

Venture Audio Encore Loudspeakers

The perfect speaker for my listening habits and perhaps yours too.
[Review By Tom Lyle](#)

http://www.enjoythemusic.com/superioraudio/equipment/0514/venture_audio_encore.htm

There are times when I feel as if I can be placed in the same category as the reviewers who write for *Car And Driver* and the *Automobile* section in the *Sunday New York Times*. Every now and then a writer will be lent for a period of time a car such as a Ferrari or Rolls Royce to drive through the streets and open roads of America. Can the reviewers that write for these publications afford to purchase these cars? I'm sure that sometimes the answer is "yes", but more often than not the most likely answer is "no". Does that make the latter unqualified to review these cars? Definitely not, which is the same answer you'd get from me regarding this review of the \$47,000 a pair Venture Audio Encore. Perhaps if I took out a second mortgage or borrowed against my retirement savings I would be able to swing it. In the past I've been awfully crafty when it comes to scrounging up enough money for some fairly pricey gear. But again, am I qualified to review these speakers? All modesty aside, I think my over twenty years of reviewing and thousands of hours of critical listening under my belt will enable me to review the Venture Encores with a perspective that others might not. But like the reviewer who is testing the latest model Lamborghini, whether we can afford it or not, there's quite a good chance we'll enjoy every second of it.



The Venture Encores are the smallest floorstanding loudspeakers in Ventures Ultimate line, and therefore their least expensive floorstanders—yet they cost \$47,000 for the pair. There are reasons why the Venture Encores cost this much money (there are always reasons why a piece of gear costs what it does). First of all, they are imported from Belgium. More importantly, is that head designer and owner the owner of Venture Audio Hoo Kong Njoo (whose friends call him Didi) received his masters in physics from the University of Frankfurt and then spent many years involved in the science of cryogenics and super conducting materials. Since forming Venture Audio in 1986 he spent years in research and development in regards to driver technology, cabinet design, crossover technology, and even the speaker connections and finishes of the cabinet and how these factors would affect the sound of his final products. Obviously, he intended from the beginning to build the best possible speaker he could, with the final cost of these speakers a secondary concern. Or at least it seems as if cost was only a secondary concern because, again, \$47k is a lot to pay for a pair of speakers.

Technical

I'm grateful that Venture Audio forwarded me lots of historic and technical background in regards to the Encores. I assume the purchaser or potential purchaser of the Encores would be provided just as much, but I had to decide how much of this to include in this review. As there is hardly enough space to include everything sent to me for this review, to paraphrase Albert Einstein, I will make this review as simple as possible, but no simpler.

When Venture Audio was first formed they used drivers sourced from some of the best manufacturers available. Since 2001 they've used their own drivers that they manufactured in-house using their on-going R&D programs. They developed two basic type of dynamic drivers, the cones of both made with very small graphite particles uniformly mixed in a resin or pulp to form a graphite composite matrix. It depends what type of driver they are using at the time, but in all of them long fibers of carbon or abaca are imbedded in the graphite composite mix in a proprietary pattern.

These cones are then encased in a mold and cured at high temperature. Venture Audio chose this graphite composite mixture mostly because it achieved optimal damping properties. The long carbon fibers, which provide the stiffness needed for the cone to act as a piston in its primary oscillating motion, are imbedded in the graphite composite cone. Carbon fiber's low mass helps minimize the weight of the cone; therefore it reacts very fast and has excellent dynamics, resolution, and results in having a very natural sound. They call this carbon fiber graphite composite, or CFGC, of which the Venture Encore uses a single 5" midrange driver in its cabinet.

The other type of driver they use has a cone that is made of tiny graphite particles uniformly mixed in abaca pulp sourced from the stems of the Abaca (a native tree of the Philippines) to form the graphite composite matrix. The long abaca fibers are also imbedded in the graphite composite cone in a proprietary pattern. The abaca based cones basically have the same construction and performance characteristics as the CFGC carbon fiber resin based cones. As a side note; abaca is known for having excellent flexibility and durability, and is used to produce United States paper currency. So the cones are very durable, but also stiff, light weight, and according to Venture Audio, very natural sounding. This type of driver is called the Abaca Graphite Composite, or AGC Driver. The Encore uses two 7" AGC woofers.

