

Loudspeakers

ENCORE
ENC-5

Manufacturer: [COMBAK CORPORATION](#)

Price (when reviewed): 25 900 zł/pair

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MADE IN JAPAN

Provided for test by: [MOJE AUDIO](#)



REVIEW

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Combak Corporation

ENCORE

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So called „vertical integration” is an arrangement in which the supply chain of a company is owned by that company. In a particular case of an audio company it means that it controls sound from the recording stage until the reproduction stage using loudspeakers or headphones. And there are few such companies, like Linn and Naim for example. They own separate brands that are involved in recording and releasing albums (respectively: [Linn Records](#) and [Naim Label](#)) but are also designing and manufacturing audio components like: sources (turntables, music servers, and Naim also CD and HDCD Players), amplifiers, cables and loudspeakers. So each such company controls the whole way the signal has to go through – from a recording till its reproduction in a audio system.

Japanese release of Bill Evans Trio's Portrait in Jazz comes with insert that, among other things, says that in When I Fall In Love in the left channel one could hear drop-outs. With Encore one can hear them as clearly as if one was present in the studio during recording. It is perceived as an inherent element of this recording, or as its curiosity so it doesn't bother listener at all. These two element – high resolution and large scale presentation give us a general idea about what Encore have to offer.

Soundstage is quite expansive in all dimensions. To hear this effect at its best one should take time to find optimal placement for the speakers. To be clear – whatever the placement they offer decent performance but only if you make an effort and find the optimal one you'll be rewarded with this coherent, rich soundstage. Like with Sławek Jaskutke album



[Combak Corporation](#) works in a similar way. Its owner, Mr Kazuo Kiuchi co-owns XRCD (eXtended Resolution Compact Disc) patents, is a producer of albums that are remastered in [JVC's](#) (Victor Company of Japan, Ltd) studio. It might not be exactly the same as producing music recorded in one's own studio, but it's close enough and it creates an opportunity of working with much wider musical spectrum. His company offers a CD Player and a D/A Converter sporting K2 digital filters, linestage and power amplifiers – all of them under the Reimyo brand. Harmonix brand is used for cables and anti-vibration elements. Loudspeakers also have their own brand – before it was Bravo!, and now it is Encore.

ENC-5

Kiuchi-san loves tubes and classic recordings of 1950ties and 1960ties – both jazz and classical music. He also prefers small monitors. So it is no surprise that also his latest speakers, Encore ENC-5, are small, stand-mounted ones. These loudspeakers sport SEAS coaxial drivers, with aluminum dome tweeter placed in a center of a fiberglass mid– lowrange driver. Encore use closed cabinets made of few types of wood. Each cabinet sports also Harmonix anti-vibration elements placed in key areas. The inside is gently damped with small wood pieces. A crossover's design is very simple. It uses few polypropylene capacitors and hand made air-core coils. It uses no resistor!

ENC-5 are designed to work as near-field monitors, so they should be placed close to listener. Mr Kiuchi calls them “studio monitors”, because in recording and mastering studios they use speakers for near-field listening. To even further minimize an influence of the rooms' acoustics Mr Kiuchi follows the Perfect Bass Balance theory in his design. These speakers are quite easy load so can be driven even by a low-power tube amplifiers – manufacturer declares a nominal impedance value of 8 Ω and it only occasionally falls below 7 Ω. Frequency range reaches from 70 Hz to 25 000 Hz, with +/-2 dB, and bass goes as low as 55 Hz with -6 dB.

— A FEW SIMPLE WORDS WITH... —



KAZUO KIUCHI
Owner, designer



WOJCIECH PACUŁA: Why didn't you this time design large,

Sea – that was really something! – lots of special effects that made piano sound like it was playing under water and a final result of remarkable depth and palpability.

Jazz is not the only genre that Encore delivers in a particularly beautiful way – it does a great job of playing electronic and classical music too. With some reservation – when it comes to electronic music the one that sounds best is the particularly dense, rich kind. When it comes to powerful, rhythmic pieces like Jarre's Téo & Téa, speakers' performance lacks openness. Recordings with compressed sound, emphasized attack phase do these speakers no good. There is more treble, more details, but lesser coherency and liquidity. But if you listen to Zygmunt Krauze on Spatial Music, or Mirt's Solitaire you are going to be thrilled.



