

Encore ENC5

Mini Japanese of great luxury



The generic concepts can be misleading, but the fascination of sure idioms it can turn out irresistible. "Small it is beautiful" it can seem (and often it has been demonstrated) a mere lexical trick, done it on purpose to justify minimalist experiences that are not always rewarding. I am speaking in general terms, one agrees. The idea can be applied for example to the world automobiles, where a mini-car as the famous Smart has collected over the years an unexpected success. By remaining about generic frequently hears the expression celebrating the good wine as the one in the "small packages." Sometimes is true, but it is certainly not a rule. In the audio sector, things are different, with important variations on the topic. If we speak of speaker systems it is quite intuitive that in order to move the major air masses requires a device driver of large diameter and a decent size cabinet. It is a quantity fact, not necessarily a quality one. It is

true, however, that the majority of the musical content (in the sense of "Music" as opposed to "sound") does not interest frequency ranges so deep as to require necessarily large speakers. By Mozart to Beethoven, by the jazz to the folk, the spectral content in lower frequency range to 60/70 Hz it is statistically reduced. The shots of the bass drum of the "Spring Festival" represent more the exception (even if fascinating) than the rule.

But there's more. If one has small environments for listening it is probably true that a compact speaker which is tonally and musically correct performing, can provide for the effective reproduction of a disk pleasant feelings and a insufficient interaction with the acoustic characteristics of the environment in low frequency. This is particularly obvious in the design and development of professional studio monitors to use in smaller rooms. Some famous

mini-monitor produced at the time for the needs of the British BBC are now part of the audio history. It is not necessary to make examples, even if perhaps it helps also the topic of the actual "portability" of the monitor speakers. However, the legend is still alive and kicking. The Combak Corporation is Kazuo Kiuchi's Company, music lover and Japanese entrepreneur who is best known as joint owner of XRCD brand. As we know in the last twenty years this label has produced hundreds of records remastering with painstaking care master pop, jazz and classical of the best moments of analogic one. Many of these recordings have been submitted on the music pages "audiophile" of our magazine, always keeping in mind that the final result of any restoration or remastering it depends in direct and



The central tweeter, an aluminum dome 25mm

dramatic way from the original master quality, and more still by the artistry of the music it was recorded. We can therefore be sure that our Kiuchi knows his as to the way in which a good album should be reproduced, a personal view but with deep musical roots.



The Seas coaxial driver, with the glass fiber cone

From professional monitoring requirements for use in the home "intimate" is a short step. The idea behind the design of Encore is to realize a detailed and authoritative sound field in a close listening. Whether in a traditional position, on supports, both in what is referred to as listening "near field". I am reminded once again the classic recording mobile "studio" in which the recording director places the monitor speakers on the shelf of a wide writing desk, the listening position not more than 150/180 cm from each speaker. It is not a theoretical case. Without going too far back in time I have followed a few months ago the Deutsche Grammophon recording carried out, with the Sistine Chapel Choir, inside the Sistine Chapel. Tonmeister one of Erdo Groot caliber signature (Polyhymnia / Pentatone). In an adjacent room (the one where to the Pope is made official the decision of the Conclave, no less!) had set in record time a recording studio with the console and a pair of monitor speakers systems (of which I can not reveal the name) put to the corners of a large writing desk. Between the sacred and the profane soon we will listen the yields of this recording resume in a truly unique environment to the world .

But back at the Encore, a speaker who presents with a significant pedigree and a very high price in relation to the size. As it appears from the photos it is a compact enclosure closed box system equipped with a coaxial driver from the Seas 175 mm in diameter, large in relation to the cabinet. Tweeter with aluminum dome from 25 mm, fiberglass cone. The cabinet seems to be the focus of attention of the designer. It is made with different types of wood, while inside there are other wooden elements placed so as to optimize the resonances of the cabinet. Just the control of the resonances is the basis of Kazuo Kiuchi design, which in addition to the cure for the structure of the cabinet it also uses the vibration damping of resonances made from Combak, appropriately placed in the interior space as well as in the outside on the basis of extensive studies that go under the commercial title of "Harmonix Resonance Technology". The same "frieze" exposed on the front panel with the company logo it is itself one of these dampers; other two are placed on each of the side panels. What is inside we do not know, not having been allowed to disassemble the speaker (not that I am usually make it). Here we find the concept of "fine tuning" that it appears to be a recurrent topic in some embodiments of the High-End Japanese, a topic that they are not able to deepen here. I believe little, but it works, I could tell with my usual cynicism. The efficiency appears quite contained, with a declared data of 86 dB, the frequency response (within 2 dB) is pushed to 70 Hz, the cut-off frequency between the mid and tweeter is

placed to 2,800 Hz. It is important the given impedance (8 ohms) with the house declaring never below 7 ohms, for a manageable speaker even by vacuum tubes. Data are in line with a project of this type. As always I would leave that to speak is the music, in the sense that at the end of the story what



Here is one of "tuners" Harmonix, placed at key points in the cabinet

affects most of us is the driving performance, ensure the reliability of the reproducer to play, in fact, as a record player. If you do not accept this simple test, each talk is useless, just as with ancient disquisitions about the sex of angels. Even a careful check in laboratory there would not even tell us of how a violin, a guitar or an orchestra is returned.

