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Xavian Bonbonus

LOUDSPEAKERS

Xavian is not only a curiously named loudspeaker company: its history is also curious. Although the company is based in the Czech Republic, and operates exclusively out of Klasno, a suburb just west of Prague, its founder is Italian, one Roberto Barletta, who was born in Turin, in northern Italy, and gained his loudspeaker experience working for a manufacturer based in that city. He moved to the Czech Republic in 1996, where he founded Xavian in that same year.

Well-known Czech speaker designer David Hyka joined Xavian in 2011, after which the company produced a flood of new speaker designs, including the Cuore subwoofer, Virtuosa floorstander, XN 125 Junior and XN Piccola, XN Carisma and in 2012, the Bonbonus that is the subject of this review, and the company's very first 'low-cost' loudspeaker. (Its most recent release is a floorstanding version of the Bonbonus called the Delizia.)

As for the Xavian name being curious, I personally found it so because it's neither Italian nor Czech, but a common Spanish male name, itself originally derived from an Arabic word meaning 'bright'.

THE EQUIPMENT

Although Xavian's English-language website states that *'the whole production is made in our factory in Kladno'* and that the drivers are *'exclusive custom made Xavian'*, these appear to be translation errors, because Barletta told Australian Hi-Fi Magazine that although the drivers are certainly exclusive to Xavian, and that they are custom-made expressly for Xavian, they are actually made in Italy by a specialist driver manufacturer. (Xavian also sources drivers from other European driver manufacturers depending on model, primarily from Germany, Denmark and Sweden).

I measured the bass/midrange driver in the Bonbonus as having an overall diameter

of 133mm across the 'rounds' of the chassis and 152mm across the corners. The cone itself is 97mm in diameter. The important dimension, the Thiele/Small diameter, is 105mm, which in turn gives an effective cone area, or *S_d*, of 87cm², which operates from a cabinet volume of around 8 litres. The cone is made of impregnated paper and driven by a 40mm diameter aluminium voice-coil wrapped around a Kapton former. The cone's compliant surround is very unusual. It's made of rubber, but instead of being of standard 'half round' construction, it is pleated. I'd be interested to learn why this unusual suspension method has been employed. The cone is also notable for having a very large central dustcap, one that's fully 55mm in diameter.

But if I thought the front of the bass/midrange driver was impressive, the rear of the driver was even more so. The chassis is an enormously solid alloy casting, at the end of which is a huge magnet assembly.

There's more to the Bonbonus than its smooth, coherent and totally musical sound quality ... there's also the stereo imaging, which is absolutely fabulous

The 'spider' is under-vented and the voice-coil former has four holes punched in it to improve cooling and to minimise compression effects under the dustcap.

The tweeter is driven by a standard ferrite magnet, and has a 26mm impregnated fabric soft dome, under which is a chamber to reduce compression effects.

The crossover components are beautifully laid out on a printed circuit board that is screwed to the rear wall of the cabinet, with a felt damping layer between the PCB and the cabinet to prevent it (and the components on it) from vibrating. The component count includes three cermet resistors, two inductors (one air-cored, one ferrite-cored, both of which are properly cross-mounted to eliminate induction effects) and four audiophile-grade capacitors. Etched on the PCB in copper are the words 'Disegno di Roberto Barletta. Grazie a David.' (Design by Roberto Barletta. Thanks to David [Hyka]). The nominal electrical crossover frequency of this circuit is 3kHz.

As you'd expect of such a small cabinet, the design is bass-reflex and employs dual front-firing ports, rather than the more usual single port, and these ports are made from aluminium tubing (each 105mm long and 6mm in diameter) rather than the more usual plastic or cardboard tubing. When I inquired about this, Barletta replied to the effect: 'The number of bass-reflex ports is given by the necessity to have them on front panel. One larger reflex would have great impact on design. Aluminium has been chosen because of its high stiffness. Further it gives a bit of retro feeling to the design.'

