minnesota Rachmaninoff *Symphonic Dances* [from Reference Recordings' RR-96CD]. Here the focus is always on

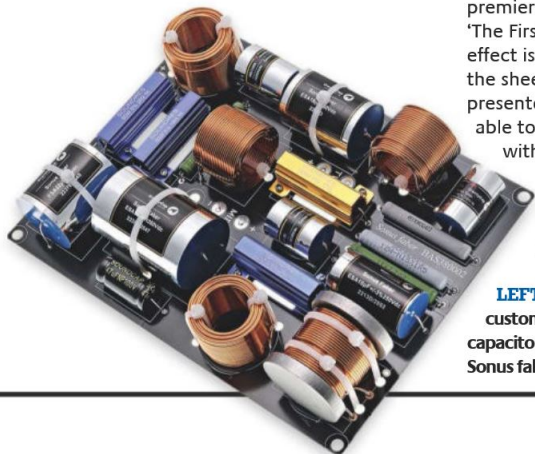
*'The pulsing bass and synths sound thunderous'*

what's being played rather than 'hi-finess', with solo instruments treated to gorgeously realised tonality while the rest of the orchestra carries the slow-building and occasionally faltering waltz rhythm. And provided you have an amplifier with the (well-mannered) grunt and confidence to drive these speakers properly, as we did with the Constellation monoblocks, there's never any sense of

dynamic congestion or restraint. For all that addictive bass warmth, combined as it is with taut control, things just get more exciting as the levels increase and dynamics open up.

That combination of sweetness, openness and expression also serves well Joyce DiDonato's *Eden* [Erato 0190296465154], with its beautifully balanced voice and accompaniment on the premiere recording of Rachel Portman's 'The First Morning Of The World'. The effect is simply magical, aided no end by the sheer purity with which JDD's voice is presented. But then these are speakers also able to sound both balanced and revealing with Noel Gallagher's High Flying Birds' *Council Skies* [Sour Mash Records; 44.1kHz/24-bit download], with a nostalgic quality that could place it sometime in the mid-late 70s. ☺

**LEFT:** Hand-selected Jantzen inductors, custom spec. Clarity Caps, plus Mundorf capacitors and resistors are hand-soldered onto Sonus faber's custom crossover PCB



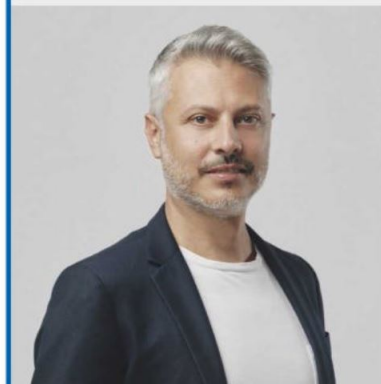
## LIVIO CUCUZZA

Livio Cucuzza, Sonus faber's Chief Design Officer, has worked on the last three generations of the Homage series, and the journey has been one of discovery. 'When I started working for Sonus faber, 13 years ago, the company was focused on finalising its flagship speaker "The Sonus faber" [HFN Feb '11]', says Livio. 'My first task was to take the lessons learnt and imagine how we might rebuild all our other speaker collections over the next few years'.

First in line was, arguably, Sonus faber's most iconic and longstanding loudspeaker – the Amati, named in honour of Nicolò Amati, the Italian renaissance violin maker. 'This was generation three', recalls Livio, 'and the best memory I have from that project is the long nights spent listening to different drivers, especially the midrange units and tweeters. We went back to compare the polypropylene-coned mid unit used in the "Amati Anniversario" with, what turned out to be, the more musical one used in the original Amati Homage'.

This proved a key turning point in the re-direction of Sonus faber's 'voicing'. 'I still remember when we communicated to the CEO our decision to "go back" to a paper midrange and silk dome tweeter, admitting that they sounded superior. Product development is an incredible game which sometimes takes you in huge loops right back to where you started!'

And now? 'The Amati G5 is the third iteration of that "new" starting point, and the most mature to date. The original recipe is still there but everything has evolved.' **PM**





## SONUS FABER HOMAGE AMATI G5

**LEFT:** The split 200Hz/270Hz crossover allows for separate bass and mid/treble 4mm input terminals. The mid and treble drivers crossover at 2.2kHz while the woofers are reflex-loaded via long 'slots' in the rear alloy spine of the cabinet

rhythms. Indeed, spending a full afternoon simply going from Bach to Shostakovich with small-scale string ensembles showed just how well these speakers live up to their luthier-inspired construction.

**A POLISHED POUNDING**

That's not to say they don't do all kinds of music very well indeed, for they are 'universal' a speaker as we've heard at this price point. The Amati G5s certainly give a glowingly close-up view of Sophie Ellis-Bextor's voice on 'Tokyo' [*Hana*; Cooking Vinyl download], her (slightly overlong) romantic/bittersweet paean to Japan, written after an early 2020 trip just before the pandemic struck.

