



The Might of



Don't be deceived! In photographs the EAT Forte looks trim and elegant. In reality it is an extremely heavy deck of king-size proportions. From a surprisingly young company – and with the blessing of an old master...

Titan

By Andreas Günther

Anyone who has a great burden to bear is generally regarded as a poor soul. Greek mythology includes a sorry tale in this regard. Atlas sided with the Titan Cronos – and it was the wrong side to pick. The winner of the war and ‘Father of the Gods’, Zeus, punished Atlas extremely harshly, not sending him like most of the other defeated Titans to Tartaros – which on the map of the Hellenic underworld was already way below Hades, itself not exactly cosy – but condemning him to prop up the sky on the western edge of the world. For eternity.

The fact that in our image of him today Atlas carries the Earth on his back is an interpretation developed much later for humanist grammar schools. This, however, does not alter the fact that we admire his strength. Anyone who has a great burden to carry, is also regarded as someone that can be relied on.

The EAT Forte has to carry a turntable weighing around 20 kilograms. An Atlas-esque task. When encountering this turntable for the first time, you are fascinated by its sheer size – which, however, has been wonderfully elegantly packaged and operates in equally elegant style. The brute force of its outer appearance is lost in the subtle play of proportions and simply superb finish. On the table in AUDIophile’s listening room the formidable dimensions were incidental. Only when changing the vinyl discs did burgeoning reverence for this Atlas of a deck again creep over the testers – on the outsize turntable platter (40 instead of 30 centimetres) complete with its 12-inch pick-up arm, an LP looks like a modest little 25-centimetre EP.

The first technical question that strikes you is: if the turntable platter weighs 20 kilograms, how is it able to rotate without wearing down the spindle? EAT solves the problem magnetically. Two repelling neodymium magnets reduce – and, if desired, even nullify – the platter’s load. The pressure between Teflon thrust plate and ceramic ball bearing can be fine-tuned and if you release two retaining screws, you could even make the turntable platter hover. Which says a lot about

the power of magnetism. But serves no great purpose. EAT ships the Forte with soft, but precisely pre-adjusted pressure on the bearing – based on experience from in-house listening sessions, which the AUDIophile team could well understand. The precision of the bass in particular well justified connecting the platter using just a few hundred grams.

Having mentioned the term ‘in-house’, it begs the question as to where the EAT is actually made. Well, the ‘Euro Audio Team’ is based in the Czech Republic. And surprise number one: it’s led by a woman. Surprise number two: Jozefína Lichtenegger has made the company famous, especially among valve enthusiasts – with fine valves and EAT valve dampers, which are proven miracle-workers when fitted around bulbs like a belt. But

how have they made the leap from vacuum valves to this mighty Forte, weighing 55 kilos in all? Implicit in this question are some minor prejudices: surely such a top-class player has to be a masterpiece of fine German engineering, an emissary of Swiss precision manufacturing or an example of Japanese obsession with detail? Not a bit of it! Jozefína Lichtenegger has at her disposal a high-tech production chain. The best example of this: the dual drive with its two motors in a stand-alone block – each accelerator getting its commands from a separate controller. The key benefit here is that the phase gets realigned by a set 18 degrees. This enables the drive to operate between poles without stopping. As a comparison, think of the way that one rower lifts his paddle out of the water, as the >





Axis mundi: how does the little ceramic ball withstand the force of the 20-kilogram turntable platter? Neodymium magnets reduce the load, making it 'feel' like just a few hundred grams.

Layer upon layer: EAT builds the platter as a sorbothane sandwich between two layers of aluminium. Plus a weighting ring in the outer section.

Legendary work from Japan: old master Osamu Ikeda gives EAT a touch of aristocratic class with a 12-inch pick-up arm – a highly polished IT 407, unique to this turntable, on a movable aluminium base isolated by sorbothane.

