

Xavian Virtuosa Anniversario floorstanding loudspeaker

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What sort of loudspeaker would one expect from Xavian, a Czech company run by an Italian audio engineer? Perhaps artisanal, with refined, traditional woodwork and naming primarily inspired by classical music?

Sure. Maybe a pleasant, inviting, warm listening experience washing over you and majoring on rich tonal colours and textures? Got it. How about speed, firecracker dynamics, transparency and detail retrieval uncovering bits of music that previously had gone unnoticed? Hang on, that wasn't in the script, not like this anyway...

Perhaps a better question would be—what to expect from the flagship speaker of an outfit whose price list reads nothing like that of the Magicos, Wilsons, and Avantgardes of this world, one that comprises six distinct speaker lines and has its centre of gravity in the middle four-figure range (which seems extremely reasonable throughout given the levels of build, finish, and materials on offer)?

The countdown begins

The Xavian Virtuosa Anniversarios are a strictly limited edition floorstanding loudspeaker, which will be all over when 50 pairs have been built and delivered (more of half that number already having 'sold' stickers at the time of writing) and features a full complement of Scan-Speak's statement Ellipticor drivers, which big-brand manufacturers wouldn't dream of incorporating in a speaker with a retail price in the lower five-figure range (Xavian was the first and the only brand so far to use Ellipticors in a series-built speaker). Still, on its Facebook page, Xavian is almost apologetic about raising the price from 330,000 to 365,000 CZK in its home market. This works out to €15,000 or £13,000 for a pair of one of the brand's finest loudspeakers, which doesn't sound like 'serious' high-end money, when a 'statement' phono cartridge is almost expected to cost the same... or more.

Whatever your expectations would be, you'd probably be wrong. These are very much Xavian owner/chief engineer Roberto Barletta's babies, culminating over three decades in the business of loudspeakers (and the odd amplifier). Having



EQUIPMENT REVIEW
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» started working for an Italian company making loudspeakers and power amps in 1989 until moving to Prague five years later. Barletta founded Xavian (the name deriving from Greek mythology, being the sacred place of the Muses) in 1996. The XN line, which with their sloping baffles pretty much defined the aesthetics of the larger Xavian speakers over two decades, launched in 1997 and is being reborn with the Virtuosa Anniversario. A project that started in 2022 with a design brief to create a mildly modified and updated version of the XN line's flagship Virtuosa, resulted in a completely new design incorporating "ultimate solutions, a journey into the innermost and previously hidden corners of music without technical limits."

The main talking point is those Ellipticor drivers; in this case, a 38 mm high elliptical dome tweeter and two cone drivers of 18 cm and 22 cm diameter, respectively, covering the midrange and bass regions. Bar the elliptically shaped dust covers – integral to the membranes rather than glued

onto them – look entirely normal from the outside; however, it's a somewhat different story at the business end, usually hidden in the cabinet. Six neodymium magnets per driver are grouped in a star constellation around an elliptical voice coil, which drives a paper membrane. The membrane's shape is not conical, but slightly curved, not unlike the mouth of a Tractrix horn. It sounds simple enough as a description but is rather complex in the real world and has huge ramifications in terms of production tolerances. Happily, the advantages are rather sizeable, too: the elliptical shape of the voice coil and voice coil gap significantly lowering distortion over the entire bandwidth and dynamic range of the drivers and excellent impulse response.

The Fifth Element

Then, there is the crossover filter, which consists of only five elements – none of which are capacitors. Instead, high-quality ribbon coils from Denmark and military-grade 'ultra resistors' using copper elements on their heat sinks do all the dividing and equalising work. The absence of capacitors – even the very best and most expensive ones – in the signal path removes a significant restriction in terms of absolute sound quality, mainly low-level dynamics, in itself; Xavian having been able to eliminate them, uses so few parts and still achieve a very uniform frequency response as well as a gentle impedance curve (the minimum being 3.1Ω at the 37Hz port resonance frequency) which is almost purely resistive over the entire range. Couple that with a generous 92 dB/W/m sensitivity, and it is a testament to the accumulated body of experience and skills the firm has gained over the past near-three decades.

In practice, despite their 4Ω rating, the Virtuosa Anniversarios provided what is undoubtedly one of the least demanding amplifier loads I've encountered from a box-type speaker to date. It enabled my Audio Note (UK) 300B single-ended monobloc amplifiers with a nine Watts rating (which is probably being generous) to shine at their brightest without any apparent compromises in terms of bass control, bandwidth or dynamic range compared to my (admittedly comparatively modest) solid-state amplification.

