

TEST: Sonus Faber Chameleon B a different speaker from Vicenza

[Karl Erik Sylthe](#)

Some HiFi manufacturers have over many years been performing to such a high level that they almost by default are written into the HiFi elite. Sonus Faber is such a manufacturer. The disadvantage of this status is that the fall height becomes very high if they don't perform in accordance with the expectations. Can the naughty innovation Chameleon B be such a case, or will Sonus Faber manage to land on their feet?



Run-up to this test sort of started on a Thursday night in late March. The night before Audun and Simen from Mono AS had a seance with Sonus Faber at Bergen Musikk Handel, and this evening they presented Sonus Faber's Amati Futura at Roald's shop, Renaissance Audio. Roald tends to get anything sounding good in his store at 5 Støletorget in Bergen, and this evening it sounded fantastic.

And it was on my way home from Støletorget over to Sydneshaugen, throughout this intensive Sonus Faber process, that I received an email on my mobile stating that Sonus Faber had launched a brand new speaker series. This was around when passing "Kjøttbasaren", and for that reason I was wandering somewhat recklessly and inadvertently over the fish market, studying the most significant details of this series. It must be admitted that my first thought when I saw the colorful pictures on the very modest mobile screen was something near – "oh no, what is Sonus Faber up to this time..."

Further study of the pictures later revealed that the Chameleon range has great detailing and use of materials. And the idea of interchangeable side panels in a variety of colors grew on me, until I

realized that I just *had* to review these speakers. Especially since recent events had put me in a proper Sonus Faber mode.

An inquiry to Audun was encouraging - he could have a test kit available already shortly after Easter. There is nothing like testing uncharted territory. It remained only to choose between a pair of standmount speakers at around 10k (NOK), and floor models at 22k NOK. I am very much in standmount mode these days, so the choice fell on a set of Chameleon B.

Sonus Faber Chameleon B

Franco Serblin was a legend at Sonus Faber. He founded this factory and brand and started his career as a speaker designer with the highly unconventional speaker Snail Project, which formed the basis for the somewhat more conventional Parva - one of the first speakers of its kind that used Kevlar cone. Serblin died in 2013, 73 years old.



After Franco Serblin a young design team have taken over and they have already managed to make his mark. Paolo Tezzon is sound designer, while Livio Cucuzza handles the industrial design. And there are some obvious changes in both of these genres. The new models from Sonus Faber clearly have a more open and neutral character than what many of Serblin`s designs were known for. And there are also very obvious new design lines, something our model Chameleon B exemplifies. But what about the sound, is it also different from earlier times wine-inspired models from Sonus Faber? I will come back to that later.



This new series will in some ways replace the newly expired Sonus Faber Toy launched in 2008. But while the design of Toy builds strongly on Sonus Faber`s traditions from previous series - especially Concerto and Concertino with its distinctive classic SF-look and great racks, Sonus Faber has taken new directions with Chameleon. But there is still a clear relationship in these new models, which are also handmade at the factory in

Vicenza roughly midway between Venezia and Verona. Materials used are leather as the dominant material and superb craftsmanship with exquisite details and we also find this on the Chameleon B. The trapezoid form with the heavily tilted front is of course an old acquaintance from previous models, although here it is reincarnated in a completely expression. A bit like Miles Davis in his many innovations of jazz, but in which he always brings along the history. More on Miles later.

The leather of the chassis forms a coherent surround for the front / top / rear, with great curved detail and a high quality finish. On each side we find perhaps the most startling element in construction. Here, the side panels are acoustically disconnected cabinet and can easily be replaced by another panel of a different color.



There's a total of nine colors to choose from and if you get tired of the color you initially select, or you want to surprise your wife with a new interior when she comes home from a business trip to Brussels, you can just buy a new set for a relatively affordable price. A lot more convenient than painting and messing around with the wallpaper!

A neat touch is the way that the Sonus Faber logo is positioned symmetrically at both the front and rear, which allows you to choose whether to leave the recess which also serves as a handle for the side panel to face forward or backward. No big deal, but still...

