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EAT

B-Sharp *Turntable*

EUROPEAN AUDIO TEAM

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\$1,999 RRP / \$2,199 RRP with Ortofon 2M Blue MM Cartridge



“who'd have thought that here in the year 2017 that vinyl collecting and turntable production would still be going strong?”

Hands up, if like me, you're a compulsive op-shop trawler? Our target is used vinyl, ever hopeful that sifting through the endless Kahmal and Sir Hary Secombe albums, there will be the odd vinyl gem for 50 cents. Or better still, getting in early to a garage sale and being the first to sift through peoples vinyl collections. These can truly prove a goldmine for any serious collector.

So, who'd have thought that here in the year 2017 that vinyl collecting and turntable production would still be going strong? It seemed impossible when compact disc first arrived back in the early '80s, but survive it did and it's now enjoyed a healthy renaissance over the past decade.





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Equipment

With it has come a plethora of new turntable manufacturers, especially in Europe where the vinyl revival has been particularly strong. Project Audio Systems is one such manufacturer, founded in 1990 by Heinz Lichtenegger in the small Czech town of Litovel. The brand has gone on to become a world-renowned manufacturer of affordable turntables and vinyl-based audio products.

Then in the late 1990s a new company was formed by Heinz's wife, Jozefina Lichtenegger, called European Audio Team (E.A.T). It started out manufacturing high quality vacuum tubes and then came a range of turntables, tonearms and associated electronics. Whereas Project was all about affordability, EAT caters for a higher-end vinyl experience.

The B-Sharp turntable we have here is the company's entry-level vinyl spinner. Its design draws on many elements from the C-Major, next up in the range and E.A.T's former starting point. The B-Sharp comes supplied with or without cartridge, the latter option being an Ortofon 2M Blue, which was the case with our review sample.

One of the beauties of owning a turntable like this is setting it up correctly. It's a bit involved but a fun process and even if you're not familiar with turntable installation, the supplied instructions are wonderfully detailed and easy to follow.

Firstly, remove the transit screws, then pop on the sub-platter, drive belt, alloy platter, felt mat and record clamp. Next, the carbon fibre tonearm needs a bit of setting up, fitting the counterweight and anti-skating weight

and thread. The arm is highly adjustable and comes dialled in with the Ortofon 2M Blue factory fitted, but can be properly set up for different cartridges.

Danish needle gurus Ortofon have been a popular choice at the pointy end of tonearms for donkey's years. It's 2M series is the company's bread and butter moving magnet range with the Blue sitting in the middle. It uses a nude elliptical diamond on a removable stylus. This is a whole diamond bonded to the end of the cantilever, instead of a diamond tip on the end of a metal mounting, which is usually the case with cartridges at this level. It's high output (5.5mV) and ease of mounting, make it an ideal choice for a turntable such as the B-Sharp.

Out of the box I was up and spinning in about half an hour. There are a few more set up procedures to tackle if you're installing your own cartridge, such as the azimuth setting (cartridge angle) and a two-point cartridge alignment protractor is also supplied to help make sure that needle is properly tracking in the groove. Three adjustable and dampened feet make sure everything's on the level and there's even a small spirit level thrown in.

Like any self-respecting turntable design, speed control is a manual affair, which means popping off the platter and swapping the belt – the larger diameter of the motor pulley spins the platter at 45 rpm, the smaller, 33 rpm. And once you place your precious vinyl on the felt mat, an alloy metal record clamp screws onto the spindle and holds records firmly in place.

“You start to take in whole albums, track after track.”

Performance

I grabbed the first LP to hand, which just happened to be an op shop gem - a mint copy of **Tom Waits'** *Swordfishtrombones*. An inspired choice, it was immediately apparent from the first few chords of the opening track *Underground* that this was a turntable not to be trifled with. Waits' somewhat distinctive vocal hits you like a gravel and bourbon-laced freight train. Dim, the lights, fill the room full of smoke and you're there in some intimate subterranean music venue.

But this is a multi-talented turntable that also loves the classics; from a Tchaikovsky symphonic onslaught to the intimacy of a Brahms concerto. The B-Sharp combines a realistic sense of scale and weight with an open, sweet treble that allows individual instruments to soar. Many a turntable leans towards an overly warm and lush sound, but this E.A.T isn't one of them, instead it producing a realistic concert-hall sound with well-mastered classic music, thanks largely to its mix of detail and substance.

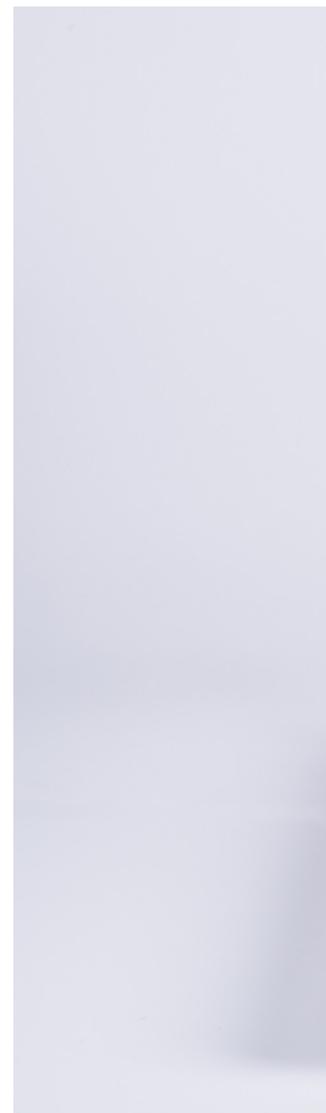
Sticking with classical, another personal favourite, **Listz's** *Piano Concerto No.1* shows just how well the B Sharp opens up this toughest of instrument. The deck nails it, with a natural timbre and superb clarity and transparency, which sit perfectly with both the solo instrumentals as well as the full-blown orchestral swings.

Sifting through the LP collection and moving musically along, it becomes clearer the more the B-Sharp hits the groove, the more its accurate tonal balance is evident. This turntable's timing is excellent; there's

ample bass extension, a strong midrange with smooth as you like highs. You start to take in whole albums, listening to track after track, such is its infectious and revealing musical nature. With more recent material such as **Vampire Weekend's** *Contra* or the **Foo Fighters'** *Concrete And Gold*, this combination of turntable and cartridge delivers the music with sparkle and cohesion, superbly so for the money.

With one final gem in the collection, it was with some reverence that I placed my original 1983 copy of the best-selling 12-inch single of all time, **New Order's** *Blue Monday*, on the platter. After I'd swapped the belt over for 45 rpm, of course. This record doesn't get played much by me - its sentimental value is absolutely priceless, as this was my musical era growing up in Manchester, north of England at the very time.

An iconic tune, in many ways and a classic pop song, this turntable combination does it full justice. It starts with that signature drilling bass drum sound which the B Sharp extracts with ample doof. Then you have Bernard Sumner's almost ashen and robotic vocal, trance-like in its delivery. Top it all off with Peter Hook's laid bare bass melody and there you have it - one of the world's best ever dance tunes and it's never sounded better played back here, on this turntable package, in its original form.





Conclusion

Long may vinyl thrive and it is turntables such as this that will only help our old analogue friend survive.

The B-Sharp is E.A.T.'s entry-level turntable and it's the real deal; meticulously designed, beautifully crafted and far from stupidly priced. It's largely thanks to our European cousins that we are still able to buy quality turntables and play freshly pressed 180-gram vinyl on them.

Anyone looking for a turntable sub-\$3000 has to put the B-Sharp on the top of one's list. It's a no-brainer.

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