

Ars Aures F-1 Loudspeaker



Chuck Bruce

THE ITALIANS HAVE A KNACK for creating unique and stylish creations whether fast cars or fancy attire. And, of course, we cannot overlook Italian artists such as Michelangelo or Leonardo. Loudspeaker design and engineering is no exception to our rule of Italian design standouts what with such examples as the famed Sonus Faber line and other notables.

The Ars Aures Loudspeaker line we are reviewing here was established by Giuseppe Nizzola of Mazara Del Vallo, Italy, and he does the Italian design tradition

proud. Here in the U.S., the line has been making a mark of its own since 2004. Various ARS Aures models have been attracting attention and acclaim at several audio events including the latest in Montreal Audio Show in early 2006. With all of the stir, I was most interested in the opportunity to audition the F-1 model. The editor felt that the magazine needed to this relatively new brand which at once achieved high fashion and high end sound.

This particular model, the F-1, offers its own distinctive touches of stylish cabinetry without being avant-garde. At first glance, the Model F-1 is not particularly prepossessing design; just 39.5 inches high (100 cm), this floor-standing, two-way, front-ported bass-reflex design is a fairly standard dynamic driver loudspeaker system. Delving further, we are presented with an extremely well-crafted and engineered loudspeaker system that quickly sets itself apart by quality of performance, all the while scoring decor points by not physically dominating a room. This, of course, should please spouses and significant others sensitive to the appearance of A/V gear.

The Ars Aures F-1 is a loudspeaker intended for either two-channel or multi-channel applications and the firm offers a companion center-channel unit which I will not address here on editor's orders (drat him!). The F-1 is available in a wide variety (and custom order) of wood and high quality faux-painted finishes, and it is clear that the manufacturer attempts to address a wide variety of preferences. The Ars family of consists of three lines of multiple models ranging in price from \$5,100 to \$25,500. The F-1 retails for \$5,100 US per pair. According to the manufacturer the F-1 system project was started to enter a new market niche with a less expensive model, with the same Ars Aures sound quality of their more costly models.

The Italians know how to craft and finish wood and the F-1 is a prime example of this fine art. The simple knuckle rap test to the cabinet reveals rock-solid construction. There is minimum cabinet vibration which results in little if any coloration to the music coming along from the cabinet. Since the F-1 is somewhat modest in size, there is minimum cabinet surface area to project colorations.

Two-way driver implementations such as the F-1 have an advantage of simplicity in crossover requirements and cabinetry. The F-1 presents a remarkably spacious soundstage coupled with excellent differentiation of vocal and instrumental lines. The listener is given here much of the clarity and focus achieved by stand mounted or bookshelf two-way systems, yet the overall sound is enhanced with extended bass from the front port and reaches down to 35 Hz.

Upon first hearing, I was amazed by the dimensions of the soundstage thrown by the F-1, as were other astute audiophiles who were visiting my listening room. The F-1 boasts a phase-coherent crossover, and based on my first-hand sonic impressions, it is on the mark. Driver integration is likely the best that I've heard, just a smooth wall of sound, completely in balance.

Admittedly, my use of above-average electronics aid these attributes, yet a good quality A/V receiver will do

justice with the F-1's performance. The F-1s use a pair of high-quality binding posts and a pair of small spikes for the front, these allowing a few degrees of tilt back to aid dispersion floor coupling.

As for audio performance, the F-1 is capable of great and touching delicacy, yet it will project deep-throated bass when the program requires. In my experience, unless an owner simply must have the gut-slam of the lowest bass octaves, a sub-woofer is not needed with this loudspeaker in any normal size listening room. Home theater buffs may want more copious bass, yet for audiophile listening, the F-1 will do full justice to most any recording without fuss or breakup.

The system's most salient attributes include resolution of subtle detail, spacious soundstage, solid imaging, excellent driver integration and remarkably deep bass from a 6½-inch woofer (35 Hz, +3dB), no one-note thumpy bass here. Paired with a 1-inch, soft-dome tweeter, this loudspeaker achieves dynamic extension with ease and no sense of stridency.