The tweeter used in the Encore is of the AGC variety, and has a wide frequency range of 100 Hz to 60,000 Hz. Venture Audio makes their tweeter in 1.5" and 2.0" diameter versions, the Encore uses a single 1.5" tweeter. Venture Audio claims that their tweeters are capable of "very high resolution, great dynamic range, and can be crossed-over at virtual any crossover point between the midrange driver and the tweeter". They go on to say that their tweeter matches superbly with the midrange drivers, with excellent linearity in phase and amplitude.



A footnote that Venture Audio mentions in their literature is that historically, graphite composite matrices were first used by the military, originally developed for vibration absorption in the construction of ship hulls and other applications where vibration control was necessary. Today, it is still used for this purpose. It makes perfect sense to manufacture driver cones with a composite graphite matrix to eliminate unwanted resonances in the radial and circumferential modes of the cone. The drivers will become, for lack of any other term, self-damping. Without this matrix, Venture Audio says there will be a masking of micro-dynamics and noise added due to these resonances. As an added benefit, graphite is also a semi-conductive material that lessens the interaction of the moving cone with the magnetic field. Venture Audio claims that their drivers are therefore lightweight, very fast, have exceptional resolution, and have "extraordinary" dynamics. Other driver manufacturers might use graphite in their products, but this graphite is usually a spray-on coating, or might be built up with layers of carbon cloth.



Venture Audio also spent a great amount of research and development on the optimization of the curvature of the driver's cones. They experimented with the sound wave launch pattern that was determined by this curvature to ensure phase and frequency linearity over the driver's entire frequency range. This was particularly important because of Venture Audio's use of a first order (6 dB/octave slope) crossover in their speakers. They accomplished the feat of having a multi-driver speaker with nearly perfect coherence. This enables the listener to be positioned off-axis with much less of a shift in tonal balance, so the soundstage and imaging characteristics remain stable regardless of the listener's position. Venture Audio goes on to say that their drivers use very powerful magnets, which exert tight control over the cones. Their specifications claim a measured Q of what Venture claims is an "unheard Q of 0.3". This means that bass overhang is "virtually nonexistent" and therefore the bass is "exceedingly tight and focused". After the construction of a driver is completed, they give them a 100 hour stress test at 120 dB, after which they are compared to their pre-test results.

As far as cabinet design is concerned, Venture Audio insists that a good speaker cabinet is a quiet one, but not a dead one. To that end, only recently did they start to use alternating layers of High Density Fiberboard (HDF) with solid hardwood in the laminated structure in their Ultimate Series of speakers, of which the Encore is included, and results in reducing unwanted vibration. Also, the cabinets exhibit very low resonance levels, and results in a speaker cabinet that does not interfere with the sound that comes forth from the drivers. The cabinets of the Encores are finished with a thick layer of hard polyester high gloss mirror finish that Venture Audio claims is about 1300 microns thick, which also aids in reducing cabinet vibration. In their research they determined that this most recent method of finishing their cabinets is responsible for "a noticeable improvement in the focus of images better micro-dynamics" and "enhances the beauty of the speakers". This "mirror hi-gloss" finish for the entire Ultimate Series is available in Makassar ebony, rosewood, piano black, pearl white, and elm burl. For an additional cost Venture Audio makes other finishes available.

Venture Audio also minimizes the size of the front baffle of the Encores by utilizing a "V-Shape" cabinet design, which greatly decreases the amount of sound waves reflected off the cabinet. Of course baffle reflections interfere with the wave launch of the drivers, causing distortion, increasing the noise floor, and messing with the focus of the images that make up the speaker's soundstage.

The first-order crossover networks of the Encore are hand-built with point-to-point soldering. Venture Audio says they "carefully select" the components and test them after assembly. Since as far back as 1987 Venture has been designing all the cable that is used for the internal wiring of their speakers, which is based on the same technology used to design Venture interconnect and speaker cables. Their general concept of cable design is similar to some of the cables designed for microwave technology, which can have a bandwidth of up to 18 GHz with excellent phase linearity. The speaker's internal wire is small in diameter, and is fabricated with high-purity copper and "special" silver plating that is also like that uses in microwave applications.