The most conventional – if very thoroughly engineered – aspect of the Anniversarios is the cabinet, which is solidly constructed out of thick sheets of high-density fibreboard (some other Xavian speaker series use solid woods, but this one probably would be impossible to move, being a hefty 51 kg apiece as is) and divided into three separate chambers inside. Bitumen felt, and fleece are used as damping agents, while the chambers for the mid and high-frequency drivers are filled with seven metres of sheep wool. The bass chamber is tuned using an oval-shaped port made of wood.

Six hours later

Right after Barletta delivered and installed the speakers in person (it's a six-hour drive from Prague to my home,) I put »



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» Kraftwerk's *Radio-Aktivität* [Kling Klang] which sounded rather enjoyable as it was. Barletta noted that the frequency balance was a bit on the warm side, which was solved to my complete satisfaction by toeing in the speakers more towards the listening seat. These are not warts-and-all, if-you-can't-stand-the-heat-get-out-of-the-kitchen studio monitors; instead, they're expertly voiced to give a frequency response that is perceived to be natural by real people in actual rooms – which is with a slight roll-off towards the high end of the frequency band rather than being ruler flat in anechoic chamber conditions. They don't need to do the latter, either – the sheer quality of the drivers and the minimalist crossover, coupled to a cabinet of which the resonance behaviour seems to be very benign at worst, results in a noise floor that is unusually low for anything that isn't a horn speaker or one that uses a single driver for most or all of the frequency band.

The electronic sounds that open Radiohead's 'Everything In Its Right Place' from the album *Kid A* [Parlophone] were so warm that one could dive into them, yet the alienating effects surrounding them took on a new level of clarity and delicacy, rising from a background free of grain and fuzz; the nuances in Thom Yorke's voice and the rising dynamic tension as the piece progresses being minutely traced. The Anniversarios proved equally adept at untangling the dense arrangements of Björk's magnum opus *Homogenic* [One Little Indian], letting both the rich textures of the real string instruments and the harsh, distorted, dynamic electronic sounds shine through – more so when on the end of the Audio Note SETs. Vocals were both intelligible and intimate, the soundstage keeping its size and solidity when all of it got underlined by big wads of 50 Hz electronic bass courtesy of the late producer Mark Bell of LFO fame.

Low-end satisfaction

Speaking of the lowest frequencies – while those seeking to reproduce the lowest pipe organ tones in rooms big enough to accommodate them, might not come away entirely satisfied, for the rest of us playing real-life rooms these generously sized but not monumental floorstanders can be regarded 'full range' without reservation. Moreover, the bass is quick on its feet with little or no discernible overhang, and as rich in tonal colours and textures as the rest of the frequency range. There are oodles of get-up-and-go to serve techno and the new wave of dark electronic body music from the likes of Ultra Sunn and NNHMN with plenty of drive and impeccable timing. Joy Division's *Unknown*

Pleasures [Factory] has been accompanying me through the past four decades at least; the Xavians, however, were shockingly adept at painting producer Martin Hannett's entirely unnatural but completely relatable dystopian soundscapes – wide open, distant and empty but also claustrophobic and too close for comfort at the same time, distorted elements that are glass clear all the same; the primal scream of the guitar parts, the nervous, driving bass patterns, exploding glass, the icy synths and of course Ian Curtis' voice (which also had been subjected all sorts of manipulation including being recorded through a telephone line in *Insight*). It was like a new listening adventure again.

This underscores the main point of this review – I had expected the Xavian Virtuosa Anniversarios to be refined, to be at least 'good' in all the box-tick audiophile aspects, to play with authority, to not draw attention to itself, to be a thoroughly enjoyable listen – what I didn't expect was for the Xavians to be genuinely exciting. They are. They make me want to listen to my music – all of it – all over again. That's what its creator set out to do – to achieve it, and to do so without resorting to artificial elements that would fatigue and the wish for a change of speakers some time down the road is commendable at any price. That bigger names in the business, following their usual calculation models, would probably charge several times the price that the Xavians retail for, is merely the icing on the cake. Weren't it for the tiny number of them being available for a world market, there'd be serious potential for disruption here... +

Technical specifications

Type Type: three-way, floor-standing, front ported speaker

Driver Complement: 1x 120 mm Scan-Speak Ellipticor silk dome tweeter, 1x 180 mm Scan-Speak Ellipticor midrange, 1x 222 mm Scan-Speak woofer

Sensitivity: 92 dB

Impedance: 4 Ohms (min. 3.1 Ohms at 37 Hz)

Frequency Response: 37 – 20,000 Hz (-3 dB)

Recommended Power: 10 – 200 W

Dimensions (H x D x W): 109 x 43 (51) x 26 (34) cm

Weight: 51 kg

Price: £13,000/€15,000/365,000 CZK per pair

Manufacturer Xavian Electronics s.r.o.,
Prague (Czechia/Czech Republic) 🌐 www.xavian.cz

Distributor Official worldwide Xavian

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