

Amphion – Argon 2

➤ *Fernando Andrette*

My first contact with this Finlander manufacturer occurred at Audio Show in Portugal, in 2002.

I remember that when I entered the room, I saw a beautiful column of generous dimensions, but quite slender, which steadily touched with a vast soundstage beyond the side and back walls.

For being intrigued, I wanted to know its origin and model. It was an **Amphion Xenon**, a three-way loudspeaker, bass reflex, which uses an aluminum woofer laid on its side, a midrange also in aluminum and a 25mm-aluminum-dome tweeter.

Up to that moment, **Xenon** was this manufacturer's top-line product. Nowadays there is already a model above mentioned, named **Krypton**.

Two years have elapsed, and close to our Hi-Fi Show last year, I started to exchange e-mails with Mr. Mario Almeida, **Audioland's** Director, who confessed to me his interest to enter the high-end market and work with some brands still unknown in our market, but which start gaining reputation abroad.

Two more months have passed and, close to the end of the year, I received the **Amphion Argon 2** loudspeakers for testing.

Coincidentally, I had read about this model testing some months ago, in the English Hi-Fi +, an article written by the article writer Chris Thomas, and I became surprised how fascinated he was with the product.

Founded only 5 years ago, the **Amphion** has its headquarters in Kuopio, Finland, and only produces loudspeakers.

Nowadays, it has two lines of loudspeakers: one is more an entry-level, composed of the models: **Helium 2** (recently tested by Stereophile), **Athene 2** and **Creon 2**.

The most sophisticated models are: **Argon 2**, **Xenon** and **Krypton**, a newly-launched model costing US\$ 17,000 in the United States.

The **Amphion** defends very steady opinions in relation to the way how the human ear interprets the musical information and has studied for years the issue of non-linear hearing. Within the range of 2,000 and 5,000 Hz, we have a higher sensitivity to note changes – exactly the range in which the frequency cut-offs are applied to two-or-more-way-loudspeakers.

To steadily cope with this problem, and without having to resort to sophisticated crossovers development, the **Amphion** has decided for a cut-off of 1,200 Hz. Thus, for all models of the top line, the tweeter reproduces from 1,200 Hz up.

The manufacturer defends its position when proving that the tweeter – with its small area – can reproduce the frequencies whose wavelengths are smaller than the distance between our ears. Result: a much more linear response in the whole audible aspect and a significant enhancement of the musical event focus.

In order to capture the signal at 1,200 Hz, the **Amphion's** engineers locate the tweeter in a retreated position in relation to midrange/woofer loudspeaker, which visually reminds horn's baffle. The trick is actually a waveguide, essential for the tweeter dispersion through the lowest frequency zones.

The detail is that the carving is made on the wood itself, giving the product a very beautiful and differentiated finishing.

There was no one who didn't become fascinated with those loudspeakers visual, because they really amaze, showing once more the Scandinavians' unmatched ability.

The **Argon 2** has a 1-inch aluminum tweeter by **Seas**, a 6.5-inch midrange/woofer speaker, also in aluminum by **Seas**, frequency cut-off of 1,200 Hz, impedance of 8 ohms, sensitivity of 87 dB, frequency response: 40 Hz to 20 kHz, recommended power of 20 to 200 Watts, approximated weight of 11 kg.

The model sent for testing was the **Birch**, but there are still other options like: cherry, black or silver.

As the **Argon 2** arrived close to the end-of-year parties, I had the opportunity to hear them with countless configurations and in three distinct environments.

The amplifiers were: **Prima Luna**, **Audiopax AH-3**, **Unico**, **Roksan Caspian M. Project 12 and 24** by **Sphinx**, pre **Audiopax model 5**, **Accuphase C 2800**. Sources: DVD **Sony 9000 ES**, player **Universal van den Hul**, **Roksan Atessa** and DAC **MSB Platinun Link Plus**.

Loudspeaker cables: **Purist Audio** (also distributed by **Audioland**), **Audience 24**, **Ecosse 4.4**, **Inspiration**, **Pro 11 Plus Harmonic Technology** and **Ocos**.

The **Argon 2** demands a long burn-in, I'd say something around 100 hours to start get used to its sound signature.

As soon as you turn it on, the sound seems a little blunt or shut. In some hours, it starts to open, enhancing the soundstage in width and depth.

The interesting is that the **Argon 2** tonal balance doesn't suffer from any change during the burn-in. What changes is its speed, instruments body and the steadiness at low frequencies.

The changes are really much more physical than electronic.

The first impact with the **Argon 2** is its focus, sharpness and plans presentation, very well defined into a wide and vented soundstage.

Another detail is that they don't get frightened by sound pressure. They feel quite at ease with a more boosted volume.

I was tired of fearing for their integrity, provided that as the auditions were "warming up", I was abusing of the little ones.

Their tonal balance is quite open, with a transparency worthy of top high-end models. Their treble is clean, balanced and with an excellent airing. The only precaution to be taken should be the selection of loudspeaker cables, because the wrong option can take a lot out of the high frequencies' balance and beauty. As the **Argon 2** does not use biwiring or bi-amplification resources, you will only have to dedicate to this task just once.

Another great advantage of this loudspeaker is its good compatibility with the countless amplifiers used in the test. Even the **Prima Luna** and the **Audiopax**, which in the abstract wouldn't have enough energy, did very well. Of course, it lacked a little more muscle in the low frequencies and in more complex dynamic situations, but nothing that could harm the general result. With **Unico**, by **Unison Research**, with its 80 watts per channel and the **Roksan Caspian M**, the matching was captivating in all aspects.

But I have to admit that we have only unveiled all their potential when feeding them with the **Sphinx**, in our main audition room.

And then, my friend, we had all of their virtues in detail.

A really three-dimensional Soundstage, plans and more plans, with focus and airing, controlled and incisive bass, instruments body very coherent among them and very good for

mini-monitor loudspeakers, and a feeling of physical presence of the musical event much higher than the expected for this price range.

Conclusion

The **Argon 2** is a loudspeaker which can give us an exact measure of the present stage at which the good mini-monitors are.

It can coherently resolve and overcome obstacles which were very common until a short time ago, like: colorful basses, short-extension trebles, more prominent midranges and lack of instruments body.

Of course, countless manufacturers are already in this present stage, but the important is to emphasize that each of them, in their own manner, seeks to present differentiated solutions to the same problems. The **Argon 2** has fascinated us mainly for providing this “adjustment of accounts” in a creative way, suggesting a very singular frequency cut-off for the present standards, and therefore, it has shown that the benefits are still bigger than the losses.

At first, I was a little sceptical in relation to such proposal, thinking that it would bring other problems like loss of harmonic body and a certain congestion of information in middle and high frequencies in symphonic works. And **Amphion** has proved that this my fear is unfounded. They play in a luminous manner, without being bright, not creating light where there is no need for such.

They are fast, incisive and coherent in the presentation of the music time, involving us in an enchanting way.

They manage to meet all the musical styles without giving preference to any particular kind.

Their cares are primordial: good-quality cables, a good stand, room sizing between 12 and 30 m² and a vigorous electronics with a coherent timbre.

With all such cares, I can't see how **Argon 2** couldn't deeply please those people who wish only to listen to their musical works in a comfortable and correct way.

AMPHION – ARGON 2	
Tonal Balance	8.5
Soundstage	8.5
Texture	8.5
Dynamics	7.8
Transients	8.5
Harmonic Body	8.5
Organic Presentation	8.5
Musicality	8.5
Total	67.5

Maximum points,

Gold Class equipment: 72

GOLD - Best Buy

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Average Price US\$ 2,970 (the pair)