XXL: the rim reveals the true proportions – EAT extends the size of the turntable platter beyond that of an LP to 40 centimetres in diameter.





other puts his in: it creates non-stop forward thrust.

Here that's a non-stop driving force exerted on a mighty turntable platter. The pure, stored kinetic energy of which EAT has calculated to be 2,460 joules at 33 rpm – when it's turning, it does so with great might and with robust stability against any outside stress. No air pressure, no feedback, no impact noise. However, it's not just the pure mass that makes the difference, the mix of materials also demonstrates a clever approach. The platter is made up of a number of diffe-

rent aluminium/magnesium alloys. The lighter aluminium mix abuts the spindle, while the heavier is in the outer area. The platter is also designed as a sandwich, with a damping layer of sorbothane on the inside.

What we also don't see is that while the EAT Forte exhibits the palpable the design principle of a heavyweight turntable, its feet are also decoupled on a magnetically cushioned basis, creating a sub-chassis element. With a separate drive unit. Practical tip one: turntable and motor block must be evened up absolu-

tely identically, with a spirit level helping here to ensure long life and maintain excellent sound. Practical tip two: any adjustment (if you don't leave it to your no doubt assiduous hi-fi specialist) should never be done alone. Four hands are better than two – and they should also be strong ones, as the weight is considerable. EAT fill the chassis with metal shavings and sand – deliberately picking two materials with different resonance qualities, in directly comparable fashion to the dual aluminium alloy philosophy used for the turntable platter. Almost

Tips: Top record retailers

Nobody needs to go without: in every city with a population of over 100,000 there is a good, basic supply of records – with one top retailer every square kilometre. At least. That is confirmed by our reporters' own field research. We had nothing but good experiences (and found countless kilos of luxury vinyl, freshly pressed and authentically old) in these vinyl temples. Here is a selection of good retailers, spread across the map of Germany, who have extensive knowledge and a wide range:

10717 Berlin
Klassikschallplatten-Café Horenstein
 (Foto); Fechnerstr. 3
www.horenstein.de

20146 Hamburg
Plattenrille
 Grindelhof 29
www.plattenrille.de

34117 Kassel
Abbey Road
 Entenanger 8

47051 Duisburg
Die Schallplatte
 Sonnenwall 12

65183 Wiesbaden
Schallplatten-Antiquariat
 Mauergasse 15

70174 Stuttgart
 Second Hand Records
 Leuschnerstr. 3
www.secondhandrecords.de

80469 München
Schallplattenzentrale
 Fraunhoferstr. 26
www.schallplattenzentrale.de



Euro Audio Team

Forte

List price: €13,900

Guarantee period: 5 years

Dimensions WxHxD (cm): 71 x 24 x 44

Weight: 55.2kg

Finish:

Wood frame, MDF base with height-adjustable feet; Ikeda pick-up arm on request

Connections: 1 x RCA phono

EAT

Distributor

Audio Reference
 Alsterkrugchaussee 435
 22335 Hamburg

Tel.: 040 / 5332 0359

Internet: www.audio-reference.de

incidentally the developers fixed a mat made of vinyl on the top, while a weight supplied with the turntable also weighs down the label. All philosophy is heavy. Beautifully and perfectly made without question.

You almost want to say as in days of yore that this is the sort of turntable that developers dream of when encouraged by management to think freely without any preconditions. Something that Jozefina Lichtenegger readily admits. However, she is business-savvy enough to know that a good, courageous turntable on its own is no guarantee of making it to the pinnacle of the Mount Olympus of customer appreciation. While many potential customers do admire courage, they do not always show it themselves.

