

Concert Hall to Go

Superb acoustic treatment for topical use only – no adverse side effects

A Saturday with friends, a good cross-section of music genres, interrupted only by a coffee break for the guests during which I – but I'm getting ahead of myself. Suffice it to say that no one was really prepared for the surprise of the session's second half ...

I invited three friends, two women and a man – more can't fit on my main couch. Three music enthusiasts with plenty of concert experience and good, but not audiophile, HiFi systems. Each brought three albums; one track to be played from each – relaxed and unhurried.

My three guests have no idea what awaits them. We're here to listen to music – that much is clear. And I would like to hear some thoughts about what they experienced. This is because I'm basically skeptical and want to make sure I don't wind up fooling myself.

The system with its DartZeel CTH-8550 and Stereofone Dura speakers is not uncharted territory for anyone present and the prices for these components are no secret. Not to mention that the system has been playing flawlessly for days. And lest I forget: the volume levels will be locked in, since I had intimated from the outset that there would be a second round of listening with the identical music program and under exactly the same conditions. Perhaps with one minor change, or perhaps not. I will leave this option open until the very end having indicated that the time of day might possibly be change enough. When you're dealing with me you can never really know for sure ... We set the order of play and began. Uneasy quiet. No talking, just concentrated listening, Experiencing the musicians. Nine tracks offer a superb palette: Faithless, Rammstein, Fleetwood Mac, Vesselina Kasarova, Róisín Murphy, Nils Petter Movær, ABBA, Musica Antiqua Köln and Gustav Holst.

At intermission all three ranked the system's sound as being harmonic, highly transparent, appealing, spatially well differentiated and in any case better than their own systems (that would really be something if it weren't). There was consensus that the Kasarova everyone loves reveals her temperament somewhat more intensively when she is performing live on stage. Nils Petter Movær's profoundly abstruse spherical jazz-funk absolutely fascinated and captivated us, while that typically brute Rammstein sound apparently develops a slightly disturbing effect even on an audiophile system. There were a few minor disagreements about details of taste, such as whether one Pop HiHat was not unduly "in your ear" ...

Intermission. The guests are enjoying coffee and pastry in the next room, while I attach 18 small white "buttons" in my living room, making sure to affix them on the walls, window frames and furniture surfaces according to the manufacturer's instructions. Since I had already identified and marked their positions days ago, it took no time at all to place them where they belonged. In doing so it occurred to me just how cluttered my living room is. None of my guests noticed even one of these Harmonix room tuning devices as the afternoon progressed. And so it was with no further ado that we resumed, concentrating fully on the music – while 18 small, flat, white lacquered, entirely nondescript, self-adhesive "buttons" composed of a mysterious material and appearing not unlike a section of a golf ball made their extraordinary affect ...



Let's make it short: The before and after sound difference was so clearly noticeable that I – now more skeptical than ever – found myself taking a furtive glance to check the amplifier settings as I was changing the CD. Even from my side loge seat on the second sofa it seemed as if someone had secretly turned up the volume. My guess would be two, perhaps three decibels, only to discover that everything was under control at least as far as measurements and calibration were concerned. Astounding!

This subjective impression of increased loudness – later confirmed by all three guests independently – suggests an enhanced rendering of the inner dynamic structures in the music. Now and then it seemed as if all of the involved musicians had rehearsed their program intensely one more time, and were delivering the performance of a lifetime. Vesselina Kasarova now sounds much clearer, her mezzo-soprano voice appears on stage with much greater focus, sets itself much more naturally apart from the orchestra, breathes with a newfound freedom, and delivers greater presence, while its vocal stature and articulation have improved notably. Lindsey Buckingham's acoustic guitar is not as flat as before, but possesses more credible volume, seems more certain and combines with the drums and electric bass guitar to form a remarkably incisive and driving band base. The delicate sounds of Jan Garbarek as he begins blowing

into the instrument ultimately magnify to become an incredibly complex weave of pianissimo air. What was a somewhat exasperating and rumbling bass has now gained structure to reveal some deep dark shades. The strings and wind instruments emerge with unprecedented substance and clarity alike.

On the whole, the system and these Harmonix room tuning devices produce a tonal richness that earlier seemed shrouded under a fine satin finish. This Harmonix set lets you peer more deeply into the music without getting distracted or sacrificing any rhythmic mobility. Easily discernable improvements in a range of individual disciplines meld to a vastly improved, yes even more harmonized, overall structure – something that is in no respect an automatism. Nomen est omen?

This exciting and intensive afternoon left a truly lasting impression on me. For the next couple of weeks I had the opportunity of investigating these impressive sound improvements with various HiFi systems and a diverse range of music styles

before I had to send the box of 18 discs back to the sales department. There were no changes to the uncanny improvement in sound during this time, but something did change as far as my short-term audio investment plans are concerned.

After all, a set of these unpretentious Harmonix RFA-7800s costs 1600 euros. Interestingly enough, my guests quoted much higher sums that they – budget permitting – would be willing to pay for this kind of sound enhancement. To the very end they suspected some sort of hidden components, or at least a “super cable.” On the evidence of this potential for improved sound quality – and regardless of the room acoustics and the HiFi configuration – I want to make a clear recommendation. No other tuning devices from a range of suppliers that I skeptically tried out have ever come close to the astonishing effect of these discs from Harmonix. And let's remember one thing: It's not called Euphonix, but Harmonix.

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Acoustic Tuning Harmonix RFA-7800

Function: Passive room tuning devices **Color:** White **Mounting:** Self-adhesive
Dimensions: 25 mm Ø, 4 mm **Warranty:** 2 years **Set Price (18 discs):** 1600 euros

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