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Wicked!

XAVIAN XN CARISMA

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Xavian XN Carisma

With their penchant for extended bass response and majestic scale, floorstanding speakers can make for exciting listening. The Xavian Carisma's add finesse and musicality to that formula...

VITAL STATS

Loudspeaker brand Xavian may not enjoy the same profile as the big-name marques, but its Italian-designed, Czech-manufactured range of products offers an attractive combination of quality, engineering, performance and value.

The XN Carisma is Xavian's second most expensive floorstander in a line-up that also includes several sophisticated stand-mounted speakers. In fact, *AV Magazine* regulars will know that reviewing colleague William Kelly not only owns a pair of small Xavians, but is a committed fan of the brand.

This was my first encounter with the company's products though, and initial impressions during the unpacking and set-up process were favourable: the XN Carismas looked and felt smart and solid, with the kind of finish and tactile quality expected of a R40k speaker.

They're tall and slim, constructed from 22 mm bitumen-damped MDF and beautifully wrapped in real-wood veneer. A slanted baffle allows time alignment for the three drivers, and adds some visual drama, too.

I particularly liked the way the branding is subtly routed into the baffle, just below the mid/bass driver. A simple cloth grille covers and protects the drivers, but I preferred to leave them off – the XN Carismas look prettier that way, and sound better, too.

The tweeter and mid/bass driver are arranged at the top of the baffle, with the woofer located low down. The rear panel is adorned by two large-diameter aluminium bass reflex ports, confirming that the woofer operates in its own chamber.

A single-pair of Michell-type binding posts ensure a simple and unambiguous connection to the amplification. The base makes provision for screw-in metal spikes, which also allow the speakers to

Enclosure type Floorstanding, bass reflex
 Drive units 26 mm ring-radiator tweeter, 2x 180 mm paper/carbon bass drivers
 Bi-wiring No
 Impedance 4 ohm (nominal)
 Sensitivity 89 dB
 Frequency response 38 Hz – 30 kHz (-3 dB on ref axis)
 Power handling 30 – 200 watts
 Dimensions (HxWxD) 925 x 196 x 370 mm
 Weight 26 kg each

PRICE R40 800

VERDICT

Beautifully presented, with bespoke drivers, these floorstanders find a satisfying mix of presence and finesse. Best in larger rooms, and upper treble can sound uncompromising.

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OUR RATING: 81 / 100



be levelled. Metal pucks can be used to protect delicate floor surfaces.

The drive units deserve closer scrutiny. Manufactured to Xavian's requirements by Danish specialists Scan-Speak, the trio of drivers consists of a ring-radiator tweeter and two carbon fibre-reinforced paper membrane cone drivers.

The tweeter is a 26 mm ring-radiator design with a 26 mm voice coil, dual magnet array and copper ring. It is partnered here by a 180 mm paper/carbon cone mid/bass driver, and an identically sized paper/carbon woofer, although the latter lacks the mid/bass unit's pronounced dust cap.

According to Xavian, the XN Carisma is a 2.5-way design with crossover points at 250 Hz and 2.6 kHz.

The Xavians were installed in a free-standing position in *AV Magazine's* listening studio, slightly toed in towards the listening position. Naim's SuperNait integrated amp provided the musical urge, fed by a Naim CD-5i CD player, with Van Den Hul The Source interlinks and Ultralink SN-1412 speaker cable providing

the signal transfer duties.

Sting's atmospheric *Symphonicities* remains one of my current reference favourites, and the Xavians did the CD full justice, creating an all-enveloping sound that managed to convincingly recreate the scale and impact of the performance.

I found myself wrapped in layers of sound, with individual instruments accurately positioned on the open but precisely defined soundstage. On 'Roxanne', Sting's vocals soared above it all, spotlighting his expressive intonation and emotive delivery to spine-tingling effect.

That said, the Xavians never strayed too far down the path of dissective analysis, managing to deliver loads of musical information, but always retaining vital cohesion and contextual credibility. The result was a rich and immersive listening experience, with a dimensionality so well defined that the effect was more surround sound than stereo.

As one would expect of a substantial floorstander, tonal breadth is a further talent of the XN Carisma. Treble was



Of Note

It's all in the drivers

Loudspeaker designers typically have two choices when it comes to sourcing drive units. They can either design bespoke drivers and have these manufactured (or even make them in-house), or source existing drive units from an independent drive unit maker.

The first scenario is obviously the ideal, because the result is a loudspeaker with drive units specifically created to match the rest of the design parameters. However, economies of scale and development costs usually make this an impossible scenario for small independents.