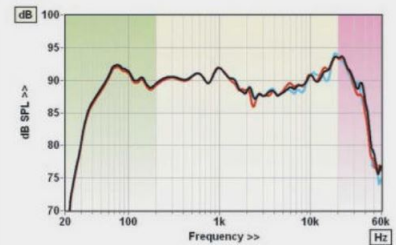
So too, they are light and sprightly with Bill Charlap's 'Not A Care In The World' [*Notes From New York, Impulse!*; 96kHz/24-bit], while big and thunderous with the pulsing bass and synths from Alison Goldfrapp's 'Fever (Special Request Club Mix)' from her gorgeous *The Love Invention* solo set [*Skint/BMG BRASSIC128CD*]. Indeed, from Bach Brandenburgs to Armin van Buuren's chilled yet mighty *A State Of Trance 2023* mix [*Armada ARMA482*], complete with suitably pounding club bass, these fifth-generation Amatis came up shining. Now all you have to do is find an amp capable of keeping them under control... ☺

The rich instrumentation, dense production and big singalong choruses are faithfully served by these speakers, even if they're not quite in what might be construed as their 'zone'. The album sets its stall out with opener 'I'm Not Giving Up Tonight', peaks on the lovely 'Dead To The World' with its lush strings, and really gets into its crowd-pleasing stride with 'Easy Now', which must be the next big live audience participation track here.

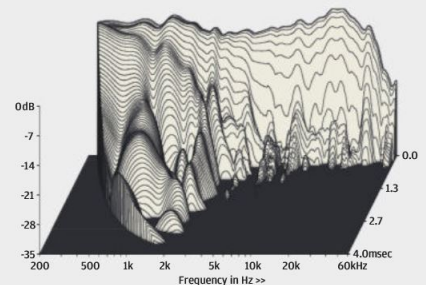
Firmly back into that string-driven universe that's always been a Sonus faber forte, the Quartet San Francisco's 'Federico II', from *A QSF Journey* [Reference Recordings RR-143], delights with the mix of crisp, clean strings and driving

The Amati G5 may be likened to an integrated sub/sat – the 150mm mid and 28mm DAD tweeter working into their own 'Intono' chamber (including a controlled vent for the mid) – while the two 220mm woofers fill-in the lower decade of bass (20Hz–200Hz/270Hz). The off-axis response of this hardworking 'mid/treble' duo is well controlled [see Graph 1, below], especially over the vertical axis where the slightly dished mid/presence output remains consistent  $\pm 20^\circ$  above or below the main axis. This dip, and the eventual rise at 20kHz, results in response errors of  $\pm 3.1$ dB and  $\pm 3.0$ dB, respectively, although Sonus faber's QC ensures the pair matching remains a tight 0.7dB (ignoring a narrowband 1.6dB error at the 2.2kHz crossover). It also diminishes the sensitivity from its 'peak' of 91.9dB/1kHz – better still than Sonus faber's claimed 91dB – to 89.3dB when averaged between 500Hz–8kHz. The response is otherwise very 'smooth' but note a slight discontinuity at the 2.2kHz crossover, and +40° peak in impedance phase, revealed as a resonance on the CSD waterfall [see Graph 2]. The elastic 'wire' grille introduces mild HF effects only [blue trace, Graph 1].

The lower woofer rolls off a little earlier than the upper bass unit (49Hz–220Hz vs. 49Hz–280Hz, re. –6dB) but they combine with the 32Hz port tuning (note strong quarterwave mode at 128Hz – see green shaded area, Graph 1) to yield a corrected bass extension of 36Hz (–6dB re. 200Hz). However, deep bass and high sensitivity is bought at the expense of a tougher load than has been typical of past Sonus faber speakers, so the Amati G5 fully warrants its 4ohm nominal rating [see boxout, p41]. **PM**



ABOVE: Response inc. nearfield summed drivers/ports [green], freefield corrected to 1m at 2.83V [yellow], ultrasonic [pink]. Left, black; right, red; w. grille, blue



ABOVE: There is one mode at the 2.2kHz crossover [also visible on Graph 1] but DAD tweeter is 'clean'

**HI-FI NEWS VERDICT**

Big, rich, powerful, and oh-so-refined, the new flagship of the Homage lineup sounds glorious with everything from small-scale string ensembles to full symphony orchestras. They've so much to give: connect the Amati G5s to amps boasting plenty of current and grip and they will thunder out room-shaking bass while still maintaining excellent insight into the rest of the mix. And that ability is really rather magical.

Sound Quality: 88%

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**HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS**

Sensitivity (SPL/1m)/2.83V – 1kHz/Mean/IEC	91.9dB / 89.3dB / 88.1dB
Impedance modulus: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	2.36ohm @ 93Hz 25.7ohm @ 24Hz
Impedance phase: minimum & maximum (20Hz–20kHz)	–74° @ 57.6Hz +42.8° @ 20Hz
Pair matching/Resp. error (200Hz–20kHz)	1.5dB/ $\pm 3.1$ dB/ $\pm 3.0$ dB
LF/HF extension (–6dB ref 200Hz/10kHz)	36Hz / 42.9kHz/40.2kHz
THD 100Hz/1kHz/10kHz (for 90dB SPL/1m)	0.35% / 0.35% / 0.7%
Dimensions (HWD) / Weight (each)	1176x411x512mm / 56kg