The test speaker was equipped with metal gray side panels - a wise and appealing choice that allows speaker fitting into most interiors without shouting visually.



The next surprise in the design is the placement of ventilation port: it is located in the bottom of the speaker, which automatically has alarm bells ringing for possible acoustic conflict with racks. For a while, I thought it was intended that they should be combined with special racks from Sonus Faber, where it would set off the gap under the bass ports. However, I soon became aware that there is a kind of integrated horseshoe around bass ports ensuring the bass can flow freely out of the speaker without being affected by the top plate on the stand or on the bench they are placed on.

The Chameleon B is a two-way bass reflex construction. At the top there is an in-house designed 29mm soft-dome and this is complemented by a 150mm midrange and bass driver. The crossover frequency between these is placed at 2,500Hz. The stated frequency response is 50 to 25,000 Hz. For a bookshelf speaker, it has a medium sensitivity of 87 dB.



Test Setup

During the test of Sonus Faber Chameleon B, these components were used:

Source:

- Rega RP1 - RB101 - Ortofon M2 Bronze
- Thorens TD160B MkII - Hadcock GH-228 arm - Sonus Faber Blue Gold
- Denon DCD-2000AE

Amplifiers:

- Linn Kolektor (preamp)
- Linn LK100 (power amp)
- Naim UnitiQute 2 (integrated streaming amp)



- NAD 3020 (classic integrated)
- Quad QII-Integrated (valve amp)

Subwoofers

- Linn Sizmik 10.25
- Xavian Basso

The distributor informed me that the speakers had been playing between 20 and 40 hours, and that they therefore should be already run-in. My impression was that there was still a positive development for a while further during testing period, perhaps up to a total of 80 hours.

Musical Journey

This time I have chosen to take you through a very thorough section on a larger part of the listening experience I had with the test object. Some of the content here is maybe as much about music as about the test object, so those of you who want to go a little more directly to the more conclusive department, may want to skip directly to the next paragraphs. Are you however interested in reading about the musical experiences that underlie the

conclusion, you are welcome into this musical journey.

The largest part of the test period was recorded vinyl, but it also played a great deal on Spotify and CD / SACD.



Naim UnitiQute 2

This magnificent integrated amplifier with DAC and streaming was the main partner for the Chameleon B during the test.... We start the listening session with Spotify Connect on UnitiQute 2, which at times sounds so great that it's very easy to forget that it concerns a lossy compression.

First out is the duo Ole Paus and Ketil Bjørnstad. The brand new album Frolandia played very well, but even better figure made Kildens Bredd, recorded at the Barony in Rosendal. Sound

played on the test setup is fantastic, not least the voice of Ole Paus in this reinterpreting of old national romantic songs.



Susanne Lundeng`s perhaps best album **Nattevåk** is reproduced with incredible dynamics. There is also a wonderful transparency and a clear perspective. And Solveig Sletthjell`s album **Silver** rendered magnificently and naked. This may be called HiFi music in the positive sense, and is played regularly during demos at one of Bergen`s HiFi stores.

We end the general Spotify department with some classical music. Rega e iRagzzi have released an exciting album at Simax called Grieg Unheard, where a handful of the best tenors in Norway perform bold interpretations of Grieg's songs. This recording is generally reproduced with great depth. The song **I Love You** has a wonderful piano rendition. But I miss a little bit more body in the vocals. In The song **Eit Syn** I have noted that there is a lot of air around the vocals.

Miles Davis on Chameleon B

It's time to let Miles Davis greet these speakers, since I initially referred to his historical perspective in their innovation. And what could be more natural than to start with that album that is wrongly (!) seen as the most innovative of them all. **Kind Of Blue** is a very good album though, even when it comes to sound quality. But right here there was something that did not add to 100%. The reproduction of this album via Spotify had a little hardness in the top.

