

Admonitor 311 Loudspeakers from Capriccio Continuo (ATD)



A Continuing Caprice Commences

By Ian Parent

Capriccio Continuo... products are created by Audio Transducer Design, which was founded in Italy in 1981. Because of the short supply of Zellaton loudspeaker cones, distribution of Capriccio Continuo speakers has remained relatively limited, news of the speakers spreading mainly by word of mouth. The speaker reviewed here is the monitor section. A low-frequency unit can be added underneath it, and together they form a very high end full-range system. The Italian origin shows in the care and elegance of the presen-

tation, from the accompanying booklet with its authenticity card to the design of the enclosures, and including the finish and the packaging. Italy does not easily drop its best habits.

Unconventionally, the stands for this pair of Admonitor 311s come, already assembled, in two separate boxes while the speakers come in a single box. Everything is perfectly protected. Once the installation is done, our attention is drawn immediately to

the careful design of the stand/speaker combination. One is surprised and impressed by the perfect liaison of the speaker enclosure with the support, and by the exceptional black polyester lacquer finish which softens the numerous sloping edges of the enclosures. On the front baffle, a sheet of velvety material covers the fasteners and at the same time absorbs microreflections around the periphery of the drive units.

The Admonitor 311s are a two-way bass reflex design using a 130mm (5.25-in.) woofer and a 20mm (0,75-in.) tweeter, on a front baffle sculpted to aid in frequency propagation; basically, you can consider that the front has a swept-back contour that facilitates the outflow of sound. You notice too that because of these swept-back planes, the light and the objects in the room which are reflected in the black lacquer are gracefully distorted — a very interesting effect. The woofer cone is special in that it has no dust cap (or central dome) but looks like a complete cone with no discontinuities. It is made of what is called an Ariacell GTi sandwich and is basically a syntactic foam matrix with hollow (usually glass) microbubbles injected into it—so as to increase rigidity with the lightest possible material, simply by augmenting the proportion of microbubbles. So yes, there is the carefully designed shape of the enclosures, the choice of exceptional drivers but there is also one more component which, in any good loudspeaker, links everything together and makes it work or fail: the crossover. In the Admonitor 311, this is the work of Christian Yvon, who has in the past contributed to the success of speakers by Apertura and Goldmund, to mention only two. The crossovers developed by Mr. Yvon, of a type known as Multislope Elliptical Zero transfer, have the special feature of taking into account what is happening upstream, that is, before the driv-

ers encounter the filter elements. These are fairly complex crossovers, using first-quality parts such as Mundorf capacitors and air coils. The cabling is by the Swedish company Supra Cable and all the connections are soldered. I note that the internal mountings are done with care and the cabinet is braced, even though its small size might have meant this could be dispensed with. Internal damping is fairly minimal and is limited to a bit of synthetic fibre similar to cotton batting. The reflex vent is a curved tube which reduces the noise made by air rushing through it.

Listening

The magnificent accompanying booklet—only in English, unfortunately—insists on careful positioning of the speakers and requires attentive reading and experimentation. To start off (and we have to start somewhere) I adopt my usual practice, which is to put the speakers exactly where and how the previous ones were! This is the most logical starting point I know and I recommend it highly. If you want to know what a new pair of speakers sounds like, put them where you had the old ones. It's simple, effective, and avoids fuss. Once this was done, the sound appeared clear and the image reasonable. Back to the magnificent brochure. In a chapter which deals mostly with home theatre, it says to try more pronounced angles of toe-in, from 60 degrees to 72 degrees for example, rather than the usual 30 degrees. Taking into account the configuration of my listening room, I went for 30 degrees. This was different from my usual positioning, which is 15 degrees, but it gave better results, especially in depth of soundstage. The speakers were spaced away from the back and side walls by 24 inches each way. The curve of the Admonitor 311 stands contributes to the elegant look of the units but also participates in diffusing sound. The pair of speakers which I received could only

be connected with banana plugs, which posed no problem in my case.

I have said before in this magazine that I am a lover of monitor speakers. Why? I don't really know, but off the top of my head I would say that I have often had more pleasure in their company than with bigger speakers. I have also noticed that the necessarily close relationship of a larger speaker's front baffle with the floor produces less coherence in voices than a monitor—which puts space between its bottom and the floor beneath, and in fact permits almost complete air circulation around the whole enclosure. This is simply a personal preference which in no way prevents me from enjoying, at my place or elsewhere, some absolutely remarkable floor-standing speakers.