Very cleverly, Jozefina Lichtenegger therefore asked legendary past master Osamu Ikeda if he would create a pick-up arm especially for the Forte. Almost like going to the most holy of holies, as Ikeda once founded Fidelity Research and created the much admired FR 64 tone arm, only to then to turn his back on such worldly things. His fan community reacted to the disappearance of this demigod

with a mixture of understanding, admiration and sorrow. How Jozefina Lichtenegger did it will forever remain a mystery – but she managed to convince Ikeda, now over 80, to give the world a sign that his talent is still alive and kicking, which he did by creating a 12-inch, gimbal-bearing tone arm – a special version of the IT 407 in polished aluminium. A tone arm exclusive to EAT and

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Jozefina Lichtenegger
MD and founder of the Euro
Audio Team

Style to us means above all saying complicated things in a simple way. The Forte shows its style by combining its complex technology with classic design – and an extremely sophisticated sound.

the Forte. It's a sign. No question about that. The ultimate accolade from the old master for a young company. And the really exciting thing is that any design professor would maintain that this combination was always intended to be this way: the subtle grain of the wood (in our case Macassar), the outsize proportions here and there, the reflective varnish, the shiny arm, the tiny offset anti-skating weight and the conscious contrast between the angular substructure and the curves of the arm. In short: aesthetic poetry. When you see it, your eyes say "I want one" right away.

And your ears, too? With this Titan screaming that it belongs nowhere but on Mount Olympus, the expectations too are of mythical heights. The choice of most appropriate pick-up arm was based on this understanding. After a brief discussion, the AUDIophile team settled on the product of another past master – and using a van den Hul Frog system quickly found by listening to it that the Forte lives up to its own high billing. In our listening sessions you could feel the might of the pure weight. It is very impressive. With dynamic >

Providing united thrust: via a decoupled dual motor unit two belts at different heights relay power to the giant turntable platter. An external mains adapter feeds in 16 volts at the back.



AUDIOphile Profile

The strengths

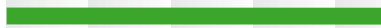
Maximum dynamics



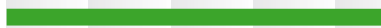
Full, firm bass



Lots of detail at every level



Strict neutrality



Gripping emotionality



Great feel-good factor



Breezily effortless nuances



Great flexibility

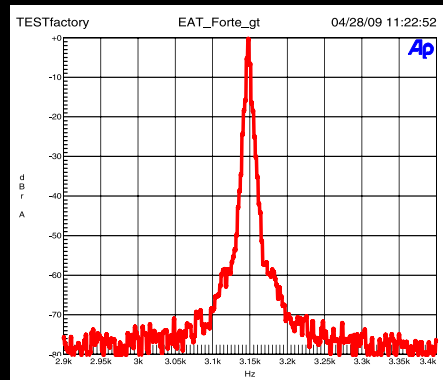


Modest footprint



Measurement 1

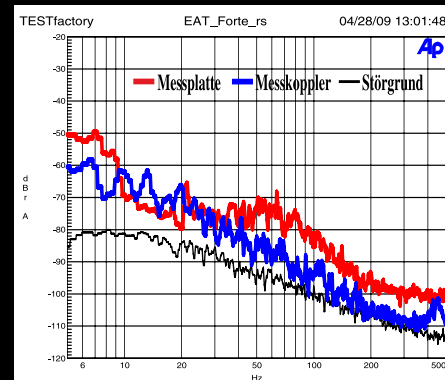
Synchronism



The more precisely a turntable keeps to the set speed, the less any dithering or, in the worst-case scenario, 'howling' disturbs your listening pleasure. The sharper and slimmer the measured curve and the less it has any 'shoulders' on left or right, the better the synchronisation. The conclusion in EAT's case: everything was wonderfully stable with extremely little disturbance.

