



Well Tempered Amadeus 254 GT

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Turntable design has always been open to new ideas, the variety of approaches to the apparently straightforward process of measuring modulations in a groove is quite extraordinary. And one of the more left field approaches is that taken by American designer Bill Firebaugh, creator of the Well Tempered turntable, a design that's been around since the eighties in one form or another. There are a number of factors that differentiate Well Tempered designs from virtually all others, the most obvious being the arm bearing. Rather than a ball race or spike in a cup the WT has a cup full of thick silicone fluid with the arm suspended above it such that the lower part is damped by the fluid. Today WT arms have a half golf ball shape in the goo and the arm is suspended on polyester filament from a small gantry that allows for adjustment of depth, it can also alter the azimuth, that is the angle of the cartridge in the groove when viewed from the end. VTA changes can be made by loosening a bolt in the side of the plinth and the long thin arm makes it fairly easy to see when its parallel with the platter.

The platter bearing is no less unusual as you will note if the turntable is picked up or knocked and the bearing makes a clonking sound. This is because it is a similar arrangement to the arm with a spindle in a box angled such that the tip of the spindle rests in one bottom corner and the top of it locates in the diagonally opposite top corner. In other words it is not fixed at all but arranged so that it remains in place when the platter is spinning. The top of the spindle is unusually long which makes it easier to put a record on whilst it's spinning. The drive comes from a 12V DC motor and uses another polyester thread (with a knot in it) to spin the acrylic platter, it is therefore a pretty low torque system that takes a while to get up to speed, but finding a new 'belt' is never likely to be a problem. Power is supplied by a separate box which provides speed switching and fine adjustment, it also has spare 12V and 24V outputs for future WT components, a phono stage is in the works.

The plinth consists of two slabs of aluminium and birch ply sandwich separated by squash balls, with motor, arm and bearing all fixed to the top slab. The result is quite a substantial and good looking turntable with a decent standard of build courtesy of Opera in China who also make the Consonance range of electronics and turntables. For a brief time an American company was building earlier Well Tempered designs but that operation went to the wall leaving the current incarnation to pick up the pieces.

The Symmetrex LTD arm is a spindly thing that's reminiscent of the Black Widow but is not a low mass design, its 10.5inch armtube is made of 'soft aluminium' and filled with sand for damping purposes. The headshell is very small and has open slots on either side meaning you can put one bolt in prior to installation of a cartridge. It doesn't appear to offer any means of adjusting tracking angle which is controversial to say the least, Firebaugh considers the second

harmonic distortion that misalignment produces to be a very minor issue, but in practise there's a screw underneath that lets you do this. Well Tempered don't encourage headshell adjustments however as getting it wrong can result in serious bass problems. It's worth mentioning that no tangentially mounted cartridge is in perfect alignment in more than two places on the vinyl, regardless of how it's set up. The arm connects to a pair of RCA sockets on the back panel, cabling from that point on is up to the customer, I used Townshend Fractal.

One of the traditional shortcomings of longer arms is that they can sound slow, which can also be described as stately or calm but does reflect a lack of pace. The Amadeus 245 could never be considered anything less than pacey, especially with a Dynavector DV-17DX cartridge in its grasp. I used the WT with both Rega Aura and Tom Evans Groove+ SRX MkII



phono stages and left the arm set up as per distributor John Burns recommendation with minimal damping; this can be changed by raising and lowering the arm in the goo. With the DV17DX cartridge it was immediately clear that timing is very strong, all it took were the first few notes of Bill Evans' 'My Precious Heart' (*Waltz for Debby*) for this to become clear. What also became quickly apparent was the subtlety of detail it can pick out, Evans is a nuanced player and on romantic tracks like this there is a lot going on that some turntables gloss over. Not this one, when the title track comes along the snap of stick on snare is palpable, giving the sense of tempo an extra kick and making the tune immediately engaging.

Lyrical intelligibility is also good, Esperanza Spalding's 'Ebony and Ivy' (*Emily's D+Evolution*) where she speaks at high tempo to the extent that you can't always tell what the words are, but here nearly all were intelligible which is unusual. The balance is on the light side, which helps the midband but leaves the bass a little lacking in welly. It works well with a lot of



music however, only when a recording is compressed or a little lean does this become less appealing. And if you are after the vibrancy of live music it's positively thrilling. The drums on Tom Waits' 'Underground' (*Swordfishtrombones*) are stomptastic and the guitar and trumpet nicely separated from the rest of the band.

It's also good and intense when the material demands it, I personally prefer a more relaxed presentation however so switched cartridge over to a Rega Aphelion. This is considerably lighter than the brass bodied DV-17DX and the twin counterweights on the arm had to be moved much closer to the pot of fluid. But the only other thing it required was dropping the arm base down to suit the shallower height of the cartridge and I was away. The Aphelion delivered a calmer and bigger picture with excellent speed and no glare from more forward sounding instruments, bass could be better extended but not a lot more articulate. Image focus is very strong with lead voices and instruments presented in solid stereo in the context of a wide but not always densely populated soundstage. Individual instruments and voices are precisely



presented but there isn't as much reverb behind them as there might be. Put on a bass heavy recording such as Burnt Friedman's *Just Landed* and you get powerful low end that is extremely dynamic, image scale with this was also magnificent and there is no sense of difficulty with tracking. Clearly the WT can cope with as much energy as the recording can muster and remain calm and collected whilst sending it to the outputs.

There are a lot of things to like about this turntable and arm combination, voices and instruments 'pop' out of the soundstage with uncanny realism and it's so nimble that the tune, rhythm and melody are always coherently presented. Despite all its quirks of design this is an easy turntable to live with and use, and more importantly it has the all important quality of musicality, it draws you into each song so that your troubles and cares fade away.

Type: Thread-drive turntable with external power supply and silicone bearing arm

Speeds: 33 1/3 RPM, 45 RPM.

Supplied Tonearm: Symmetrex LTD, 10.5-inch

Drive Mechanism: polyester thread driven from 12V DC motor with anti vibration circuit

Speed Control: electronic with fine control

Platter Type: 13-inch acrylic with foam mat

Platter Weight: 3.5kg

Bearing Type: Zero clearance Teflon

Plinth Configuration: Aluminium and ply sandwich with squash ball isolation

Analogue output: balanced and single ended

Dimensions (HxWxD): 195 x 480 x 412mm

Weight: 15.5kg