Venture Audio uses speaker connectors that are low-mass, high-conductivity connectors. They use Furutech binding posts on the Encore, but also outfit the rear of the speaker with Speakon twist-on connectors. The Encore uses a single set of binding posts as opposed to having a bi-wiring option because Venture Audio feels that it maintains better linearity in phase and improved coherence. Speaker cones (or "spikes") are provided as standard equipment with the Encores. Venture Audio recommends that the listener use them if the speakers are going to be located in carpeted listening rooms.

These Speakers Sound

But that's it for the technical details. I'm sure, as I was, that most are more interested in how these speakers sound, as well as how they fit into one's system. The speakers made the trip from their California distributor by truck in two light grey flight cases with the Venture Audio silk-screen on their top. Thankfully, the cases had wheels, which made it much easier for me and the trucker to get them to the steps of the front porch of the house. Together we lifted them up the five or so steps to the front porch, and into the first floor of my home. They spent their first few weeks connected to the second system in a common space on that floor, connected to a pair of tubed PrimaLuna monoblocks where a small pair of EgglestonWorks Isabella two-way floorstanders usually holds court. The system is all digital, with a Logitech Squeezebox touch and an Oppo Universal player feeding the digital-to-analog (DAC) *de jour*, sometimes with, and sometimes without a linestage stationed between it and the amps. Cabling is by Cardas throughout, other than the digital cable between the Oppo and the DAC, which is a DH Labs. Mike Slaminski, the fine gentleman who heads Precision AV, Venture Audio's distributor, told me that the Encores might not have too many hours on them so they more than likely needed breaking in. I tried not to be too critical of their sound while they were spending time in this system, which believe me was tough, but experience has led me to believe that the sound of a speaker can change dramatically during its break-in period so most of their playing time was performed with me listening off-axis.

Even though the Encores are Venture Audio's smallest floorstanders they aren't that small, and at 132 pounds each they are hardly lightweights. The speakers stand more than 3.5 feet tall, are about 15 inches deep and about a foot wide. The speaker's single pair of binding posts is nearer to the top of the back of the cabinet than the bottom, and they also have Speakon connectors which I mentioned above, which at first threw me for a loop—I had never seen them on a pair of speakers before and at first was confused as to their purpose. But all in all, these are a beautiful pair of speakers. Rather than grilles

each of the four drivers on the front baffle is covered with its own black metal mesh grille, making more visible the mirror-finished woodgrain veneer of the front baffle. This dark wood-toned mirror finish is impeccable, and rather than just "blending" with the décor of ones listening room, I'd wager that they would enhance the décor of most. Needless to say, the fit and finish of these speakers is among the best I've ever seen.

Moving the speakers up two flights of stairs to my main listening room took two people and an appliance dolly. Unlike the downstairs space, this room has wall-to-wall carpeting therefore the cones provided for the bases of the speakers had to be installed. Accompanying the Encores are very detailed set-up instructions, entitled:

DETAILED METHODOLOGY FOR SETTING UP VENTURE SPEAKERS IMPORTANT FOR ATTAINING THE BEST RESULTS

They didn't have to yell. But the instructions had specifications such as listening distance from the front of the speakers, the distance between the two speakers, and the "important" six degree toe-in angle and how to accomplish this. Call me a rebel, but I'm not one to blindly set a pair of speakers according to the manufacturer's instructions without some experimenting. Then again, it's been a while since I had a pair of speakers with the pedigree of the Encores, so I was more than willing to read the instructions and follow them as closely as I could. I set up the speakers where I thought they sounded their best, and then tried Venture Audio's methods. Wouldn't you know it? They sounded best when I followed Venture Audio's instructions.

