

FOURTH TIME'S THE CHARM!



Axxess is the fourth brand in the portfolio of the Audio Group Denmark. Especially the streaming amplifier Forté 1 is supposed to provide a smooth entry into the sound cosmos of the Danish Company.

Michael Lang

Lightning-fast, with fine resolution and impressive spatial imaging

A manufacturer who creates, grows and establishes four brands in the span of about a decade ought to have a clever business plan so as to not get lost on the way or to annoy the targeted audience. All the more so when the people are always the same; those behind development and production as well as the presentation at shows and dealer events – as is the case with the brand Axxess, which is headed by Michael Børresen and Lars Kristensen, two persons who have been widely-respected in the hi-fi world for decades.

However, creating a new brand does not only require effort to make it well-known; beforehand, a technical and visual identity that makes the product as distinctive as possible has to be developed.

Until now, it was quite simple: Børresen means speakers, Aavik is electronics and

Ansuz stands for cables and various accessories. But now, with Axxess, a second electronics brand joins the lineup. And with that, it's no longer quite as easy to tell which brand means what. After all, Aavik also offers amplifiers and streamers – but not inside the same device; and that is the key difference to the Axxess products, in addition to their much more moderate price point.

Let's take a look at what differences and similarities we were able to discover: The visual appearance is kind of similar to that of the Aavik products, as the housing of the Forté 1 is also made of a mixture of natural materials. However, with the sides featuring a line of „X“s and the large combined volume/input selection knob, the Axxess products come across as overall more striking and eye-catching. And just like the other Audio Group Denmark products, this series is indeed designed and manufactured in Denmark.

The rear panel of the amp is home to one analog input, a preamp output with RCA jacks, the speaker connectors – which accept bananas, spades or bare cable – as well as three digital inputs in Toslink, BNC and USB-B, and finally the Ethernet port and two USB-A ports. Antennas for Bluetooth or an



The interior is structured extremely cleanly. The black pieces are the company's own Tesla coils.

HDMI input are nowhere to be found; but the Forté 1 has however been equipped with a high-quality, Class A headphone amplifier. The corresponding output on the front comes in the shape of a 6.3 mm jack.

The dimmable matrix display shines in red letters and numbers that are easy to read even from a distance. All in all, what we have here is a device that is reduced to what is essential for listening to music, without a lot of gimmicks, such as are sometimes found in other devices on the market.

PSU, DAC & Tesla Coils

The interior is characterized by a Class D amplifier section, which is load-stable thanks to the generously designed power supply and can provide strong short-term impulse peaks when needed, and should thus be able to handle even difficult speakers. Furthermore, it is supposed to stay away from the topic of noise and distortions due to its „fast“ and high switching frequency – which is also confirmed by our measurement lab.

The streaming section is based on the technology of the Aavik devices and was developed specifically for audio use. Instead of signal processors – often only available for a limited time and not necessarily beneficial to the sound in the opinion of the Danish developers – a circuit has been built here that employs high-quality capacitors, which is supposed to lead to a better sounding result. The circuit for the 1-bit DAC unit was also developed in-house by the Danes. Via BNC or Toslink, 24 bit/192 kHz and MQA are accepted, while the USB input can handle data up to 32 bit and 384 kHz in PCM, reaching a maximum of DSD 128 in DSD mode. Here, too, attention was placed on particularly fast data processing together with an optimization of noise properties. The latter, of course, again using the „Tesla coils“, developed in-house and employed in the devices of chief developer Michael Børresen since 2011. The goal of all this effort is to avoid a coldness in the sound image that is often attributed to digital audio technology, and instead to achieve an analog sound signature – whatever that means for everyone individually.

Setting up and configuring the Forté 1 is quickly done; it establishes the connection to your router shortly after being paired to it, and the connection is stable. The controls are quickly understood, and the app is easy to use and not visually overloaded. All important streaming services are preinstalled.

In terms of sound, you quickly marvel at the incredibly potent and powerful as well as dynamic pace of the Danish newcomer, as was immediately apparent with Michael Jackson's classic „Beat It“. Steve Lukather on bass and rhythm guitar was just as crisp and absolutely precise in timing as Eddie van Halen's guitar solo seemed fresh and startling; even now, decades later. Impulses are processed immediately. The grip, which is



COMMANDER

The remote control feels good in your hand, but not all functions are intuitive.

The rear is not crowded, but only equipped with what is necessary.



noticeable over the entire frequency range, is impressive. And the voice of the „King of Pop“ came with just the right mix of throatiness and energy.

