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DECEMBER 2008

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FIFTH ELEMENT



Compact 7's woofer is too large to do complete justice to the midrange. However, what your incremental dollars buy you over the three-way, \$1090/pair Renaissance Audio MLP-403.5 that I wrote about in August 2008 is not only better industrial design and fit'n'finish, but a more coherent sound. And while the Renaissance's bigger woofer might give you more bass extension, the Compact 7's bass is faster and punchier.

Fried's Compact 7 is handsome and well made. Furthermore, when the right crossover is properly connected to the woofer and the tweeter, it has a very respectable sound that I can get enthusiastic about, though by no means *insanely* enthusiastic.

The obvious comparison is with Harbeth's HL-3PES-2, which costs only \$55 more per pair. It's a straightforward tradeoff of sonic quality for sonic quantity: The Harbeth nails the midrange and treble in a way the Fried does not, but the Fried produces a bigger sound, and does dynamics and bass better.²

If you were to splash out on an Arcam Solo Mini, the Fried Compact 7s, some speaker cables, and some tallish stands, then, for an outlay of about \$3500, you'd have an attractive system that should give lots of pleasure with minimal fuss. By "attractive," I mean a decisive step up in sound quality from a den/library/dorm room-type "second" system. But the search will continue!

That Time of Year

Which is my favorite of Shakespeare's sonnets, by the way.

² After writing this column, and at the risk of opening up another can of worms—and I sure don't want to do that—I swapped the Fried Compact 7s left to right and turned them upside down so that the tweeters were above the woofers. The result was pretty much a one-to-one tradeoff. The treble was now more prominent, but less well integrated with the midrange. If I had to live with these speakers forever, I'd probably want stands taller than 28", and I'd experiment more extensively with associated equipment and speaker cables.

Here are some gift suggestions. I've run out of space, so these assessments are brief, but every disc is a total knockout. Highest recommendations, all.

Morten Lauridsen's evergreen *O Magnum Mysterium* appears on two discs that are new to me. On *Mysterium* (CD, Sigillum LVCD 1), the Finnish group Lumen Valo takes a brave plunge, using only eight



singers. It is a sublime performance and a magnificent recording. This small group's otherworldly virtuosity brings unprecedented transparency to Lauridsen's neo-Renaissance writing. Time stands still. Heartbreakingly beautiful. Just buy it: www.lumenvalo.fi. *Grex Vocalis' Renaissance for Kor* (CD, Kiku FXCD 39) has been a desert-island disc of mine for at least 20 years, so you can imagine how jazzed I was to discover that Norway's hypertweaky (I mean that in a good way) label 2L had recorded the group singing *O Magnum Mysterium* (2L26SACD). Painfully beautiful. Again, just buy it: www.2L.no.

2L has released another stellar SACD/CD of vocal music, but from the opposite pole of the liturgical year: Lent and Holy Week. *Consortium Vocale Oslo's Exaudium Eum* (2L43SACD) may or may not be the best job of singing I have ever heard in a program of monophonic chant (though at the moment I can't think of a better one), but it is, beyond doubt, the best recording job. You can almost smell the incense. If you don't have it already, Gregorian Chant is a taste worth acquiring—or at least worth visiting, when the recording is this good. Gorgeous booklet and world-class liner notes. Miss it at your peril.

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