

ENCORE, the best 300B amplifier for high end audio

If there is something close to perfection in audio amplifiers surely is very similar to the model “Encore” designed and manufactured by Kenji Mizushima. Perfection meaning of course reproduction of music sound as close as possible to the real or live sound.

The amplifier “Encore” is a 300B single ended amplifier using Tango Hirata XE20S vintage transformers, and Electro Harmonix 300B tubes, with General Electric 6CG7 and Sylvania 5814A tubes. Critical components inside the amplifier are top for high fidelity audio. I am using it with a pair of Altec Lansing A7-500 speakers, and FLAC music played through a HifiBerry high resolution DAC.

The sound of Encore is not “sweet” nor “warm” but “natural”. Many cheap tube amplifiers produce a kind of distortion that sweetens the real sound and many people indeed love this distorted sound. But sound of real music is not sweet but natural, that is, without the coloration and tonal distortion most amplifiers and speakers unavoidably add to the music once it is replayed from the digital or analog source.

With the amplifier “Encore” sound is so close to the real sound that every instrument is easily identified in the soundscape of the audio room provided by the Altec speakers.

Even inherently difficult to hear instruments within the background of the orchestra, like the harpsichord, appear with its own sonic presence in great recordings like the Bach harpsichord concertos by the Retrospect Ensemble with period instruments (Linn Records). In this outstanding Hi Res recording the equilibrium amongst the different instruments allows to follow each group during the beautiful interpretation. One of the characteristics of the violin family of instruments, mostly during allegros and fast tempo pieces, is a little raspiness when the arc attacks the chord that is proper to the character of the sound of these instruments. This raspiness may not be at all beautiful to listen so many recordings reduce it by sound processing and most amplifiers and speakers are not capable of the very hi fidelity need for reproduction of this sound. Not the case of “Encore” combined with the Altec speakers: everything that is in the recording appears in the sound brought to life by this spectacular amplifier, even the natural raspiness of the violin.

The tonal precision of “Encore” is spectacular. If you like double bass then the Diana Krall interpretation of “All Or Nothing At All” opens with an impressive duo of Diana Krall accompanied by acoustic double bass that is truly outstanding. In this song all the power and strength of the massive double bass sound comes to live with beauty and impressive presence but just “natural” like the real instrument without any exaggeration. The trio of piano, double bass and electro acoustic guitar that accompanies Diana Krall is toughly demanding for recording and reproduction, requiring superb processing during the whole chain of recording-reproduction because their frequency and tonal range overlap and this combined with the ups and downs of musical phrasing makes difficult to follow the individual instruments in the background of Diana Krall

interpretations. Here the natural sound of “Encore” just shines in itself with outstanding clarity that most resemble live music with these big Hi End speakers. It is like to be in the theatre with Diana Krall.

For bigger orchestra music “Encore” is as good and at home than with smaller groups. The outstanding interpretation of Mendelssohn Symphonies 1 & 3 by the NDR Radiophilharmonie Orchestra conducted by Andrew Manze (HiRes digital recording, Primephonic) comes to the soundstage of the room with plenty of orchestral presence thanks to the easiness that this great amplifier impregnates the recorded music. The high loud volume that “Encore” can produce without any distortion or stress to the music is truly impressive with these symphonies. In this recording what is most impressive is the unique interpretation the conductor gives to the music, is like symphonies played as chamber music, with a sense of delicacy to each passage and phrase that somehow and sometimes makes one to remember baroque music. All these exquisite nuances of the fine work of this orchestra under Andrew Manze conducting are brought to life by “Encore” is such a natural and easy way that one forgets the amplifier in the room and there is only the listener and the music in the fantastic audio experience of enjoying “Encore” at home.

This is probably the finest high fidelity sound a 300B single ended amplifier can provide.