

Børresen Acoustics 01 Silver Supreme Edition stand-mount loudspeaker

by Alan Sircom

It's hard not to think of the development of Børresen Acoustics loudspeakers without falling into the classic voice-over-speak mode of those late, lamented and much-copied vocal talents, Hal Douglas and Don LaFontaine: "In a world where loudspeakers are boring, in a time where people are held captive at home. One man, a renegade speaker designer, can change everything. Now. More. Than. Ever... Børresen: Rise of the Silver Supreme."

You see, that's kind of the whole thing about Børresen; it's built around the brain of Michael Børresen, a designer with more than his fair share of hits under his belt; not only with the current Aavik, Ansuz and Børresen lines, but with a string of notable prior works in the audio business. A maverick in the truest sense, he's more directed toward looking forward and building up the brand that bears his name than raking over the past, but let's just say if you haven't run into an aspect of Børresen's design input in some form in the 21st Century high-end audio world, you've been leading a very cloistered life.

It's also hard not to view the Børresen line as the distillation of all that he's had input on. However, it's also worth looking at those three different product lines, because they are still relatively new to the world and the distinctions might seem blurry to those who haven't been keeping up. Aavik is the electronics brand, Ansuz is the cable, power, network infrastructure, and resonance control products, and Børresen is the speaker brand. ▶



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From here, Børresen has two ranges in its line-up; the lower-cost Z-series and the four models in the '0' series, of which the '01' is the smallest model, the others being ever larger 2.5-way designs, culminating in the seven-driver slimline Børresen 05 tower. They all share a common design brief, combining a large ribbon tweeter with a 115mm mid-bass unit that both uses a specially-created membrane for its diaphragm and features a unique iron-free motor unit. In each speaker in the line, there are three options; the 01, a cryogenic-treated version, and a model where the copper pole ring is replaced with a ring of solid silver, which also benefits from cryogenic treatment.

The removal of iron from the magnetic motor of a driver is not an easy task, which might explain why practically every dynamic transducer made in the last 90 years sports an iron core. But it is the only practical solution if you want to reduce a drive unit's inherent inductance. With the company's standard iron-free drivers, that inductance was already cut about 12-fold, but by swapping out the copper pole ring for silver, the conductivity of that component increases, and the inductance decreases still further, and because that component is also subjected to the cold shoulder treatment, the cryogenic silver pole ring reduces further inductance by somewhere between 12-16%.

We decided on the Børresen 01 Silver Supreme Edition because in a very real way it's the purest of the pure. A two-way stand-mount design has effectively nowhere to hide. It also puts the other technologies in the Børresen design front and centre; you have a much closer working relationship with the Darkz decouplers – for example – in the 01, because you use them to decouple the speaker from the stand.

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▶ The speaker cabinet itself is extremely elegant in all the speakers in the range. The walnut veneered top and side panels are extremely nicely finished and contrast well with the black and silver of the baffle, the drivers and the back plate. Maybe it's just because I'm looking back at a pair of stand-mounts, but I find the contrast of black and silver stand works extremely well, too. A distinctive feature unique to Børresen is the triangular ports inset to the side cheeks of that boat-backed cabinet. This makes a feature of something most companies try to hide, and personally I think it looks good and works well.

The manual – common to all '0' series models is extremely comprehensive, and those not handing the installation task over to experts would be wise to download the manual first, if only to work out the most expedient way of opening the boxes. That may sound trite, but we've all approached the task with all the subtlety of a charging rhino at times, and this well-thought-out manual makes that operation clear. It also recommends a run-in of at least 50-100 hours of music replay, and suggests (in graphic form) how the improvement tracks a sigmoid curve, improving rapidly in the first hundred hours and still improving gradually for the next few hundred hours as the curve flattens out.

Given the panoply of Aavik electronics and Ansuz goodies that arrived from Denmark on the same carnet, you might expect us to view the speaker in context, but we did more than that. We also used it with a variety of audio electronics from Burmester and Linn (at comparable costs) to Hegel and Primare (at far lower cost) to see just how flexible the speakers can be. We did use Ansuz cables and Darkz decouplers where possible.

The difficulty with integrating that large ribbon tweeter and a dynamic bass driver has been encountered several times before, in the designs of another well-known Danish loudspeaker brand (one that Michael Børresen worked for before forming his own company); Raidho. Over the years, they cracked the integration problem through clever crossover design and ever lighter, ever stiffer bass-driver materials, making the step between treble and midrange/bass almost disappear.

Børresen takes a slightly different approach by addressing the magnet 'motor' of the bass driver. This does three extremely important things to the sound; it makes it faster, it makes it more accurate, and it makes it go deeper. The third of these things is perhaps the most immediately surprising; every review of a two-way stand-mount gears itself up to say "given the limitations of the cabinet..." and then try to justify why that speaker shouldn't be dismissed for being light in the bass. Here, there is no need; you get full-thickness bass down to 50Hz, and good, well controlled bass down still further, possibly to around 30Hz in room based on listening to some organ pedals at work [Albinoni's Adagio, John Challenger, *Salisbury Meditation*, PIAS]. Below that, you are going to need a bigger room, and a bigger room means bigger speakers. But, this is one of those rare stand-mounts that is neither the size of a refrigerator, nor has to make apologies for itself in bass delivery. The fact it can produce that depth of bass without the cone flapping itself out of existence is impressive too.