Measurement 2

Rumble Spectrum

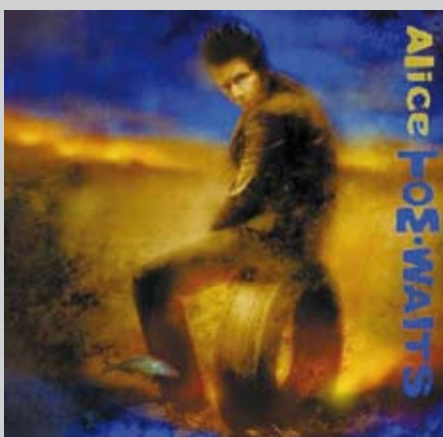


Rumble faults are effects that interfere with the sound from, for instance, the motor or rough bearings. The sensitive stylus picks up this low-frequency interference and the sound gets increasingly dull, accompanied in the worst-case scenario by a constant burr. Here too the EAT is absolutely outstanding, with its signal-to-noise ratios at the limit of what can be measured.

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Tips: Top discs

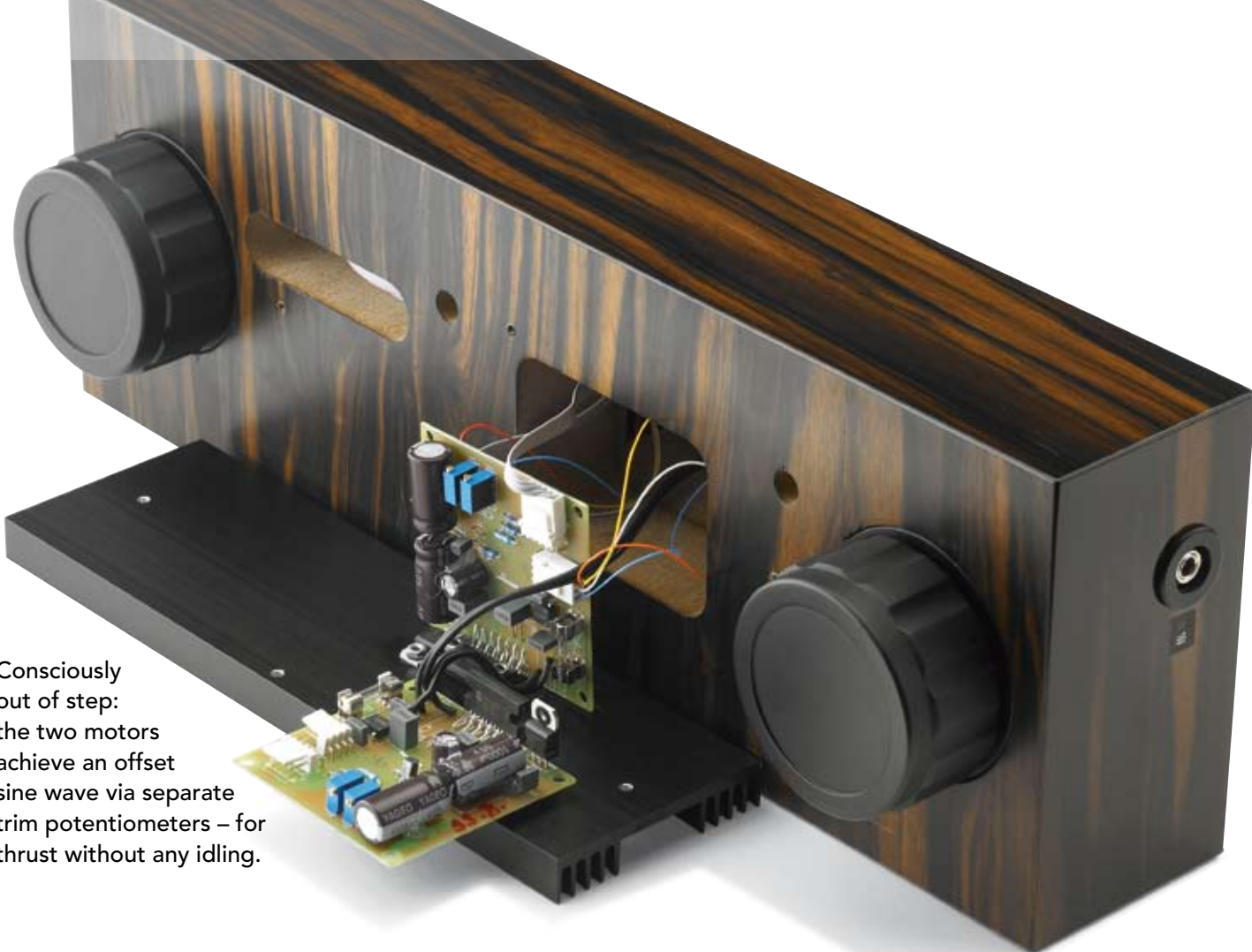
(1) Audio Vinyl Masters Vol 1: a 180-gramm double LP from first-class sources, such as Eterna master tapes. Other stars include Sting, Helen Schneider, Andreas Vollenweider – and the pros from the Optimal production house. (2) Alice – Tom Waits' interpretation of 'Alice in Wonderland' as a show in a small theatre with meagre, basic resources. Extremely direct (Anti/Indigo). (3) Brahms: Piano Concerto No. 1 – a legendary encounter between the strict conductor Georg Szell and pianist Clifford Curzon, a sensitive master of the finest dynamic levels (Decca / Speakers Corner). (4) Stravinsky: 'Ballet Music' sounds trivialising for the brute outbursts. Antal Dorati demands everything, especially in deep bass. Perfect 'Living Presence' sound (3 LPs, Speakers Corner).



