

HAUTE FIDÉLITÉ NO. 254 DÉCEMBRE 2021 / JANVIER 2022

The Swiss manufacturer Ensemble has always kept away from the broad marketplace, offering products that are as original as they are talented. Now Ensemble is reinventing itself with a new masterpiece of a compact speaker that will fit perfectly in an art gallery: attractive, soft curves and eloquent musical discourse. Ensemble: a collection of elements forming a whole. A definition and a name that fit like a glove to this Swiss "watchmaker" who strives to design products that come together in an endless quest for musicality. Under the leadership of its designer, Urs Wagner, who is passionate about concerts, this fine brand has been cultivating the high end in a masterly manner since 1986 with extremely accomplished products designed as a global system: an ecosystem capable of recreating all the emotion conveyed by music in one's home.

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAIL

The Ondiva Silver is a 2-way, bass-reflex loaded, compact speaker with a rear port. The thick walled cabinet is machined (and not moulded as one might expect) and consists of a sandwich of seven different materials, hardness and softness alternating, for maximum rigidity and to eliminate any form of resonance.

Its elegant dress with sensuous and asymmetrical curves resembles an undulation from which all right angles are banished. The 18 cm diameter bass-midrange driver benefits from a very light and rigid sandwich cone, as well as from a fine gold vacuum-coated centrepiece. It is joined by a 28 mm textile dome tweeter treated with a special gold varnish, and matched left/right. Their origin and composition will remain a well-kept secret. The capacitors are custom-made to specification from aluminium and polypropylene foil with a special coil/wire connection and individually damped. The filter components are matched to an overall tolerance of 2 %, mounted and soldered by hand on a printed circuit board with a track thickness five times greater than usual, and a dielectric quality six times higher than average. This circuit is mounted decoupled on an aluminium plate. The rear of the enclosure features a pair of proprietary binding posts of pure copper with 0.4 % tellurium. They accept 8 mm spades, 6 mm bananas (better conductivity but not widely used) and, laterally by retracting the insulator cap, either a stripped conductor up to 10 mm² or standard 4 mm bananas.

These speakers will benefit from being installed on the dedicated Ondiva Arc stands (registered design). This combination will guarantee a unique aesthetic but above all the efficiency intended by the designer in the hunt of resonance and vibration. The design of this stand is based on a damped mounting of the individual elements. The speaker rests firmly on damping pads on an aluminium platform and can be secured by means of nylon screws. A blade-like curvilinear steel post provides a spring-loaded effect, coupled to a highly inert sandwich base on anti-vibration feet.

LISTENING

These speakers are not demanding in terms of their position in the room but must be set-up with the logo facing outwards in mirror image. The designer recommends to orient them towards the listener without toeing them in.

Sound quality: The Ondiva do not fail to live up to the reputation for excellence that sticks to the skin of the products of this Swiss goldsmith, such as the Elysia of 1999. Transparency stands out in all circumstances, accompanied by a great profusion of details, particularly on acoustic instruments and voices, sounding very natural and truthful. The emotion is overwhelming, thanks to the superbly executed attacks. On "Edith and the Kingpin" from Herbie Hancock's album *River: The Joni Letters*, the listener is in direct contact with the atmosphere that prevailed during the recording. Tina Turner's performance has a lot of soul, in addition to her unique vocal range. The tonal structure remains homogeneous and well balanced over the entire reproduced spectrum, maintaining a beautiful density. Although its gauge does not allow for abysmal depth, the bass is very detailed, taut, rich in tonal color, linear and precise. The midrange / treble shows a remarkable airiness and sweetness, endowed with a superb articulation and natural expressiveness, with a clean and very luminous rise in the high frequencies.

Dynamics: Always realistic and lively in brio passages, these small sculptures reveal the smallest dynamic shades with gusto. This is due to the diaphragm of the bass-midrange driver and its absence of partial oscillations, demonstrated by excellent "waterfall" diagrams, and shown by its movement without flexing or irregularity. Their beautiful spontaneity preserves the full harmonic and dynamic content without simplification. The orchestral ensembles are rendered with an enviable coherence and stability, always endowed with a surprising absence of confusion. Responsive to the slightest musical inflexion, and free from the artificial swelling characteristic of some compact speakers, the sound signature of the Ondiva is such that nothing is missing from the music.

Soundstage: This is their primary talent, as their astonishing breadth recreates the illusion of a big system with plenty of air between the performers and their instruments. The soundstage is impressive, taking on the volume of the hall, unfolding a soundstage that extends well beyond the frame delimited by the speakers, including depth and height at the same time. This three-dimensional representation is diametrically opposed to the size of these lilliputians. At the same time the sweet-spot is greatly enlarged, allowing for true expanded stereo listening. The 'wavedynamic' diffusion as conceived by the designer allows listening outside the classic apex of a triangle, and even behind the speakers. This approach enhances the credibility and realism of the soundstage.

Quality/price: Assembled by hand in Switzerland and optimized down to the smallest detail with the implementation of relevant and meticulous technical solutions, they are almost objects of art, such as the bass-midrange centrepiece with its very fine layer of pure gold applied by vacuum deposition. This excellence is the result of long and costly developments, which do not make these loudspeakers available to everyone.

VERDICT

Ensemble has set itself the challenge of offering a reasonably sized loudspeaker for the 21st century. The Ondiva Silver meets this challenge brilliantly. It combines the Swiss tradition of scientific research, supported by measurements, with craftsmanship for a musicality characterized by a subtle alchemy between tonal quality and a sense of phrasing that make a stunning musical discourse. They will convince the music lover, not least the one lacking in space, looking for a certain truth in music.

Jean-Marie Draperi

TIMBRES _ _ _ _ _
DYNAMIC _ _ _ _ _
SOUND STAGE _ _ _ _ _
QUALITY/PRICE _ _ _ _ _

SPECIFICATIONS

Origin: Switzerland

Dimensions : 380 (1020mm with Ondiva Arc stand)

× 350 × 310 mm (H × W × D)

Weight : speaker 15.8 kg (each)

Ondiva Arc stand 15.9 kg (each)

Frequency response : 38 Hz - 25 kHz (-6 dB)

Crossover frequency : 1800 Hz

Nominal impedance: 8 ohms

Sensitivity : 88.5 dB/1 W/1 m

Type : 2-way

Recommended amplification : 50W to 180W

Rear bass-reflex

CAPTIONS

The sensuous and luxurious modelling is highlighted by its dedicated support, ensuring a stable footing, and decoupling it perfectly from any vibratory phenomenon.

The tweeter is treated with a special gold varnish, the centrepiece of the boomer is coated with a thin layer of pure gold applied under vacuum, as with an object of art.

Just above the Synergia binding posts, a grounding terminal connects via the shield of the speaker cable to the mass of the amp (centre of system mass), thereby creating an equipotential connection that gives parasitical intrusions into the signal no chance.

Two fasteners allow the cables to be guided along the column.