At one point in the review period I made a remark to an associate that the Venture Audio Encores are so sensitive to upstream changes that they are sensitive to the changing phases of the moon. Of course I'm exaggerating, but because of the exceedingly transparent disposition of these speakers I used just about all the equipment and ancillaries I had in my home before I was completely satisfied with the sound coming from the Encores. As I was experimenting with different components and cables, though, it was tough to "ruin" their sound, at the same time it was not very difficult to hear the changes that resulted from switching everything from power amplifiers to cables to the tonearm's VTF. The same was true with their set-up, because even if not positioned according to Venture Audio's instructions they still sounded great. Their chameleon-like character was due to the fact that the Encores are the most sensitive speakers that ever took up residence in my listening room. I don't mean they had uncommonly high sensitivity, they are rated at 87dB/W/m with a fairly stable impedance rating of 6 Ohms, but rather they are sensitive to the signal they are fed—from the software that the front end is interpreting to the terminals on the speaker cables. Every single change I made produced significant, easy to hear differences in the sound. It was no surprise that their character changed dramatically when the speaker's surroundings changed from the rather live sounding common space on my home's first floor to the acoustically treated main listing room. There are some characteristics of the speakers that remained constant, of course, and I will discuss these. But more than any speaker than I've ever auditioned, they likely will sound very different in one audiophile's system to another's. Again, I'd also wager that they will never, ever sound bad, but different.

During my auditions many components in the system changed a few times before everything was dialed in. The digital front end remained rather constant, as most of the digital signal I listened to originated from of a number of hard-drives loaded with FLAC files that were connected to a Dell PC running Windows 7. These files were played on Foobar 2000 open-source music software with its preference's output device set to Kernel Streaming. This bypasses the computer's internal sound mixer and sends a "pure" signal to the USB outputs. Furutech USB cable fed the signal to a Benchmark DAC1USB, a Wadia 121 Decoding Computer, or an AURALiC Vega DAC. I also played SACDs and the rare DVD-Audio on an Oppo BDP-83 Special Edition, it's digital output connected to a

DAC, its analog outputs connected to the preamp. The analog front-end started out as a Basis Debut V turntable, on which a Tri-Planar 6 tonearm was mounted using a Lyra Kleos phono cartridge. The Basis' AC cord was plugged into a PS Audio Power Plant P300, which powered the turntable with either a 60 Hz or 81 Hz sine wave depending on its speed, 33.3 rpm for the former, 45 rpm the latter. After only a short while I switched out the Basis set-up for an [Oracle Delphi MK VI turntable with an Oracle/SME V tonearm](#), but still using the same Lyra phono cartridge, the turntable powered not by the PS Audio but by its own Oracle Turbo MK II power supply. When using the Tri-Planar on the Basis it had a hardwired 1.5m cable made by Discovery, the SME on the Oracle had a Van den Hul phono cable with a DIN connector on the business end. Regardless of the turntable/tonearm/cartridge, with its interconnects traveling to a Pass Laboratories XP-15 phono preamplifier.

I started my listening sessions with a Balanced Audio Technologies (BAT) linestage, but then switched it out for the Red Wine Isabella tubed linestage, which was a better match for the Encores. Then, only a short while later I discovered that no preamplifier or linestage was preferable to either that I had at my disposal. Even though both the BAT and the Red Wine are very low in coloration, the slight coloration they did exhibit was detectable through the Encores, and the plusses definitely outweighed the minuses when I instead connecting the phono preamp's output to the Benchmark's analog input, and then used the DAC's volume control to attenuate the signal. This limited me to only one analog source at a time unless I was willing to unplug and reconnect cables, but it was worth it. Of even greater significance was the choice of the power amplifier. I began with the solid-state 350 Wpc Pass Labs X350.5. As good as this power amplifier sounds with my resident Sound Lab DynaStat hybrid/electrostatic speakers; it was just wasn't a great match with Venture Audio Encores. I much preferred the sound of the vacuum tubed PrimaLuna DiaLogue Six monoblock power amplifiers. Again, nothing I did could make the Encores sound objectively substandard, even when driving them with "only" 70 Watts per channel with the PrimaLunas. When the Encores were reproducing music with at the loudest listening levels I could tolerate along with the most challenging musical material I could find I did not hear a hint of distortion or other signs of overload that was the cause of the amps or the speakers. I suppose, at the time, I wouldn't have refused some tube amps with more power than the PrimaLunas, but as I don't have a very large listening room, the "lack" of power didn't come into play that much at all. I'm also lucky in that the listening room that the Encores were spending their review time is devoted to the purpose of listening to music—most of the front end equipment is situated on an Arcici Suspense equipment rack, there are two dedicated AC power lines, and there are acoustic treatment wall panels lining the front, side, and back walls. The Venture Audio Encores were quite at home.

