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Bellissimo! Franco Serblin's Lignea Speakers

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Delectable

The Franco Serblin Ligne Speakers

By Jeff Dorgay

Imagine the world's best mini-monitor; highly resolving, magnificent imaging with midrange so clear, clean and uncolored it feels as if there are no speakers in the room at all. To make this vision even more inviting, forget the tiny, rectangular box that most familiar small monitors come packaged in; wrap whatever it takes to achieve these electronic goals in a pair of sculptures that look at home in one of the world's top museums.



REVIEW

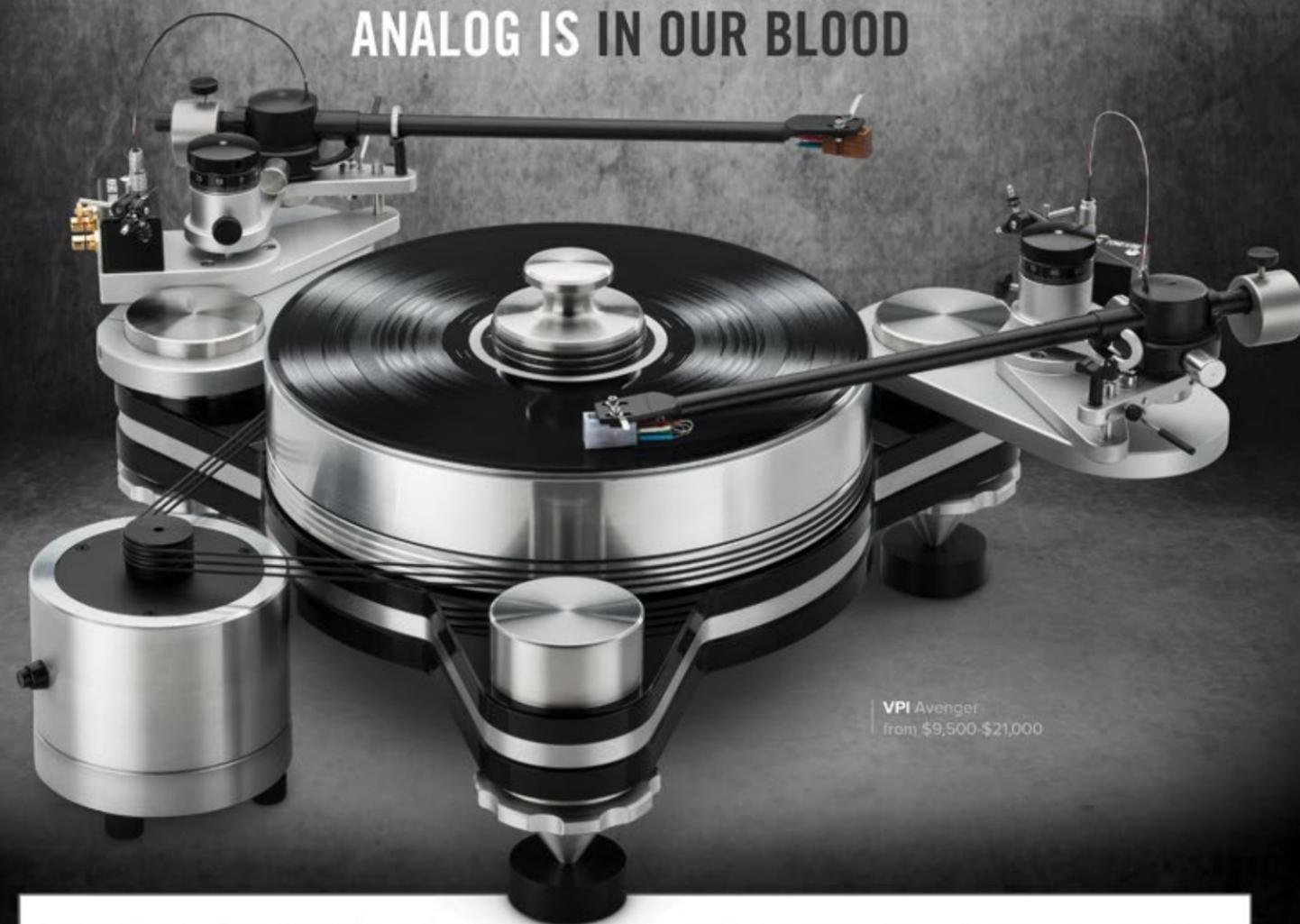
Open your eyes; this is a dream you can have right now. Chief designer Massimiliano Favella mentions that the Ligneas are the last of the legendary speaker designer Franco Serblin's visions. While I haven't ever qualified a speaker as a "jazz" speaker, or a "rock" speaker since I was selling JBL's back in the early 1980s, the more acoustic music auditioned through the Ligneas leads me to believe they are more of an acoustic, or real music speaker. It's not that you can't play rock with these petite beauties. Steven Stills voice and the accompanying harmonies sound massive through these speakers in my living room, which only measures 11 feet wide and about 17 feet deep.