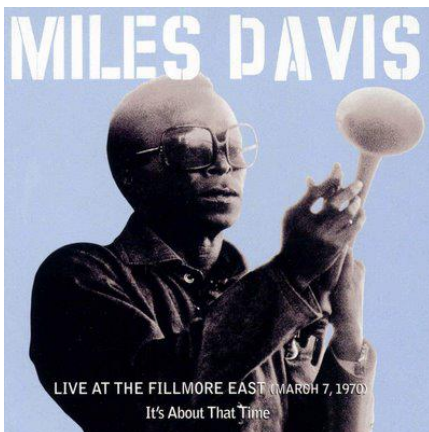


Another milestone from a completely different era a quarter of a century later - **Tutu** - the album that made Miles was fairly widely available to a much wider audience than he had previously - developed in strong cooperation with Marcus Miller. The title track Tutu rendered very dynamic. The deepest bass is lacking a bit on this album when Chameleon B plays without sub. Repeated playback with the assistance of the subwoofer Xavian Basso change course on it. I have otherwise noted that it's an incredibly effective dissemination of the atmosphere of **Portia** - the album's undisputed highlight, and maybe Miles Davis's best song ever during the 80s.

And while we are first in the 80s, I pulled one of his best album ever forward in Spotify. **We Want Miles** is a live recording from the beginning of the 80s, from one of the first concerts Miles held after his catastrophic drought in other half of the 70s. This album is for MD's concern characterized by two factors - he was technically on something close to an absolute low, after his 5 years long absence from music. And musically he is top notch, characterized by an enthusiasm that surpasses most.

The sound of the album, I already appreciated as very dynamic, but played on the combination UnitiQute 2 and Sonus Faber Chameleon B it surpasses anything I have heard before of this album. On opening track **Jean Pierre** I have just listed "fantastic!". **Back Seat Betty** impresses just as much - the front seat will never be the same after this. One of the most intravenous I experienced the music, despite the obvious (analog) distorted override at the peaks of the recording. **FastTrack** is still a great experience, even though here too there are big-time override of recording - particularly in the hottest bass areas where Marcus Miller plays some octaves below normal. Otherwise an amazing solo by Miles Davis.

My man's Gone Now is the album's undisputed highlight, and is essentially taken from the album Porgy and Bess from the second half of the 50th century. The mood is set already in the intro, when one or another exclaims, "Yeah, man!". Miles Davis plays musically at its very best here, despite a half rusty technique. And it has in truth been no exercise technique that has been what has been the most interesting thing with Miles Davis. And Bill Evans plays an impressive piece of Solo, and demonstrates that he musically perhaps is up there beside his brother-in -name, who helped immortalize KoB. During the rest of the album I was only listening without taking notes - almost paralyzed.



We need a small trip back to the 70s before we leave Miles Davis - what many consider the most challenging decade in Miles Davis's music. We start with **Live at Fillmore East**, recorded in March 1970 just before Bitches Brew was released (not to be confused with the recording Black Beauty a little later in 1970 at the same location). This is a very demanding album sonically, and playback on Chameleon B is no exception. And the opening track **Directions** there are other speakers who have performed better. But I've still noted that **Spanish Key** rendered a terrific rhythmic drive.

Latest Miles album is **Cellar Door Sessions**, live recordings spanning a week in late 1970, where Keith Jarrett in the band, and Jan Garbarek present among the audience at some of the

concerts. I sit paralyzed and listen to the extreme closeness of **Yesternow**. This setup has given this live-box a new life.

Vinyl

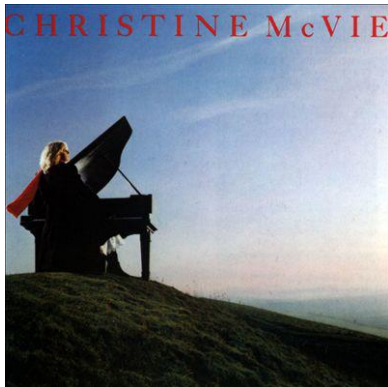
Time to switch over to a batch with analog sound before we attempt to draw up a synopsis and conclusive lines.



We start with **Rega RP1**, quite extensively upgraded with a Ortofon 2M Bronze.