Components And Cables

As I switched out different components and cables, and as I adjusted them the sound of the Encores changed, sometimes dramatically. The same thing was true with recordings, whether they were analog or digital, the sound of the Encores changed depending on the quality of these recordings. Of course all speakers change their sound when faced with either tubes vs. transistors, or digital vs. analog, but certainly not as drastically as the Encores. Again, they were very sensitive to what they were fed. In my listening room they sounded better with tube power amps, there was no doubt about that. And their sound changed with the quality of the recording, the never sounded bad, per se, as I didn't bother with any recordings that I didn't want to enjoy listening to. However, they were forgiving of recording with less than perfect sound quality only because as with digital vs. analog they set the bar so high with great recording that lesser recordings were made so much more tolerable.

But after I settled in with the amps that I thought sounded best with the Encores, the PrimaLuna monoblocks, along with all the other equipment choices that were made, I got a sense what the Encores were all about. One of the first sonic impressions that struck me when I started my serious listening sessions in my main listening room was that a tweeter so small, only 1.5 inches in diameter, could produce so much sound and contributed so much to such a huge soundstage. But there was so much more to think about than the *quantity* of sound being produced by the highs of the Encores, because the *quality* of their high-frequencies were so outstanding. The top-octave air contributed to producing a realistic and involving sound that affected every instrument and sound that entered the listening room. Over the years it has been revealed to me that it takes great engineering and design skills to enable a piece of high end gear to create such large gaps between instruments and sounds in the soundstage it produces. The Encores took things even further, where these spaces between the instruments were separated not with silence but by air. Not only that, the Encores have such pure sounding high frequencies, it increases their ability of only being able separate these sounds within their huge soundstage, but to differentiate between very similar sounding high frequencies, such as different sizes cymbals and different locations on which these cymbals are struck. These qualities in the treble is also exhibited in the sound of the higher pitches in wind instruments and horns, and the different timbres that are caused not only by the different types of instruments, but the musician's breath control, style, and skill.

The ambience of a recording reproduced by the Encores sometimes contained the air of the venue if recording was one that was made in a real space, but sometimes it was just the ambient sound of the recording medium, which was usually tape hiss on analog recordings. But there was also the ambient sound of the recording process, so if something such as noise reduction was used this process was made clearly evident by the remnants of the aliasing. I don't want one to infer by these statements that the treble of the Encores was overly-detailed, and the music was made less enjoyable because of this, it wasn't—not at all. These speakers sounded like music, so not only wasn't it necessary to crank the volume, neither did I have to squint my ears to hear all that was on the recording.

When I spun my cherished copy of the RCA Living Stereo LP of Prokofiev's *Fifth Symphony* conducted by Jean Martinon with the Paris Conservatory Orchestra it was again the Encore's midrange prowess which led to one of the most enjoyable afternoons I've ever spent in my listening room. This is one of my favorite readings of this piece, not only because it's on LP, but because of the excellent performance of both the conductor and the orchestra. The sound quality of this vintage LP released in 1959 is fantastic, especially the string sound. The violins, violas and cellos play a very important role in Prokofiev's orchestration, and the many moods and themes that occur and reoccur throughout the piece that are not only easily recognizable, but are never grating despite the semi-dissonant nature of some of the melodies embedded within the sometimes complex orchestration. There is a reason why this is one of Prokofiev's most famous works, save some of his ballet scores, and the Encores seemed to revel in the playing of this disc. Along with revealing details I've never noticed before, they were also able to lay the large orchestra before me, surrounding and engulfing me with its sound. When I would close my eyes the location of the speakers became quite vague—how such large speakers were able to pull off this illusion is a mystery to me. Nice.

