

Xavian Quarta Evoluzione floorstanding loudspeaker

by Jason Kennedy

Xxavian was founded in Prague in 1997 by Italian loudspeaker designer Roberto Barletta. It seems an odd place for an Italian to start such a project, but apparently, destiny led him to Prague at the tender age of 23, and he has never felt the need to return. Xavian makes its drive units and produces the cabinets for an extensive range of speakers. If the exceptional gloss finish on the Quarta is anything to go by, they have clearly mastered the art.

Xavian makes two Classic Series models, Terza and Quarta Evoluzione; they look alike, but the Quarta is the bigger box and sits on a lower stand, but that doesn't make it a lot easier to install. This is a substantial 40kg loudspeaker with no ports to grab and a luxurious finish that you don't want to mark. I had to get help to put them on the dedicated stands that Xavian makes. Fortunately, the speaker bolts onto the stand, so it is possible to move the whole thing as one.

The Quarta is classic in the full sense of the word, and few companies make speakers in cabinets of these proportions today. I can only think of a few, with ATC being the first to come to mind. The reason is largely down to fashion dictates; ever since the eighties, when Lawrence Llewellyn Bowen and his ilk started telling people about how their homes should look, loudspeakers have become distinctly unpopular. Anything that can be done to make them less obvious is desirable, which has resulted in narrow baffles on relatively deep cabinets. Wide baffles have pros and cons as far as acoustics are concerned. On the negative side, the more baffle (flat material around the drivers), the more coloration you get from vibration in the baffle. The other side of the equation is that a flat surface is the mildest form of horn loading available, so a larger baffle increases efficiency. Some fabulous wide baffled speakers are made today, and many consider them to be more desirable than their skinny cousins.

The drivers in Xavian speakers carry their founder's brand AudioBarletta; they consist of a 270mm bass ▶





“A rib braces the motor system or magnet on the bass driver within the cabinet.”



▶ driver with a hand impregnated ‘non-pressed’ paper cone in a diecast chassis with neodymium magnets, the latter being a rarity on bass drivers because of their cost. The voice coil is a double layer type with two windings on the in-and outside of the former for extra control. A rib braces the motor system or magnet on the bass driver within the cabinet with an elastomer between wood and metal; this provides a damped but firm fixing for the rear of the driver.

The 175mm midrange unit has an impregnated paper cone with a diecast chassis again and a 50mm voice coil, this time in copper-clad aluminium. It also has a pleated rubber surround which is a bit of a throwback but popular among tube enthusiasts among others. They don’t allow plenty of excursions but have a different character to rubber surrounds. At the top of the box is a 29mm soft dome tweeter controlled

by a copper-clad aluminium voice coil. Copper shorting rings assist its motor system and its rearward output absorbed by a labyrinth chamber.

Xavian has gone to town on the crossover and its components, using Mundorf resistors and Jantzen capacitors in a crossover with variable slopes to give this new Evoluzione version of the Quarta a frequency response of 35Hz to 30kHz. The latter being an exceptionally high figure for a soft dome. The Quarta has bi-wire terminals on the back of its sealed enclosure and those disinclined to look at the drivers in the front baffle can use the magnetic grilles supplied, even if the quality of veneer and finish warrants as much exposure as it can get. The stand for the Quarta is made of MDF with a matte black finish and discreet branding. It stands 372mm high and has adjustable felt-covered feet for hard floors. ▶

▶ Despite its size, the internal volume must be in the region of 60 litres, and driver area; this is no boombox, quite the opposite. The bass is tight and highly articulate, you have to throw serious amounts of very low end to get it to rumble, and I suspect that a warm and not too grippy amplifier might suit it better than the Moor Amps Angel 6 that I use for most of my listening. Positioning is essential with any speaker and no less so with this one. In my room, best results were achieved by placing the Quartas close to the back wall and firing straight out from it with very little toe-in; this is because of the above-mentioned restraint in the bass and a revealing midrange that produces better image scale in this arrangement. Pointing their axis at the listening seat increases detail resolution to a degree but restores the image width quite significantly and can be a shade forward with some recordings.

The midrange is particularly clear, and it allows you to hear right into each recording and pick out what's going on, what each musician is contributing and, critically, how well they are gelling with other members of the ensemble or band. The Grateful Dead's 'Cumberland Blues' [*Europe '72*, Warner Bros] can sound chaotic because there are several lead instruments jamming together in a live situation, but this speaker is able to delineate what they are all doing and how their contributions knit together, the result being boogie power on the next level and a whole lot of fun. They proved very adept at revealing differences between versions of the same song too, the track on this occasion being 'Home Again' by Steely Dan [*Aja*, ABC], of the two digital versions available, DSD proved the most even-handed and revealing, a CD rip sounding quite bright despite being a quieter mastering. On vinyl, I was surprised to find an audiophile pressing by Cisco that sounded better than an old UK release; generally, older is better, but on this system, older had a pronounced lower midrange hump that thickened the sound. Bernard Purdie's drumming is superb, and Larry Carlton's guitar sublime on each version, but the Cisco took top honours, all of which was made obvious by the Quartas.

I tried a newer recording from Boz Scaggs, 'Thanks to You' from *Dig* [Virgin]; this has some serious low end on it and proved that the Xavians are happy to produce the stuff in delicious style. The synth is sounding dark and chocolatey in a rolling glue kind of way while letting the vocals deliver their message with clarity and feeling. This speaker is very good at vocals, a fact reinforced by David Thomas and Two Pale Boys' 'Obsession' [*Erewhon*, Cooking Vinyl], where the bass guitar comes out in full, three-dimensional form behind Thomas' pitiful lyrics, the texture and depth of his voice popping out of the speakers alongside sharp yet rounded guitar notes.

The Quartas are revealing the makeup of the piece whilst simultaneously honing it into a cohesive whole that sounds very real in the room. A couple of tracks followed this by Miles Davis, firstly the opener on *Miles in the Sky* [CBS], where Ron Carter's double bass propels the groove without ever standing out and Tony Williams responds in a more clear-cut fashion. Leaving the centre stage to the horn where it's as expressive as ever and never less than engaging, it's a surprisingly good recording for 1968.

Bitches Brew [CBS] is also a cracker, especially on vinyl, the track 'Spanish Key' being revealed in all its splendour across the wide soundstage provided by the Quartas. They manage to reveal just how good the band was on this session and how adeptly Davis guides them without getting caught up in the density of the piece, something that can easily get in the way of lesser speakers.

Xavian's Quarta Evoluzione is something of a rebel speaker in the market today. Its squat, wide shape and infinite baffle loading are rarities in a world of tall slim reflex-loaded designs, yet Barletta and his team have proved that a well-executed design does not need to conform to the latest trends. The Quarta may look old fashioned to some eyes, but when it comes to ears, its sonic abilities are very much of the moment. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: 3-way, standmount speaker with infinite baffle enclosure

Driver complement: One 29mm impregnated soft dome tweeter; one 175mm midrange driver with impregnated paper cone; one 270mm hand impregnated, 'non pressed' paper cone

Crossover frequencies: 300Hz, 2.5kHz

Frequency response: 35Hz–30kHz

Impedance: 8 Ohms

Sensitivity: 87dB/W/m

Dimensions (H×W×D): 680 × 350 × 400mm

Weight: 40kg/each

Finishes: High gloss zebrano, silver ebony, rosewood real wood veneers

Price: €11,990/pair, stands €990

Manufacturer: Xavian Electronics s.r.o.

Tel: +420 734 528 189

URL: xavian.cz