I was particularly impressed by the design of the loudspeaker grilles, because Barletta and Hyka are using a very clever design where four clear plastic nodules keep the grille clear of the front baffle and the drivers, while the grille itself is kept in place magnetically, via four magnets that are positioned directly over the woofer mounting screws (the alloy frame itself being non-magnetic, of course). This makes it very easy to position the grille correctly whenever you replace it.

The Xavian Bonbonus comes in a kaleidoscopic array of colour options and three real wood veneers, with the website listing the available finishes as being 'Beech, Bianco, Cilio, Crema, Flora, Fuoco, Metallo, Nero,

Oak, Sole, Tuchese and Wenge.' The coloured finishes are all pastel colours, and are painted over the real wood veneer, rather than being applied to the underlying 16mm-thick MDF sheets, so the finish is not smooth, but shows the underlying grain of the veneer. Because of this, the images on Xavian's website may not show the exact colour shades—particularly for the pastel colours—so I'd advise you to check out the exact colours if you're trying to match your home's other furnishings. The speakers measure 273×160×200mm (WHD) and weigh 4.7kg.

IN USE AND LISTENING SESSIONS

When these speakers were supplied for review, Xavian was very specific about the type of amplifiers it thought should be used with the Bonbonus, a requirement I thought warranted further investigation. Roberto Barletta says that this specific recommendation for an amplifier type was because his design brief for the Bonbonus was that it should perform best with budget-priced amplifiers. In an email relayed to Australian Hi-Fi Magazine via his Australian distributor, Final Link Audio, Barletta wrote: 'About Bonbonus: it is the first Xavian to be developed for using with really economical amps. It is very important to know this since if you play music with Bonbonus connected to high-end amps the sound character might be dark with too much warmth.' When I asked Shane Lewis, of Final Link, whether he could elaborate on this comment any further, he replied via email: 'From what we have heard, the Euro market is very tough and a lot of people seem to be buying entry level hi-fi so they wanted to touch that market with an all-euro made speaker at a price point to suit what they are buying. Amps that are entry-level can tend to be on the 'bright', 'thin', side... hence the warm tuning of the Bonbonus.'

As it happened, I had entry-level amplifiers from NAD, Rotel, Arcam and Creek on hand, but since I had a few high-end amplifiers from Yamaha (its new A-S3000), Marantz and VTL also available, I also took the opportunity to team the Bonbonus with these more expensive models as well.

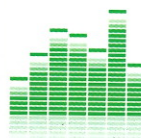
Many hi-fi equipment reviewers maintain that first impressions are the most important when reviewing hi-fi components, because they

represent the immediate emotional response to the sound, before any dry, academic, analytical appraisals kick in, and so I am very pleased to be able to report that my first impression of Xavian's Bonbonus was of a very smooth, coherent loudspeaker, with a very inviting and totally musical sound quality. Indeed the first line in my auditioning notepad reads 'easy listening'.

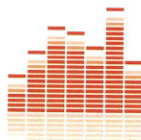
But there's more to the Bonbonus design than just its smooth, coherent and totally musical sound quality. There's also the stereo imaging, which is absolutely fabulous. Sit in front of these speakers with your eyes closed and you can pinpoint the exact position of every single musician that's on stage, and when you're listening to a well-recorded

XAVIAN BONBONUS LOUDSPEAKERS

Brand: Xavian
Model: Bonbonus
Category: Standmount Loudspeakers
RRP: \$699
Warranty: Five Years
Distributor: Final Link Audio Pty Ltd
Address: 4 Harrison Circuit
 Melton VIC 3337
 ☎ (03) 9746 0394
 ✉ info@finalink.com.au
 🌐 www.finalink.com.au



- Easy listening
- Smooth sound
- Colour choice



- Need stands
- Deep bass

LAB REPORT

Readers interested in a full technical appraisal of the performance of the Xavian Bonbonus Loudspeakers should continue on and read the LABORATORY REPORT published on page 92. Readers should note that the results mentioned in the report, tabulated in performance charts and/or displayed using graphs and/or photographs should be construed as applying only to the specific sample tested.