The second option is less than ideal, because sourcing off-the-shelf drive units that perfectly match the required design parameters isn't all that easy, and may lead to the overall design being compromised.

However, there is a third option: having an existing drive unit design tweaked by the independent maker to better suit the specific requirements of a loudspeaker. Xavian's Roberto Barletta follows this route, sourcing the XN Carisma's drivers from Danish specialists Scan-Speak, but with individual modifications for their application here.

The result is the best of both worlds: the manufacturing quality, consistency and excellence of a dedicated drive unit maker like Scan-Speak, but modified to best suit a bespoke application as is the case here.

The XN Carisma (and most of the other models in the Xavian line-up) employ specially tweaked Scan-Speak tweeters, midrange drivers and woofers supplied by Scan-Speak to Barletta's particular requirements – a bespoke and sonically superior solution that would otherwise not be economically feasible.



delicately and lucidly presented, providing a rich harvest of spatial cues and allowing access to the finer, subtler details of the recording: clean, liquid woodwinds, clear flute passages, and boisterous pizzicatos.

One could argue that such tonal cleanliness, especially in the upper frequency realms, could be deemed too bright in some systems, and given the SuperNait's inherent smoothness and inherently benign tonality, this is one aspect would-be buyers should keep in mind.

The Xavians were particularly good in the midrange, managing to recreate the sonority and richness of the violas and cellos, while the bottom-end was powerful and muscular, with plenty of heft and momentum, and no sign of boom or laziness. Tonal transitions were

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seamless, with no obvious peaks or dips.

Have I mentioned that the XN Carismas also manage what many floorstanders struggle with: transparency? All too often, the larger physical presence of floorstanders impacts negatively on their ability to vanish as point sources – but the Xavians were more than up to the challenge, greatly benefitting their staging ability in the process.

Moving on to the recently remastered version of Pink Floyd's *The Final Cut* – arguably not their most highly rated effort, and more Waters than Gilmour in concept, but as good and engaging a workout of a system as any – the Xavians were able to do the cinematic, effects-laden recording full justice.

Staging was admirably open and

inviting, and every strand of the finely captured detail was brought to the fore, again without adding artifice or unnecessary emphasis to the musical equation.

The upper frequencies still ended up sounding a bit too etched for comfort, although there was no sign of brittleness or aggression, but the XN Carismas were able to recreate the sweeping sonic vistas with confidence and aplomb.

They had no trouble reflecting the highly challenging dynamic swings of the recording, nor maintaining the athletic momentum demanded for truly realistic reproduction. The percussion had real snap and impact, the bass sounded solid and robust, and the Xavians provided all the air and space to create a lavish and, again, completely engrossing sonic image.

The effect was a visceral, utterly involving listening experience which had me at the edge of my seat, expecting and hearing nuances and finer details which lesser speakers and systems would simply ignore.

Mozart's *Requiem* (Marriner/Academy of St Martins in the Fields) on the Decca label provided different musical challenges, but similar results. Again, it was the combination of space, scale and attention to detail that made for compelling listening.

The XN Carismas were not in the least intimidated by the densely arranged music, nor the tonal range of the recording. They treated the music with poise and dignity, digging deep into the emotion of the recital, and also allowing the acoustic ambience and scale to come to the fore.

The Xavians had no trouble remaining in control of the musical proceedings, always sounding authoritative and convincing, yet never constraining or limiting the ebb and flow of the delivery. Nor did their talent for accuracy and detail retrieval get in the way of the performance's passion and overall impact.

The Xavian XN Carismas are articulate, musical and impactful performers that combine the power, presence and tonal breadth of floorstanders with the finesse,



transparency and attention to detail usually associated with fine stand-mounted monitors.

They are musically versatile, allowing them to deal with a range of genres and styles with equal proficiency, while their dynamic capability, bottom-end authority and athletic delivery will also stand them in good stead in home theatre applications.

Add their crafted construction, and the top-notch driver technology on offer, and these Xavian floorstanders will please even the most critical of ears. As always, careful set-up is a prerequisite, including careful choice of cables and ancillaries, while those with smaller rooms should look to Xavian's extensive stand-mounted speaker catalogue instead.

Deon Schoeman

Associated Equipment

Naim Supernait integrated amplifier
Naim CD-5i CD player
Dynaudio Audience 52SE loudspeakers
Van Den Hul The Source interlink
Ultralink SN-1412 speaker cable

Software

Pink Floyd – *The Final Cut* (EMI Remaster CD)
Sting – *Symphonicities* (DGG CD)
Mozart – *Requiem* – Marriner/Academy of St Martins in the Field (Decca CD)
Joe Bonamassa – *Driving Towards The Daylight* (JR Adventures CD)