Operatic vocals are presented with clarity and focus; here one of my favorites is soprano Kathleen Battle on her *Mozart Arias* (EMI DS-38297). Her engaging reading of *L'Amore Sarò Costante* K. 208, with B. Griffiths violin accompaniment, is a prime example of this speaker's ability to convey both nuance and emotional impact.

Another of my favorite vocal references is the time-tested soprano Natania Davrath on her wonderful *Songs of the Auvergne* on the Vanguard reissue LP (APC 002). The delicacy of Ms. Davrath's voice in front of the orchestra and woodwind accompaniment, was conveyed with a perfection unsurpassed by any speaker that I have used to audition this recording.

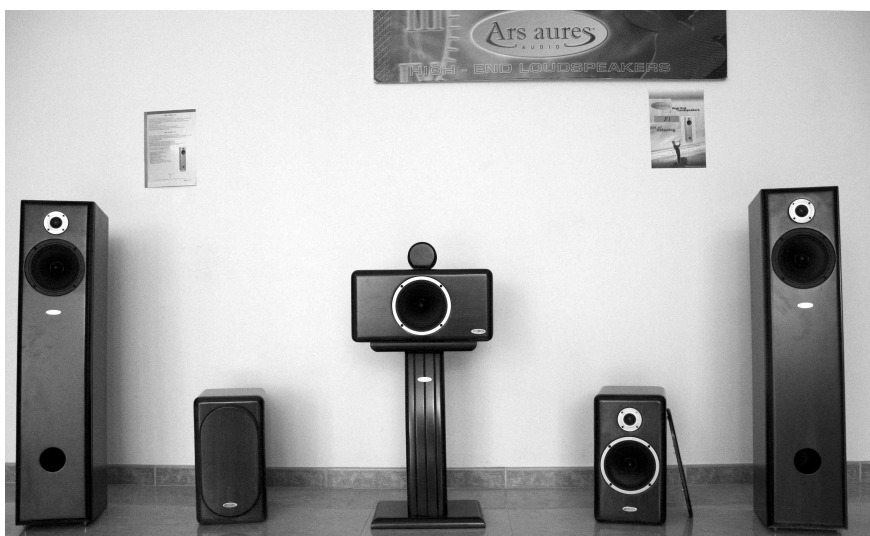
Next up on my trials list was Rimsky Korsakoff's *The Snow Maiden* RCA LSC 2238, a John Pfeffer and Lewis Layton wonder with the 1958 RCA Symphony with

Giving all the music with aplomb, the Ars runs with the best in class.

NOTES

Ars Aures F-1 Loudspeaker, \$5,100.00. U.S. importer/representative: Landes Audio, 73 West Main St., Chester, NJ 07930; phone 908/879-6999; e-mail mail@landesaudio.com or arsaures@arsaures.it; web site www.landesaudio.com.

Associated Equipment
Audio Research Ref 2 Mk-II preamp; Audio Research Ph-3 SE phono stage; Sony NS999ES CD; Theta DS Pro Basic IIIa D/A; VPI HW-19, Mk 4 turntable; Benz Micro Ruby H 3 phono cartridge; Art Audio Jota, 300BXLs, Cary V-12R, and Pass Labs X-150 amplifiers; and various interconnect, loudspeaker and power cords by Audioquest, Direct-Connect, Kimber, and Soundstrings.



Speaker models on display at the firm's Italian factory.

depth of field achieved in this 1958 recording was most convincing. A prime example was the driving melodic drama of Schumann's *Symphony #4 in D minor*, especially the Third Movement. The differentiation of vocal and instrumental lines is very precise, likely second to none, and particularly impressive from a ported, two-way loudspeaker of this scale and modest driver complement.

