

Sonus Faber Grand Piano Home

The Italian connection

By Michael Jones

Sonus Faber Grand Piano Home loudspeaker \$5499

"A speaker of consequence" is how Sonus Faber describe their Grand Piano loudspeaker. And, for once, the manufacturer's description is not hyperbole.

As part of the Home series, the Grand Piano can make up part of a complete home theatre package (their are centre and surround speakers plus a subwoofer in the range). But they perform superbly as a stereo pair, which is how I used them.

No two ways around it – the Grand Piano looks great. Standing 1080mm high, the front, back and top of the speaker is finished in black leather.

The sides are thick slices of solid walnut left with a natural finish or finished in a black piano lacquer. My review pair were in black, which nicely matched the gloss black finish of my Loewe television.

Putting the looks to one side, the Grand Piano cabinet is a little unusual. Most speaker manufacturers go to great efforts to reduce resonance in their cabinets.

In contrast, Sonus Faber claim to use resonance to create a better sounding speaker, giving as an example the way great violin makers use resonance. For example, the side panels are decoupled from the rest of the cabinet for "resonance control".

Also unusual are the cabinets. Most speakers are rectangular boxes, as that's the easiest and cheapest way to manufacture cabinets. With the Grand

Piano, the front and rear are angled from each other, as are the top and bottom.

This is a good way to reduce the influence of the cabinet of the sound of

the speaker.

A 26mm silk dome tweeter crosses over at 3kHz to two mid-woofers. These 180mm drivers are made from fibre glass and are magnetically shielded, should you wish to use these speakers in a home theatre system.

The Grand Piano is said to have a sensitivity of 90dB and a 6 ohm nominal impedance. Most good audiophile amplifiers should drive them without problems. My Plinius 8150 drove them superbly, while the little Naim Nait 5 sounded very nice, if a little undynamic driving these speakers.

And so how did they sound? Magnificent!

If you regularly attend live classical music, you will immediately recognise the superb tonal balance and timbre of these speakers.

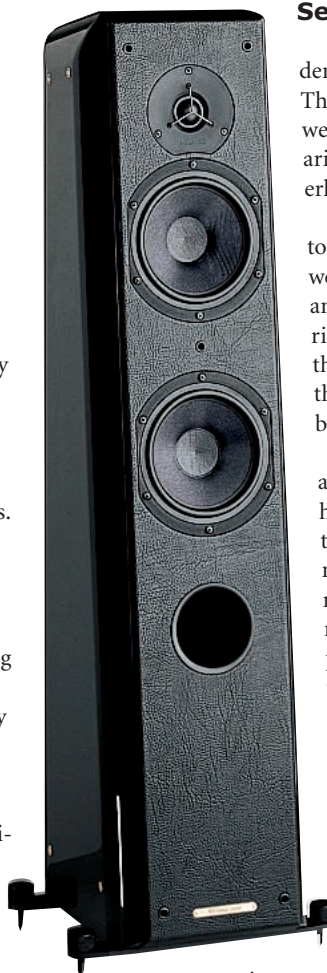
Play some chamber music (Mozart piano trios and Beethoven string quartets were heavily played while the Grand Piano's were in residence) and the sound is immediately "right".

This is a glorious sounding speaker. The rich tonal balance and easy to listen to nature of the Grand Piano make this truly a loudspeaker for the music lover.

I've been finding that many speaker brands have been getting a more "forward" sound over the past decade.

I suspect that this is partly because the tonal qualities of speakers have become less important to many listeners as much of modern music departs further from the sound of real instruments.

Plus it's partly because some of the hi-fi media (What Hi-Fi is a notable offender here) reward more forward sounding speakers with positive reviews.



Searching for space

The Grand Piano demands space. Lots of it. The speakers need to be used well away from room boundaries for the sound to properly breathe.

Put the speakers too close to the rear wall or - even worse - towards the corners and the sound veers from rich to overblown. But get the speakers well away from the walls and the sound blossoms.

Getting the speakers well away from the walls also helps in the development of the soundstage. A regular non-audiophile visitor to my home has never paid much attention to the parade of hi-fi gear that travels through my home. But he was astonished to hear, through the Grand Piano's, a vocalist hanging midway between the speakers.

The Grand Piano conjures up solid, three-dimensional imaging from recordings containing this information. The solidity of central images extends across the soundstage.

One aspect worth commenting on is just how articulate the Grand Piano's are with vocals. I've found that with some speakers it can be hard to make out the words. With the Grand Piano's vocals are consistently articulate.

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