When I first heard it, I didn't immediately fall in love with Miles Davis' *Four And More* album. First of all, when I first heard it I was too young to appreciate it, and when I did finally get around to realizing I was in the presence of genius, at that time I was spending more of my time listening to his more "blasphemous" albums such as "In A Silent Way" and "Bitches Brew". Yes, it took me a while to come around, and I guess it had as much to do with my increased willingness to listen to different forms of music and simply maturing as a listener as anything else. As much as I appreciate the Mobile Fidelity Sound Labs re-issue of the LP of *Four And More*, there are many that feel that

their simultaneously released SACD of the same title may be the better of the two. I'm sure this largely depends on the system on which one is listening. Even though the analog front-end in my system can trounce the digital front end, it is when I play the SACD through the Oppo is when I can still sit back and enjoy this album to the fullest, regardless of the "quality" of its reproduction. After living with the Encores I strongly suspected that these speakers were voiced using classical music, that is, real instruments recorded in a real space, yet they have no problem with other genres, even those that have not been recorded in this way. Recordings made in a recording studio or a live situation with the instruments going through a mixing console before they reach the audience's ears, or through that mixing console before being laid down to a storage medium, be that medium magnetic tape or a hard-drive, were hardly short-changed through the Encores. Discs or music files of jazz or jazz-fusion were no problem. Electronic music? Easy. My beloved Black Sabbath? Child's play.

Four And More was recorded in 1964 on the cusp of a new era for Miles, where his new quintet would be comprised of the same personnel as this album minus saxophonist George Coleman but with Wayne Shorter in his place. And this is one of the last albums that would find Miles Davis performing standards in a style that he'd been honing for a quite a while, but with the teenage drummer Tony Williams in the band this must have spurred him on to take a new direction, eventually adding electricity to the mix at first placing pianist Herbie Hancock at the Fender Rhodes, and then adding not only length to the tunes, but a more modern vibe as well.

I have a strong feeling that the ambience we hear when listening to Miles Davis' *Four And More* isn't merely the sound of Lincoln Center's Philharmonic Hall (now Avery Fisher Hall), but reverb and other effects were added electronically during its mixing sessions. This really doesn't come into play at all as to whether or not one (or I) can enjoy this album to its fullest. It is a great performance, not the best recording out there, but the timbre of all the instruments are still rendered in the most life-like of ways possible through the Encores. In fact, I've never enjoyed digital as much when listening to the Encores. Believe it or not, I have a strong feeling it is because of the Encores midrange, which at the same time as having an ultra-high level of transparency, could also render the instruments that they reproduce with an uncanny ease and verisimilitude. Yes, analog sounded better in my system, but when playing digital files, whether they were Red Book, high-resolution files, or SACDs, the sound was so much better than I've ever heard them it hardly mattered if the sound didn't reach the high bar that analog set since the lower bar of digital was set higher than I've ever heard it before!

The neutrality of the Encore's midrange is quite amazing. Even on the most boisterous fare no portion of the midrange overpowered the other. On the latest vinyl reissue of Leonard Bernstein's infamous reading of *Le Sacre Du Printemps* with the NY Phil on Columbia the orchestra was recorded in a huge Brooklyn ballroom, but the microphone placement was such that the room's ambience didn't really come into play that much on the record, and hooray for us audiophiles, as the technique led to one powerful recording of this recurrently profound piece of artistry, both compositionally and performance-wise. When I first played this reissue it was played ostensibly on a completely different system, which included electrostatic speakers and a high-powered solid-state amplifier. Though the Venture Audio Encores, listening to this album once again was an overpowering experience, but in a completely different, and an objectively better way. One would think that during the climax of the last movement the blaring horns and pounding drums would overpower the midrange, but no, the Encores kept their composure and presented the music as it was recorded, and what a recording it is! The separation of instruments and groups of instruments in its *huge* soundstage was in full effect and at the same time the very revealing, but never analytical midrange of the Encores was able to place every section of the orchestra in a separate field of the soundstage. Yet these many discrete fields seemed to communicate with each other as the musicians did during the performance. The air was infused with the sound of the musicians in the adjacent

sections, but simultaneously, the orchestra behaved as a single-celled giant organism—all of this music spreading across and beyond the sonic territory of the physical manifestations of the speakers.