Set up per the instructions, placing the speakers about 3 feet in from the side walls and about 3 feet out from the back wall, tilted in on a triangle putting the listening spot about 6 feet back is perfect. The harmonies in the Beatles' "What Goes On" are equally inviting. Revisiting some of the most listened to Beatles tracks divulges more intimate secrets from albums I thought I knew thoroughly. This is the magic of the Ligneas.

The reason perhaps that I categorize the Ligneas as acoustic speakers is because they have such a high degree of resolution and musical accuracy without ever sounding harsh, forward or strident, they do so much justice to reproducing acoustic instruments. Observing Dave Grisman's fingers command the mandolin, or Chick Corea master the keyboard, they paint a lovely musical picture in my listening room. *(continued)*



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REVIEW

Leaving Roon in radio mode, Blackberry Smoke's "Waiting for the Thunder" joins the queue, making it easy to turn the volume up and enjoy how much these little speakers really can rock. If you live on a constant diet of heavy rock, EDM or hip hop, you will probably yearn for a bit more of the bass response of the Stradivari, perhaps Franco Serblin's finest creation, yet on a day to day, you may never miss it.

Up close and personal

The Ligneas are a personal, intimate speaker; a private treasure you may not want to share with anyone. The subtle inflections of Chuck Mangione's flugelhorn on "Peggy Hill" is so involving and awash with detail, it's as if you are glued to the listening chair. Not only does the slender shape help them to disappear, but the sheer transparency will fool you into thinking you're listening to electrostatic speakers. And with a pair of Quads right here for comparison, I'm not pulling your leg. The Ligneas are that good.

And like the legendary British ESL's, the Ligneas are similar in the sense that they do what they do nearly better than anything else.

Franco Serblin built Sonus faber on small two-way speakers that served the music. The Ligneas are an ultimate expression of this concept. When you hear the natural timbre and decay of cymbals through these speakers, you may just be spoiled for anything else. My LS3/5a's (even the cool vintage ones) sound course by comparison, as do some other speakers at my disposal. *(continued)*

Though these speakers are rated at a relatively low 83db sensitivity, possessing a very gentle slope, first-order cross-over network, they are easy to drive with modest amplification. The PrimaLuna HP integrated that is our Product of the Year turns in an outstanding performance, as does the 20 watt per channel Nagra 300i and the 30 watt per channel Pass XA30.8. You won't achieve concert hall levels with these speakers either way, so go for quality over quantity.

Layers of texture come alive through the Ligneas. If hearing the classic "You Were on my Mind" from Shaun Colvin and Steve Earle doesn't make you weep, and Ella Fitzgerald's rendition of "Miss Otis Regrets" doesn't make you chuckle, you aren't alive. These speakers excel at delivering tonal saturation and contrast, which helps you to interpret the emotional content of a performance that much easier. Every breath that Sarah Jarosz takes in "Lost Dog" comes through clearly, with the banjo in the background having its own distinct space.

Thanks to the small driver, small footprint, two-way design, the Ligneas also offer a superb sense of musical timing, acting as a point source. Lights on or off, it doesn't matter, if these speakers weren't so beautiful, you'd never notice that they were in the room.

To grill or not to grill

The stringed grilles are have been poorly imitated by a number of other manufacturers, yet they continue here with the Ligneas and while I'm not sure if they add or subtract to the sound, they are beautiful to behold. However, their soft nature will not protect the soft dome tweeters from prying hands, noses or paws, so beware.

(continued)





The grilles are easily removed with modest effort, and though I usually remove the grilles on everything I audition, the Ligneas just feel a little naked without them.

Setting up the Ligneas is straightforward, but does require patience. Like a sports car with a small engine, you don't have the luxury of losing horsepower anywhere. Achieving the correct balance between bass, midrange, and imaging is critical so that you don't throw away any of the resolution the Ligneas are capable of. Once the spot is found, inch your listening chair or couch up or back to find the last bit of perfection. I highly suggest enjoying these speakers nearfield for the most engaging results.

While they are not as difficult to position as a pair of ESLs, take it easy and pay close attention to the process. When you get it right the stereo image explodes from

left to right, but if you go too far in, it all disappears, becoming sound from two separate boxes. Ease your way back into the music and swim in a breathtakingly broad and deep soundstage that immerses you in music that just can't be coming from these two tiny speakers.

A whole lotta love

Maybe I was Italian in another life. Whether it be a Ducati motorcycle, an Armani suit or this pair of speakers from Mr. Serblin, there is an emotional component to Italian products that I can't ignore. Both in sound and aesthetic, the Ligneas speakers are a beauty to behold. They won't be the right speaker for everyone, but I suspect those of you that track a pair down will never part with them. You owe it to yourself to arrange an audition. ●

Franco Serblin Ligneas Speakers
\$5,995/pair

MANUFACTURER

Franco Serblin

CONTACT

www.francoserblin.it (factory)
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