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Consciously out of step: the two motors achieve an offset sine wave via separate trim potentiometers – for thrust without any idling.

thrust not being created under pressure, but completely effortlessly. Or to put it less philosophically: the Forte places every sound onto an ultra-stable bass foundation – world class!

What prevails via this basis is calm and wonderful order. During his best period, Herbert von Karajan dared with the Berlin Philharmonic to tackle the Bruckner symphonies. Until now we used to believe that the sound engineers for these early vinyl pressings by Deutsche Gramophon had mixed too many extra, let's say, 'showy effects' into the dynamism and acoustic breadth. However, the Forte taught our team in the listening room that it all depends on the coupling and control of this intoxicating sound. In this equation the Forte is that Atlas once again: muscular, highly aesthetic and also always free of any flab. Which makes it so boundlessly powerful for such big-format music. Acoustic feasts that even on turntables in the premium price bracket always sound a touch sedate get celebrated on the Forte in proper fashion.

The way that in Solti's legendary Deca 'Ring' the Forte resolves the separa-

tion of large orchestra and singers' stage is fantastically precise both in the reproduction and the dynamic sequences. With 'smaller' music this great might becomes more of a sporting element, with the Forte defining the intimacy and the room in which the recording was made via its bass power. On first reading that may sound look like a mistake: how can the deep bass be the defining dimension for a small event, a string quartet or a jazz combo? But it is and the Forte celebrates this in grand style: when the brief moment of inhalation alone already paints a physical image of the singer, or the soft touch of a low register key portrays the entire grand piano – that is great art.

The start of Brahms' Second Piano Concerto (DGG) is just such a magical moment. Two horns open the elegy in B flat major, while Emil Gilels also rips open the space – with a fine mezzo-piano run of the left hand. That is truly great art – which to date no medium has been able to reproduce so honestly, powerfully or supremely as vinyl on this large-format player. Finally, voice reproduction: Tom Waits naturally had his 'Alice' re-

corded not only on CD but pressed on vinyl as well (Anti/Indigo). It's a big show in a small auditorium. The Forte loves this timbre, this rawness and the very complex blend with the whisked away beats of the drum and the great thrust over and again. Titanic work. No Zeus would commit an artist like the Forte to service based purely on strength.



The writer
Andreas
Günther

What is the benchmark? For our writer it's the concert hall, the score and the information that lies behind the obvious. Andreas Günther studied at one of the great music colleges. Equipment is to him not a means of reproduction – top loudspeakers and fine electronics can be just as creative as the artists whose recordings they bring to life.