There was another astounding feat of these speakers, the closest term I can think of is "forward", but I fear using this term because if I were to call other speakers forward sounding this certainly would be considered a negative trait. What I'm called forwardness in the Encores, especially when listening to orchestral recordings, is not the same as the audiophile textbook definition of the word, as this usually implies that the speaker has an elevated midrange, or brings the listening perspective closer to the performers than is "normal", normal being the preferred Row H rather than a front-row perspective that a forward sounding speaker would produce. The Encores have a soundstage that with the right recording is meticulously drawn to scale, yet when one attends a live performance there isn't a line drawn on the floor as to where the sound stops; it is projected into the performance space to envelope one in sound. Somehow the Encores manage to do this without sounding "forward". What one might call forwardness on other speakers instead presents itself as a sound that immerses the listener with music; they envelope ones aural senses with a semblance of instruments that sound like the real thing. And even if these instruments aren't "the real thing" on the recording, the speakers' images of these individual sounds are placed throughout the listening room as a huge soundfield—behind, in front of, and in between the speakers. This is not sonic pyrotechnics, but rather a reproduction of the musicians, engineers and producers' intentions, even though they themselves have never privileged to hear it this way. They would surely be impressed with the sound they are hearing being created with only two speakers.

I suppose the only fault I could find with these speakers in reality isn't truly a fault, but a trait that one that the potential purchaser of the speakers has intentionally selected by not purchasing a Venture Audio speaker higher up in their line. The Encore's bass is only rated down to a low of 30 Hz. Even though the lowest notes produced by a double bass or bass guitar is 41 Hz, and a five-string bass guitar with a low B string can produce a low of 31Hz, the low frequency harmonics and fundamentals produced by the lowest percussion or a growling bass amplifier is much lower than that, and these tones are not present in the Venture Audio Encore. But what the Encores do have is a bass with a quality that is unmatched by any speaker that I've ever had in my listening room, so when listening without the Velodyne HGS-15b (which can produce a 15 Hz test tone 3 dB down from the flat frequency of the rest of its range) is more than "acceptable". Those who know me are aware that I hate using that word, as audiophiles it's our job to not accept acceptable. But really, unless I was listening to some real headbanging music (as I'm wont to do some evenings) the subwoofer wasn't only not necessary; it was a bit of a distraction because the quality of my sub's bass is nowhere near as accomplished as the Encore's. The "exceedingly tight and focused" bass that Venture Audio spoke of in their literature was hardly hyperbole. I was willing to live with the shortcoming of the Velodyne only because the lows that were present in some music were sorely missed without it. I think the majority of those who purchase the Encores depending on their music gravitation will not miss the lowest of the low frequencies mostly because of the high quality of the bass that the Encores *do* reproduce.

Bold Statement

The Venture Audio Encore is the best speaker I've ever had in my listening room. That isn't such a bold statement because this is the first time I've auditioned a speaker in my listening room with their type of pedigree. The Encores are expensive at \$47,000 per pair. They are also quite large. What may be frightening to some is that the Encores aren't anywhere near the largest nor most expensive speakers in Venture Audio's line. If one is in the market for a speaker in this price range, I hope one has made peace with all

the non-profit organizations in close range of one's sympathies, but even if they have, I'm hardly one to find fault with any audiophile who spends more on a piece of audio equipment than is "reasonable". And yes, I think these speakers are worth every penny. Why? Because they do so many things right and so few things wrong, and in effect are the perfect speaker for my listening habits and my associated gear and room. If they match your listening habits, your associated equipment and room (and your budget), I highly recommend the Venture Audio Encores.

Specifications

Type: Reference grade floorstanding speaker

Frequency Response: 30 Hz to 40 kHz

Drivers: One 1.5" Venture AGC dynamic tweeter

One 5" Venture CFC driver

Two 7" Venture AGC woofers

Sensitivity: 87dB/W/m

Impedance: 6 Ohms

Recommended Power: Up to 300 Watts (no clipping)

Break-In Time: Minimum 24 hours playing time

Crossover: Three-way first order crossover design

Weight: 132 lbs.

Dimensions: 44.1" x 12" x 15" (HxWxD)

Finishes: Mirror polish piano black or white, rosewood veneer, Makassar Ebony veneer

Price: \$47,000 per pair