In the same way a restaurant menu puts you in an appreciative mood just by reading it, the Capriccio Continuo Admonitor 311s, set up and waiting in my room, were an invitation to come and listen. Surely this was because of the unusual look of the model and the seductive curve of its stand. I tried to guess the what kind of speaker these were: discreet and delicate? Powerful and impressive for their size? Or maybe timid and self-effacing? A new album I had just been given, *Everyday Learning* by Vue D'ensemble, surprised me from the first notes. Like an electrostatic speaker's, the image was large and spread out. It seemed to materialize on the facing wall as if on a screen. And yet, curiously, everything was very present, the cymbal lively and sparkling, the bass lines melodic and easy to follow and the guitar like a solo instrument which agrees to the accompaniment. Everything was clearly perceptible. I grab another album that I know better, so as to be able to describe for you what I hear. This is Ibrahim Maalouf and his magic trumpet, which will

bear witness to what the Admonitor 311 can do for this kind of jazz. Once again I easily notice that the soundstage is not projected outwards the way I'm used to, but instead is in relief and perfectly integrated into the room space. This is hard to describe, so let's just say that you don't have to close your eyes to make the speakers disappear, which is a great compliment and the sign of a perfectly conceived and implemented crossover. On the track *Surprise*, the brushes are realistic and the trumpet which plays over them seems like barely a murmur at certain times, which surely must be just how the sound engineer wanted it. The piano, omnipresent, is well localized in the room and has a reasonable piano size, which is pretty flattering for a pair of small speakers! The *Stabat Mater* moves me greatly, and I have to say this is a formidable test for a pair of small-volume standmounts. Let's say just that what is small, in general stays small, and without reaching the volume level of a larger pair of speakers, it is emotional character which wins out and makes you forget the modest size of the Admonitor 311. This is exactly what happens here. The ability to convey emotion is of prime importance, and you cannot say these small monitors are short on bass, in fact the overall balance is unusually good. With the Admonitor 311, once again, what stays with you is the beautiful sonic image.

Although I listened to many recordings with these Admonitor 311s, I'll continue my description with one of my all-time favorites. This is *El Nuevo Mundo: Folias Criollas* with Monserrat Figueras, which is a masterpiece of recording as well as a work of immense artistic quality. Everything about this CD is perfect, and to understand that, you only need to play tracks 3, *Jacaras* and track 4, *El Pajarillo* and find out what you can get, if your speakers don't try and add anything to what's already

there. These pieces are all nuance and subtlety, from the foot-tapping to the guitar strokes, not to mention the general complementary atmosphere provided by the other instruments as they gradually enter the scene. Our pair of Admonitor 311s did justice to all this. It was really good, at times moving, at times even spectacular.

Conclusion

Audiophiles will find in the Capriccio Continuo (ATD) Admonitor 311 a high quality product which absolutely must be appropriately matched, and especially, perfectly placed in the listening room. Once these two criteria are respected and implemented, this pair of speakers will satisfy the most demanding and the most meticulous listener. The speakers' dispersion and their analytical power are remarkable, and the beautiful soundstage they produce will make it unnecessary to close your eyes to imagine a large and entirely believable space. So, are they discreet and delicate, powerful and impressive for their size? Certainly some of all that, but in any case never timid and self-effacing! The exceptional work on the crossover should again be emphasized, it has made the cutoff between drivers really imperceptible. Not to neglect the form of the enclosures or the choice of high-technology drivers, all of which participate in the final result, the crossover elaborated by Christian Yvon is a total success and gives the Admonitor 311 a special and easily recognizable charm; a kind of signature which is impossible to forget. Let us hope the Admonitor 311 receives a welcome which is not capricious, and the most continuous possible listening sessions in the audio boutiques.

Admonitor 311 Loudspeaker

Price: \$5,999

Guarantee: 5 years, parts and labor

Matching stands for Admonitor 311

Price: \$1,699

Distributor: Charisma Audio, 905.470.0825,
www.capricciocontinuo.com;
www.charismaaudio.com

Discography

Vue d'ensemble, *Everyday Learning*, CD independently produced by **Christian Pommerleau**

Ibrahim Maalouf, *Wind*, *Harmonia Mundi*, IBM 4

Pergolesi, *Stabat Mater*, *L'Oiseau-Lyre*, 425 692-2

Montserrat Figueras, **Jordi Savall**, **Hesperion XXI**, *El Nuovo Mundo : Folias Criollas*, *Aliavox*, SACD, AVSA 9876