Rather early **Santana** initially, where **Marathon** by Santana released in 1979 in my ears mark the end of a great period. This album was the start of a permanent decline - Santana was hit by some of the same musical flattening that happened to Chicago, and almost simultaneously. But since this should be really all about the sound, I noted that it sounds fresh, but a hunch hard. On the album with Carlos Santana and Buddy Miles from seven years earlier, there is a surprisingly open and dynamic sound to be this kind of concert recordings. HiFi at rock concerts are rare commodity.

VI take a trip to **Simply Red** 's debut album **Picture Book** from `85, which is reproduced with a huge rhythmic drive. The song **Sad Old Red** has a wonderful open sound, and with a great bass in the opening.



Paul McCartney 's **Peace of Pipes** is reproduced very open and dynamic. Consistently very good sound in the entire LP - transparent and dynamic.

Christine McVie from Fleetwood Mac also released a solo album, although she probably shouldn't. She was a terrific contributor to FM, both as a singer and songwriter. But was a bit depending on the rest of the gang to bring out the magic of music. Here the music is uninspiring, and so is the sound. And even Sonus Faber Chameleon B does not manage to revive it.

Linda Ronstadt don't need blowing life into the album **Living in the USA** . Could it be because the album is mixed with Aural exciter? Highlight is **All That You Dream** - an old Little Feat song, which she has also has performed on a record with this band. Very good sound and performance, and creative arrangement with Steel Guitar. And the old classic **Love Me Tender** has the best performance of this tune I'd ever heard.



We change turntable, to Thorens TD160B MkII, with Hadcock tonearm and Sonus Blue Gold PU.

Old Dire **Straits** has good sound, and the **Communique** , **Making Movies** and **Love over Gold** played crisply, open and detailed.

We switch to old **Simon & Garfunkel** . This duo's reunion in **Central Park in autumn 1981** is legendary . **Mrs. Robinson** is rendered with great width, while **Homeward Bound** played beautifully, with good perspective. The song **America** rendered a little more middle of the road, and also has a bit too slow

pace here for my taste. **April Come She Will** is an insane song that the world would be a poorer place without, and here we get a great perspective with the purchase.

Wake Up Little Susan is rendered very transparent, while on **Still Crazy ...** I have noted "open sound, wide, beautifully with almost spooky perspective". And great dynamics. **American Tune** also has good dynamics in a laidback song, and **Late In the Evening** impresses with great rhythmic drive.

Just over five years after the concert in Central Park **Paul Simon** released **Graceland**, and this album was magnificently rendered on the test setup. **You Can Call Me Al** was rendered opened, rhythmic and punchy, while **Under African Skies** were beautiful and with good resolution. **Homeless** really impressed with good depth.



A round with Beatles's White Album gave a sense of crisp reproduction.

Perhaps one of the most instructive albums was the Swedish album **Big Blues Band** from 1972. Here both the strengths and the limitations of the speakers were revealed. The first impression I would characterize as "jawdropping", Big band performed naked is a truly remarkable experience. And still there was lacking some warmth, as other speakers can deliver much more of.

Berget Det Blå is one of **Ketil Bjørnstad's** very first album, and perhaps the very best in a variety of excellent albums. Sound has an outstanding transparency, but is still sound slightly thin, and Sonus Faber Chameleon B is after all not able to change this timbre, quite the contrary.

The sound of Sonus Faber Chameleon B

If you have read through the entire musical journey, you probably already suspect what direction this is heading. Sonus Faber Chameleon is a dynamic firework of a speaker. It has occasionally given me dynamic and rhythmic sensations that I have hardly experienced before on the same records. At least not with speakers in this price range. The highlight was undeniably on Miles Davis' *We Want Miles*, where I was sitting spellbound listening through the whole album that I really should just take a short trip into just to gauge the mood. And the dynamic characteristics of the speaker are quite unchanged regardless of the electronics being played, although there are other properties that change depending on the amplifier selection. More on that later.

Rather it is a clear tendency for the turntable combo Rega RP1 / Ortofon 2M Bronze highlighting micro dynamics to a greater extent than the Thorens TD160B Mk2 with the tonearm arm Hadcock and pickup Sonus Blue Gold priests...