Also baroque music, but played on period instruments sounds amazing. I think it shows perfectly Encore's preferences: the more harmonics, the richer, deeper sound, the better, more enjoyable performance.

Summary

Small boxes measuring 217 x 300 x 217 mm sporting a 175mm mid– low-range driver working in a closed enclosure should not be able to deliver low bass. I happened to witness not once and not twice such a phenomenon where a designer treated such situation not as a problem, something impossible, but as a challenge that helped him to build something special. Mr Kiuchi chose a loading method for a larger of two drivers that resulted in great coherency of the sound. And this coherency allows listener to forget about limitations of these speakers. It is obvious that what we can hear comes from monitors, but we are aware of that because of previous experience rather than because of what we can actually hear.

Encore are perfect choice for small rooms especially to play the music genres I mentioned above. High sensitivity and impedance might suggest using low-power tube amplifiers, which is true but only if one uses them actually in a small room as a near-field monitors. In other cases powerful amp will be a better choice. One should follow these suggestions and make an effort when finding an optimal placement for these speakers – in return Encore will offer an amazing performance.

DESIGN

The Combak Corporation webpage calls these speakers „State-of-the-Art Near-field loudspeaker”. They are small, two-way monitors using the SEAS H1384-08/06 coaxial driver operation in closed enclosure. Mid– and low-range is reproduced by a driver with fiberglass, yellow diaphragm. In its center instead of dust cup there is the second driver – a metal tweeter. Crossover frequency is set at 2800 Hz.

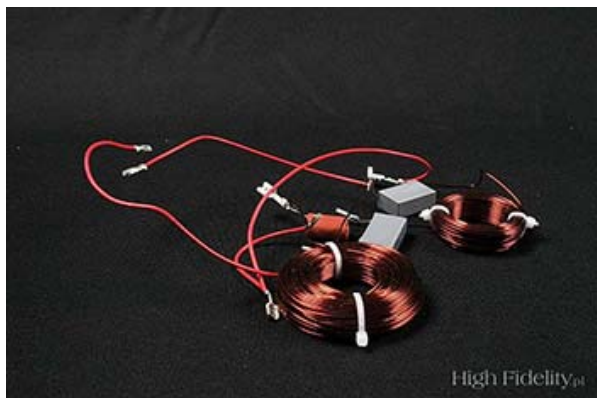
The ENCORE's design follows a closed enclosure principle based on Perfect Bass Balance theory, allowing a bass roll-off of 12dB octave ideally compensated by boost of room reflections often associated with listening rooms. The nominal impedance of the ENCORE is 8 ohms and rarely drops below 7 ohms . To unleash the true potential of the ENCORE, the

floor-standing loudspeakers?

KAZUO KIUCHI: I have visited very many number of music lovers and their listening room is not the size that big size speaker can play. The room is also a part of system and acoustically very important. Big size speaker shake the room and room produce their own acoustic sound. The most of speakers on the market is designed to handle big power and play very loud not musical. There is many big problem in designing speakers.

What is important for you in loudspeaker design and what do you want to achieve by your constructions?

Important mission of audio system is to Faith-to-Original reproduction and nothing else, including speaker design. Every piece of my product is designed based on this concept. This is only where music lovers can meet original intention of music writer, composer, conductor, artists. Every piece of CD soft. It is stored them and history, life of time, love etc. Please listen and compare ENCORE with any other speakers in term of musicality and reality, not volume of sound.



What music did impress you recently? What music would you recommend to „High Fidelity” readers?

Performance out of the most of systems, I guess, you only get 30 to 40% only. Many of system owners make chose the sound they prefer and not music. They like big and loud sound where there is no musicality and No art-of-music. When I present my systems and sound of my system, every listeners got shockingly surprise. Some listeners drop their jaws for the sound never experienced, and some other have become mesmerized. This is what music should deliver and I am experiencing excitement in making my product and XRCD music soft.