This Ars Aures loudspeaker conveys a sense of "presence" that is so tremendously apparent, especially in big opera and "stage" productions, that one's listening room swept wall-to-wall by the recorded sound. The F-1s are capable of performing a true disappearing act

Robert Russell Bennett conducting. Imaging and

with better and more spacious recordings, again apparently due to superior crossover design and driver integration.

Another real jaw dropper is Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* and the version I use is a cut from my original issue RCA LSC 6065 LP featuring the Royal Opera House Orchestra. The F-1 presents this superb 1960s recording's sweeping soundstage and earth-plumbing bass in a manner second to none.

As a jazz fan, I especially found pleasure from JVC's XRCD2-0206-2 when Count Basie met Oscar Peterson in the tune "Timekeepers." The driving force of Basie and Peterson, backed by Louis Bellson on drums and John Heard on bass, was near palpable. Other tunes such as "Rent Party" and "Indiana," with their rapid fire beats, left this listener with a big, fat "Oh, Wow!" emotional response.

Far as power amplifier adaptability, despite the rather moderate sensitivity of 89 dB SPL for one watt input and nominal impedance listed at 8 ohms, I found that lower powered vacuum tube amplifiers such as the 20 watt Art Audio 300 BXL SE performed most admirably. This pairing likely give the best sonic performance during the audition. This was actually a bit of a surprise considering the manufacturer recommends 50 - to -100 watts of amplifier capability. Of course, I can imagine that the manufacturer wants that extra juice to assure the most dynamic performance possible. I also applied a couple of my solid-state stalwarts including the Pass X-150 amplifier and got back sound without strain or pain together with rock solid bass.

A simple sensitivity number doesn't always indicate how a given amplifier will interact with a given loudspeaker (and connecting cables). Indeed, audition after audition in my real-world listening room which uses a minimum of artificial acoustic treatment, has proven this principle time and again. I maintain a fleet of power amps, some tube and some solid-state, to deal with these uncertainties. There is a lot more at work here than a simple number. We have the complex inductance and capacitance characteristics of crossover networks, wiring and drivers of various designs to challenge the most-competent amplifier. The amp, of course, has its own characteristics as well, and how it behaves with various loudspeaker loads can sometimes be uncertain or unpredictable. Plus, how "deep" are those impedance valleys, e.g. do they drop to less than one ohm) at certain critical points, especially those power hogging low frequencies? Or are there any sustained set of frequencies which, when reproduced at higher listening levels, that drain a power supply dry? And does this cause the speaker any undue distress?

In conclusion, even though the F-1 is not at the top of the ARS Aures loudspeaker line, it surely got the job done with flying colors, on each of the many recordings I asked her to reveal. The F-1 gave me all of the music I desired and did so with aplomb. The F-1 can run with the best in her class and then some. Kudos to Giuseppe Nizzola and his team of engineers and technicians in Mazara Del Vallo Italy.

S P E C S

Bass-reflex floor standing system. Frequency Response: 35 - 20,000 Hz +/-3dB. Nominal impedance: 8 Ohms. Sensitivity: 89 dB SPL (2.83 V at 1 meter). Crossover: 6 db/octave, with Litz coils. Recommended power amp: 50to 100 watts. Components: One 6-1/2 inch SEAS woofer with double Santoprene surround coil, self-positioning in the magnetic field. One 1-inch soft dome tweeter is by TB and uses a tube chamber that is heavily modified with damping material to change overall frequency resonance. Cabinet dimensions: 100 by 22 by 28.5 cm (HxWxD). The cabinet is constructed of 1-1/8 inch (3 cm) MDF plus 1/8-inch real wood veneer; the frontal thickness is 2-1/8 inches (6 cm). Finishes: HDF painted high-gloss, solid wood, and veneer with painted front. Net weight: 11.5 pounds, 25 kg each. Finishes include painted chrome silver, high gloss racing red and other standard colors; standard veneers are beech, ash, cherry, mahogany, and bleached oak. A chrome fascia is also offered.