And it's not just micro dynamics that are outstanding at Sonus Faber Chameleon B. Perspective and depth reproduction is very good. And transparency is also one of the strengths. There are perhaps few other speakers I've tested where the term naked have appeared more frequently in my head and my keyboard.

But then, there are still so few trees that really grow into the sky, at least not trees with a price tag of around ten thousand NOK for the pair. And the limitation of Sonus Faber Chameleon B is undeniable in the exercise of tonal balance.

We can start in the deeper octaves. With a stated frequency response that rolls off around 50hz this pretty average for a relatively compact bookshelf speakers. Purely subjective, I got the impression that the speakers are a bit careful also in the frequency ranges above the deepest bass. And still, the lack of genuine deep bass wasn't a big topic for me during the listening period. I used Chameleon B both with and without an external subwoofer, and quite apart from some special recordings that appreciated a sub, I had no particular sense of loss in the bass range. I could have lived with these speakers without a subwoofer, even in a master setup, if I otherwise had landed on a couple Chameleon B. And then it must be said that I, unlike some other members of the editorial staff of Audiophile.no isn't very dedicated to deep bass.

But also further up the frequency ranges there are some limitations. Or perhaps rather the lack of constraints, the top frequency sticking slightly forward here. And it is the combination of a slightly prominent treble and something missing body and heat in some cases manifests itself. What impact this has will depend on the recordings that are served. It was very evident on the album Big Blues Band, where an otherwise sparkling reproduction was limited by a little cold timbre. But it is also very dependent on the components speakers were connected to.

This highlights the old devil called matching. And very clearly this time it was that Ortofon 2M Bronze has some characteristics that make it on some recordings may be a little too much of the energy and treble. For both the 2M Bronze and the Chameleon B have properties that go in the same direction, both in terms of micro dynamics and timbre balance. Therefore, I am very certain that my old pickup flame from late 70s - Sonus Blue Gold fits much better. And yes, I'm sure I was not seduced by name similarity with Sonus Faber. With this pick-up put into set in a tonearm from Hadcock on a Thorens TD160B Mk2, there was significantly less challenges in the upper frequency range, but without the sound characteristics disappearing.

The result was interesting when the Chameleon B was connected to a couple of tube amplifiers. A cheap Mengyue tube amp that Ole-Petter brought along to a summit, resulted immediately in a musical and appealing presentation, and managed in an almost magical way to neutralize the sound-related tendencies of Chameleon B. Certainly it was at the expense of detailing.

Even more interesting was the combination of the Chameleon B and Quad's neoclassical Quad QII-Integrated, Here there was hardly any recession in the treble that did the trick, but rather a very well resolved, airy and polished treble turned a tendentious treble not being negatively perceived. And when all other parameters are in place, this is a very exciting combination, although of course there is a fundamental offset in price point, with an integrated amplifier that costs five times more than the speakers.



Conclusion

Sonus Faber Chameleon B is a very interesting speaker, as it is virtually impossible to be indifferent to these beauties. I was in love with design and finish, and this lasted through a long and rigorous testing period. Just design and finish alone are worth the price!

Nor is the sound of the Chameleon B easy to be indifferent to. Here we have a brilliant example that the apple can fall very far from Franco Serblin: here there is not so much red wine around. Explosive dynamics and great openness, combined with a sound balance that is far from neutral, can easily provide various perceptions. It also made for a variety of views among the members of the editorial staff who received tasting samples, where Stig Arne thought they sounded too bright, while I was deeply fascinated by the dynamic properties and an occasionally skinless reproduction.

The Sonus Faber Chameleon B were sorely missing from the first day after the test kit left Sydneshaugen. Few loudspeakers have set equally deep impressions. But that does not mean that other speakers in the same price range can't play equally well, but they are usually very different. I have yet to hear anyone in this price range that is as engaging as the Chameleon B.

The Chameleon B needs some consideration when it comes to matching with other equipment and personal preference compared to many of its competitors. If this exercise is performed and you appreciate a lively and dynamic speaker with exquisite design and finish, the Sonus Faber Chameleon B a wonderful exciting speaker!

Thanks to the Norwegian distributor [Mono AS](#) for letting us borrow Chameleon B