COMBAK CORPORATION in HF

SOUND

Recordings used for this test (a selection):

- Paganini For Two, Gil Shaham, Göran Söllscher, Deutsche Grammophon/Universal Music Ltd, Taiwan 480 246-5, XRCD24 (1993/2009)
- Bach, Violin Concertos, Yehudi Menuhin, EMI/Hi-Q Records HIQXRCD9, XRCD24, CD (1960/2013)
- Bill Evans Trio, Portrait in Jazz, Riverside/Victor Entertainment, VICJ-61322, K2HD CD (1959/2005)
- Heinrich Ignaz Franz von Biber, Rosary Sonatas, viol. Rachel Podger, Channel Classics CCS SA 37315, 2 x SACD/CD (2015)
- Jerzy Milian, Milian 80 | 1956-2004, GAD Records GAD CD 026, CD (2015)
- John Coltrane, Blue Train, Blue Note/Esoteric ESSB-90123, SACD/CD (1957/2015) w: 6 Great Jazz, "MasterSound Works", Blue Note/Esoteric ESSB-90122/7, 6 x SACD/CD (2015)
- Mirt, Solitaire, Bôlt Records BR ES18, "Polish Radio Experimental Studio", CD (2014)
- Nahorny Sextet, Chopin Genius Loci, Confiteor 005, 2 x CD (2010)
- Pat Martino, Hombre, Prestige/JVC VICJ-41574, "Heritage of Jazz - II Prestige 50 | 18", K2 CD (1967/2006)
- Sławek Jaskółke, Sea, Kayax 079, CD (2014);
- Wes Montgomery, Echoes of Indiana Avenue, Resonance

recommended amplifier should have higher electrical output current and quality. When such amplifiers are used ENCORE can also play impressively in large listening rooms up to 80 square meters.

The following speaker models offered by Mr Kiuchi differed mostly with their enclosures. In this case enclosure is made of few wooden elements and "tuned" to achieve required resonance control. Resonances are an inherent feature of any speaker enclosure – in this case it is about resonance control. Part of the system that allows such control are Harmonix anti-vibration elements placed in the key parts of the speaker that look like Harmonix anti-vibration feet. Even the logo on the front baffle is an anti-vibration element. Rear panel sports additional piece of wood that also helps to control resonances. This piece of wood is a reason why speakers posts had to be placed quite far away from each other. These are gold-plated posts that look like those used in my Harbeths – honestly I'm not a great fan of them.



There are two color versions available – black and Russet (side walls are still black but all others are finished with Russet veneer). Driver is protected with a black, metal grid.

Specifications (according to manufacturer)

Drivers:

- 176 mm fiberglass
- 25 mm, coaxial aluminum dome

Frequency range:

- 70-25 000 Hz (+/-2 dB)
- 55 Hz/-6 dB

Sensitivity: 86 dB/2,83 V/1 m

Nominal impedance: 8 Ω

Crossover frequency: 2800 Hz

Recommended power amplifier: 20 – 150 W

Dimensions: 217 x 300 x 217 mm

Grill: metal grid, diffraction and early reflections free.

Finish: black or Russet

Weight: 6,16 kg/PC.

Kazimierz Jonkisz Energy

6 Hour With Ronnie

ForTune 0070 | 045

Medium: Compact Disc

Released: Sept. 25th 2015

Records 195562, CD (2012)

- Zygmunt Krauze, Spatial Music, Bôft Records BR 1019, CD (2013)



Japanese issues available at

It is said that knowing man or people behind particular product – not necessarily an audio one – helps to understand its purpose and function. I have to agree with that and I'm speaking from my experience. The smaller, more specialized manufacturer, the more true is there in this saying.

In other words – understanding Encore means also getting to know Mr Kazuo Kiuchi better. Because Kiuchi-san creates products for his own, private audio system. The system he and his wife, a professional singer, use to listen to the music and to assess recordings he produces (for XRCDs in JVC studio). He creates them for himself and then shares them with others, thus sharing his private life with us.

So it came as no surprise that these were “specialized” products. I can't call them „universal”, because they clearly work better when playing some recordings and not so well when dealing with others. They never sound poorly. But once we hear the “right” sort of recordings played by Encore we know exactly that they were created for this type of music and we can feel it in our gut. By when forced to play music that doesn't suit them they become bit nervous and sometimes slightly aggressive.