Fast and Precise

Similarly impressive is the high level of detail and, thanks to the generous spatial imaging in all directions, the intelligibility of even complex pieces of music. This aspect is particularly noticeable in classical orchestral music such as Tchaikovsky’s „Pathétique“ or with big bands such as that of former Rolling Stones drummer Charlie Watts and his version of „Stompin’ at The Savoy“. At this point, the amp’s power reserves were also called upon. With a nominal 100 watts per channel, those are by no means small. Yet, the amp sounded significantly more powerful and less strained than the data would lead you to expect.

The Axxess will breathe new life into many a speaker and turn quite a few leisurely sounding speakers into sprinters with esprit and passion. Only in the most extreme case, a generally rather lively and fast speaker could gain so much additional vitality that it might sometimes seem too exhausting for sensitive listeners, when placed in rooms with rather high reverberation and weak damping and when listening to standard pop music. That stems from the fact that the Forté is certainly not the kind of amplifier that wants to shower its listeners with sugar coating, but clearly prefers an unadornished reproduction.

While we had already spent a few enjoyable hours in various listening setups by now, combining the amp with the Børresen



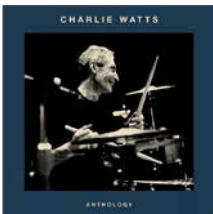
The case is made of a mix of natural materials and elaborately crafted. The Axxess products can be recognized by the X on the side.

X3 speakers (reviewed in STEREO 7/23) and Ansuz cables proved to be an absolute hit. The sonic image was extremely spacious in the dimension of individual sound events – voices, instruments, size of the stage – with plenty of space, but still crisply defined. A respectable feat was accomplished by the Danish ensemble here. The Forté also scored particularly well with the extremely tight grip it had on the speakers. It was virtually impossible for the connected speakers to develop a life of their own, despite a moderate damping factor specified in the measurements. But the control did not go so far as to take away the speakers’ vital spirit, their ability to swing.

In terms of sound and workmanship, the Dane thus has no rival to fear. Only those of you who appreciate large, multi-colored displays with plenty of functions and the possibility of wireless connections might need an intensive listening session before they start to wonder whether they really need the large equipment package ... ■

WHAT WE’VE HEARD

Charlie Watts: Anthology



The drummer of the Rolling Stones, who passed away in 2021, skillfully indulged in his big band passion on the side – absolutely worth a listen!

Michael Jackson: Thriller



Even after 40 years, a milestone of pop music, convincing in every respect.



Few control buttons and a large knob for volume and input selection make the Forté 1 easy to operate.

Axxess Forté 1

Price: around €5,000

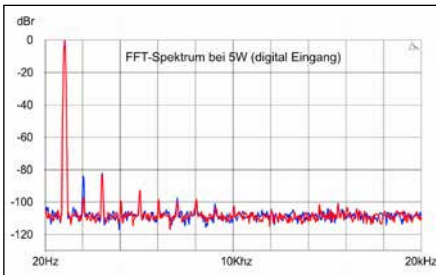
Dimensions: 38x11 x44 cm (WxHxD)

Warranty: 2 Years

Contact: Audio Group Denmark
www.audiogroupdenmark.com

The next sound sensation from the Audio Group Denmark. Extremely detailed and spatial sounding amplifier/streamer, which does not neglect the musical context despite all its attention to detail. At €5,000 not cheap for an entry-level device, but it's worth the money in view of the musical merits.

Measurement Results



Continuous power (8 ohms / 4 ohms)	90 W/115 W
Impulse power 4 ohms (1kHz)	Protection circuit
Distortion 50mW/5W/-1dB Pmax	0,015 %/0,009 %/0,9 %
Intern. 50mW/5W/-1dB Pmax	0,009 %/0,007 %/0,05 %
Signal-to-noise ratio at 50mW/ 5W	68 dB/87 dB
Damping factor into 4 ohms (63Hz/1kHz/14kHz)	41/39/15
Upper cut-off frequency (-3dB/4ohms)	39 kHz
Synchronization error volume at -60dB	0,01 dB
Stereo crosstalk (5mV/1kHz/1k ohms)	84 dB
Power consumption Standby/Idling (at)	-/13 W(226 Volt)

Lab Comment

Low distortion, moderate bandwidth, low noise, high channel balance, a moderate damping factor and sufficient power for the vast majority of situations characterize the Class D amplifier circuit.

Features

Inputs: 1 x RCA analog; Pre Out; Digital out in BNC, Toslink and USB; Class A headphone out; Remote control; Speaker output for bananas, spades and naked cable; Display

TEST DEVICES

Streaming Amp:

Rose RS520

CD Player:

T+A MP 2000

Loudspeakers:

Gauder Capello 100,
PMC Prodigy 1,
Børresen X3

Cables:

Ansuz,
Audioquest,
Silent Wire

STEREOD-TEST	
SOUND LEVEL	89%
PRICE/PERFORMANCE	
★★★★☆	
EXCELLENT	