A first advantage in dealing with a compact speaker weighing about seven kilograms is the fact of being able to carry it home and cuddle as you want in different listening situations. The Encore were made to sit on a pair of solid construction stands about a meter tall, a classic location for a stand system into a fifteen square meters environment. More intimate and almost I could say "intimate" the bold accommodation in a writing desk, a solid piece of furniture from ministerial dimensions that served perfectly to give a sense of the studio monitor and listening in the near field. If the idea were that to make a point source in a position able to focus a wide and care image, we can say without reservation that the result has been achieved. Consistency is the typical one among the best compact systems, a source in a position in order to



The input terminals are somewhat distant from each other

extrapolate environmental information from the best recordings. Listening to some piano songs indicates a smooth and natural flow between the audio band portions entrusted to two-way, in a precise reconstruction of the execution meaningful way that offers through graceful transparency of the media range considered in the broadest sense. The overall sound level can be fairly high according to available power amplifier. Here with pre and power amplifier AM Audio we have no problems in this regard and we succeed to squeeze firmly the small woofer with energetic piano recordings signed recently by Baglini for Decca home.

The Baroque instrumental groups are good sap timbre, with just slight body in the medium-low and the trend (from monitor?) to bring up some parts, while maintaining a fresh and gentle depiction of the whole. Instruments are not always easy like oboes, flutes, bassoons are an interesting enamel and a very euphonic central portion, free of nasality and fastidiousness audiophile. The issue is ready to follow the rhythmic pattern of the sheet music, with young dynamic contrasts that they mark in a meaningful way the interpreter, rendered with diligence and a bit of refined pleasure that can not fail to excite. A more Mozart system than a Mahler one, just to stay in theme song, Encore does not fear the great symphonic music but of this certainly has a version compared to scale, in a representation suitable for more intimate domestic environments. The analysis of the musical text is however remarkable in its ability to extract the more hidden details of the software. If the recording is indeed good the result is satisfying for the true lover of music and the voices appear very proposed, from that of Bartoli in the CD "The Dance" (Decca), ductile and expressive, that of Patrizia Laquidara recorded by Velut Luna, clear and present. Friendly and pleasant support of acoustic instruments. Thus the Mozart of Horn Concerts presents a healthy balance between the roundabout heading the natural horn and the typical harmonic liveliness of the original instruments. The freshness of the medium-high

section does not hide the soft sensuality of cellos and double basses, in a harmonic and rhythmic carpet. The reduced mass of small midwoofer offers a fast answer to the transitory signals. It appears the attacks of the instruments (that magical moment in which silence becomes sound), key moments that characterize the sound timbre and the contribution of the performer. Even with the most vibrant jazz groups it is possible to have use of a sound level addictive and more than adequate. There amaze the listening quote from a historical Decca incision that is Bernstein and the Vienna Philharmonic engaged with Mozart. Here proves the correctness of the bottom in the gentle and reliable performance of the Viennese instrument body, while the soloist appears on his part well placed in a scene from the solid boundaries. The ability to reconstruct coherent image also emerges in powerful rendition of Lakatos (DG violin) made in the right size. Tall and well centered, the violin has a rich harmonic texture, phrasing clear, the first consisting eighth in the realistic way of which we realize when we hear the true instrument within walking distance. If a disc sounded good 40 years ago, it is the case that sounds too good today? I would say so with the acoustic bluegrass of "Confederation" of Sheffield (a rare LP live recording here listening with the help of the coupled EAT/Ortofon), with its old voices America and especially an instrumental carpet where banjo and guitar enjoy a still unpublished today transparency and naturalness. Therefore it is interesting the scenic setting and a sense of airiness, once again demonstrated by Czerny Sonata for horn and piano. It is a difficult coupled this one and here Baumann horn (a splendid recording Philips) can show spurious resonances and any defect in the interaction between the different drivers. It requires an unexpected power in handling midrange and I can assure you that it is a step that we always follow with a sure apprehension. Everything it is solved with a sense of heroic prowess, away from noise code and defects of form and substance, so that to demonstrate the solid construction of this luxury compact system.

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By Marco Cicogna (translation from Italian to English by Giovanna d'Amato)

Specifications

Name	ENCORE ENC-5 Two way Speakers
Details	<p>Company: Combak Corp., Kanagawa, Japan www.combak.net</p> <p>Distributor for Italy: Ethos srl, Via della Fonte Meravigliosa, Roma Tel. 065192128 www.ethosfineaudio.com</p> <p>Price: €5.990.00 the couple</p>
Drivers	<p>176mm fiberglass midrange, coaxial aluminum dome 25mm.</p> <p>*One-point source driver controlled dispersion patterns and balance for ultra smooth spectral.</p>
Frequency response	70-25,000Hz +/-2dB; 55Hz -6dB.
Sensitivity	86dB/2.83V/1m
Impedance	8 ohms
Crossover frequency	2800Hz
Choice of amplifier	20 – 150W
Enclosure closed box	217 x 300 x 217mm
Weight	6.16 kg/pce, 12.32kg/pair.