I'm not laying the praise solely at the drive unit here though. I think that clever cabinet is contributing to that deep, powerful bass too. However, it's so well-engineered that it's almost impossible to hear its influence in the real world; my routine Trentemøller 'Chameleon' test [*The Last Resort*, Poker Flat] can identify any uncalled for port resonance or other problems within a few low beats, and there was nothing but malevolent, deep bass. Jason Kennedy often calls this kind of bass 'chewy', but in the case of 'Chameleon' whatever it is that lives in this track just might be chewing on the listener. That's one of the 'joys' of the 01 Silver Supreme Edition; the sound is so vivid and visceral, tracks like this one get you on a more atavistic, primal level. "Whatever it is, it's big and we should be afraid of it!" says the early hominid part of your brain.

The speed of that bass unit is vital to creating that primal effect, which – when not listening to Trentemøller recordings – helps put us in the same space as the musicians making the music itself. More importantly, the speed of that bass unit is vital to keep up with the speed of a ribbon tweeter. Except this time, it seems to be closer to the other way round; the bass unit is almost supernaturally reactive to transients, to the point where drum-pedal kicks are presented as fast as the hi-hat. Let's differentiate 'speed' and 'pace' here; this isn't about the timing of the drum beat (pace), but about the sound of that drum's attack, sustain, decay and release and how there is no overhang. ▶

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▶ That speed of instrument sound ‘envelope’ loops into the accuracy of the bass unit, which in turn matches the treble from the tweeter, the absence of cabinet intrusion, the decoupling from the stand and surroundings, and so on. This means the Børresen 01 Silver Supreme Edition presents an extremely accurate rendition of music played, to the point where other designs could be more of an interpretation. That means a fast, reactive and uncolored performance no matter what you play on these speakers. And while that can be a double-edged sword (poor recordings sound really poor here), when it works you get an open window on the music in a manner akin to Quad Electrostatics, but with the added drive and energy of a well-made box speaker.

I’ve focused on the bass unit because it’s so innovative, but in reality both units take some beating. The lighter, thinner carefully optimised ribbon tweeter is remarkably linear and doesn’t ‘beam’ as much in the process (it’s still a speaker you sit and listen to, but not one where a few inches either way ruins the sound). Like its bass sibling, it’s extraordinarily fast (even by ribbon tweeter standards) and extremely musically unobtrusive. The purity of Joyce DiDonato’s mezzo-soprano voice coupled with the weapons-grade lungs that power that voice, rings out with a vivid clarity and tonal beauty that is just emotionally intense.

I must admit, I came away from listening to the 01 Silver Supreme Edition somewhat shocked. My expectations were that this would be something akin to a Raidho with extra gift-wrapping, due to Michael Børresen’s prior connection and the overall look and shape of the design. It might be a bit better in some places and a bit worse in others. It will probably nail most of that point of interaction between ribbon and bass, but it will still be at least slightly noticeable. And, while that was almost what I heard for the first few hours, it quickly and clearly showed itself to be something altogether different. The Børresen loudspeaker is pretty much invisible in use, with no cabinet intrusion to speak of, no audible distortion from box or drivers, two drivers working in surprising harmony, and with a speed and dynamic range that will leave you wondering where the much bigger panel loudspeakers (and accompanying subs) have been hidden.

In use, however, I found they are so good at soundstaging, you tend to want to accent that. I found myself repositioning the speakers so that they fire across the room rather than down. This meant they were wider than usual with a sharp toe-in. In so doing, I created a very wide, but incredibly detailed, soundstage. The worry here with most loudspeakers is that added space comes at the expense of some energy and rhythmic pace, but here that was never a problem. The 01 Silver Supreme Edition just does everything right.

I started this review with a cinematic joke about trailers, so it’s fitting I end this review with a line from a cinematic joke: *The Godfather Part III*, “Just when I thought I was out, they pull me back in!” But that’s a different Michael speaking;

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Two-way bass reflex stand-mount loudspeaker

Drivers: Børresen planar ribbon tweeter, Børresen 114mm iron-free bass/midrange driver

Frequency Response: 50Hz–50kHz

Sensitivity: 86dB/1W

Impedance: >6Ω

Amplifier recommendations: >50W

Finish: Walnut

Dimensions (incl stand, W×H×D):
25.8 × 110.3 × 25.8cm

Weight (incl stands): 18kg per loudspeaker

Price: €43,000 per pair

Manufacturer: Børresen Acoustics

URL: borresen-acoustics.com

UK Distributor: Auditorium Hi-Fi

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Corleone not Børresen. Just when I thought the two-way stand-mount loudspeaker had reached its peak, Børresen comes along and pulls me back in by re-drawing the landscape with the 01 Silver Supreme Edition. While the notion of a two-way stand-mount loudspeaker hitting this price point is going to raise some eyebrows, those of us who can only dream of products at the lofty price point should think of this review as a ‘proof of concept’; the reduction of induction made by the ironless motor system, increased still further by swapping copper for silver in the pole ring, has significant benefits for the listener, and those benefits must be capable of filtering down to more attainably priced products in the future. In listening to the Børresen 01 Silver Supreme Edition, I think we are actually listening to the sound of audio’s tomorrow being forged. +