Lab Report on page 92



choral work, such as Mozart's *Requiem*, you can aurally 'see' where the last tenor is standing alongside the first alto. I'd go so far as to say that the ability of the Bonbonus to image is right up there with the very best designs I've ever heard... and I'm not going to qualify that statement with a price limit! I used both John Eliot Gardiner's version of the *Requiem*, with the Monteverdi Choir and the English Baroque Soloists and also the Colin Davis version with the London Symphony Orchestra and Chorus. Gardiner's version is super-clean, and has superior soloists while Davis' version is more 'full' with a larger choral sound, at the expense of some clarity. I regularly listen to both versions, with the one I choose depending entirely on my mood at the time I decide to listen.

■ I was particularly impressed by the very high build quality of the Czech-made cabinet and crossover networks and Italian-made drivers...

Also exceptionally good was the sound-staging as rendered by the Xavian Bonbonus. Yes, it was necessarily somewhat constrained by the physical limitations of the design itself, but the auditory stage was far wider than where I had the speakers positioned, extending to the left of the left-channel speaker and to the right of the right-channel speaker, plus there was outstanding image height into the bargain. Obviously you will need good-quality stands to ensure the tweeters are at seated ear level to achieve this level of performance, so unless you're handy with a TIG welder and can knock up your own, you'll need to factor the extra cost of stands into your purchasing calculations.

I was more than satisfied with the balance of the Xavian across the all-important midrange, where most musical 'action' takes place, but to my ears, I found that the upper bass was a little forward and the treble just a tad laid back... though I thought that this manifested itself as a high-frequency 'smoothness' rather than any lack of highs *per se*. And, at least so far as the highs were concerned, my main listening room is very large and well-damped, so that I found that when I moved the Bonbonus into a smaller room with fewer furnishings, the levels of the

high-frequencies increased. However, I also decided to experiment a little by tweaking the bass and treble controls on those amplifiers I used that were fitted with them, and found that by edging back the bass control a little (only to around 10 o'clock) and advancing the treble control (to around 2 o'clock) I achieved a sonic balance across the audio band that I thought was perfectly balanced. Only the extreme low frequencies were still attenuated, which is only to be expected with any small two-way stand-mount design. I was then able to largely restore the deep bass by moving the speakers (and stands) back closer to my rear wall. (I'd initially moved them more than a metre out into the room, well away from the rear and side walls, in order to reduce the upper bass levels.)


When re-auditioning after my tone control tweaks and speaker re-positioning, I found that not only had I achieved a better sonic balance (at least in my room, and to my ears) but I'd also improved the articulation across the midrange, and that the extra crispness I was hearing in the treble resolved to my ears as additional high-frequency detailing, so overall, it was all win-win! Also, because I'd done so little in the way of tonal tailoring, the dynamic capabilities of the speaker were completely unaffected, in fact I found that after rolling off the bass tone control a little, I was actually able to get higher overall volume levels than I could previously before I reached the upper limits of the Bonbonus max SPL capabilities.

In the light of Roberto Barletta's comments, you're probably now wondering

which amplifier(s) I would personally recommend as being the 'best fit' with the Xavian Bonbonus and my answer is that I'd be happy to use any good-quality hi-fi amplifier—including high-end models—so long as the amplifier you use has bass and treble tone controls so that you too can, if you want, 'tweak' the sound to suit your room and your listening preferences. I'd also suggest that the amplifier you choose has a minimum power output of at least 50-watts per channel, because I found I had to turn the volume up quite a bit to get to the listening levels I prefer. However, given the low price of the design, it obviously makes sense to use a 'budget-priced' amplifier... and I can certainly confirm that the Bonbonus works outstandingly well with these.

CONCLUSION

Xavian's Bonbonus is an excellent stand-mount/bookshelf design that has the multiple advantages of delivering good sound, from a small package, in a range of standard colour options that can't be matched by any other speaker manufacturer that I'm aware of, and all at a very competitive price. I was particularly impressed by the very high build quality of the Czech-made cabinet and crossover networks and the equally high quality of the Italian-made drivers.

However, it did make me wonder: if Xavian's lowest-priced speakers are this good, what must its more expensive models be like? Watch this space!  **greg borrowman**

CONTINUED ON PAGE 92