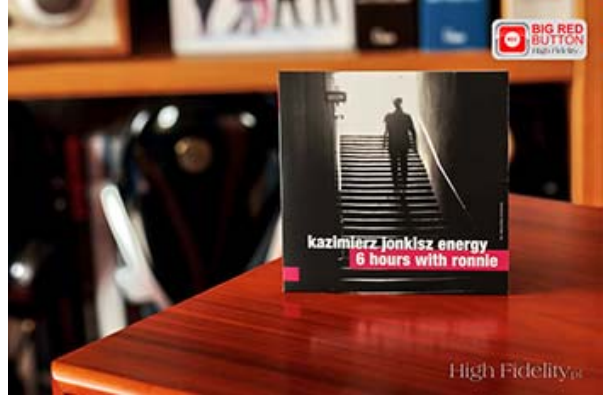
Assuming that we have fulfilled these two basic conditions (proper system and music selection) the first thing that we realize is the the scale of the sound that is defined as “amount of the sound” delivered over chosen unit of time. It is something that (in jokes) we describe as “the actual content of sound (music) in sound (music)”.



Already the previous Combak Corporation monitors called Bravo! Were in this respect unique, but Encore exceeds even further. Our eyes see small speakers but our ears enjoy large scale, rich sound. This effect is particularly present when listening to jazz recordings from 1950ties and 1960ties, especially using high quality Japanese releases that take particularly good care of a refined midrange. The soundstage is huge. Listener feels like in the center of a huge bubble that is usually created by large, horn speakers like, for example, JBL ones from Monitor series.

Density of the sound is enormous, simply beyond any scale. Evans' piano had depth and size that most large speakers would never be able to reproduce, as well as this amazing vibrancy and smoothness of Jerzy Milian vibes. Same happened when I listened to guitars played by Pat Martino on El Hombre, or Wes Montgomery on Echoes... Each of these recordings were presented with fabulous richness as well as with impressive resolution. Probably nobody would really call these speakers particularly selective, just as nobody calls sound from analogue master-tape selective. In these cases selectivity seems like a core feature, something that is simply there to “support” other sound features and not just to impress listener.

It definitely supports richness and resolution of the sound. Sound seems slightly warm and dense. But it is not achieved by



In 1978 he, as the first drummer ever, started his own jazz band. Many currently well know musicians played at some point in one of his bands. Musicians like: Krzesimir Dębski, Janusz Skowron, Maciej Strzelczyk, Andrzej Olejniczak, Maciej Sikąta, Krzysztof Popek started their careers this way.

Kazimierz Jonkisz recorded almost 70 albums throughout his career. He took part in recording many most important Polish jazz recordings like, for example, Zbigniew Namysłowski's „Winobranie”. His first own album called Tiri Taka was released in 1980 and today it belongs to prestigious „Polish Jazz” series.

Ronnie (Ronald Edward) CUBER is an American saxophonist best known as baritone sax player. His first notable work was with Slide Hampton, Maynard Ferguson and Lee Konitz.

These two musicians met for only 6 hours when they recorded a lot of material that after selection was placed on this album. These 6 hours were enough to prepare material for six tracks – their own compositions and some standards, rehearse them and record them in Studio Tokarnia.

The recording was done on November 17th 2014 in Studio Tokarnia in Warsaw.



SOUND

ForTune really knows how to choose best musicians but also sound engineers for their releases. I wrote it because the Kazimierz Jonkisz album is very coherent and stylish. It sends listeners back to 1950ties not only because of the music itself but also because of style of the production of this album. It was recorded over a single day and most likely at 100% (at least that's what I thought when I was listening to it). It is particularly meaningful music delivered with a full, rich sound. I appreciated natural, realistic timbre of double bass that did not sound anything like a bass guitar. Drums placed in the left channel sounds like recorded from some distance but it is very lively, with vibrant, rich sound of both, drums and cymbals. Even when on Ivy track some reverb was added to baritone saxophone it still sounds very good, there is no artificial brightness, nor is the sound overly detailed. Sound is rich, essential, dense and palpable. Great sounding album with highly enjoyable music. Highly recommended!

“warming this sound up” but due to this remarkable resolution – it’s a phenomenon one should remember about: the better selectivity the more detailed sound, but selectivity by itself tends to make sound too bright; on the other hand the better resolution the (subjectively) warmer, richer sound gets while remaining highly detailed.



Sound quality: 10/10

Galeria

Gallery



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