

in silicone, which damps out vibration and keeps the arm centred. By twisting the filament loop, you apply antiskating force, all without resorting to the usual Rube Goldberg weights and pulleys.

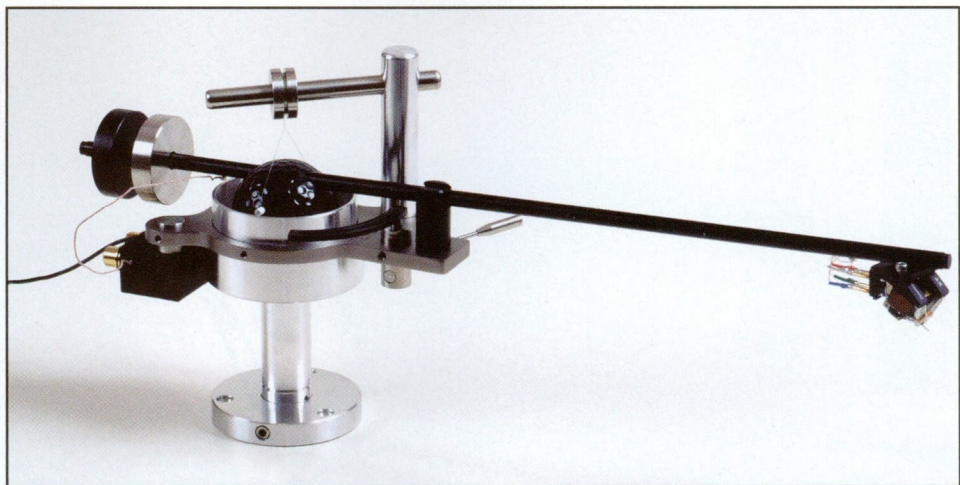
The plinth of the Versalex is made of a slab of Baltic plywood, with a decorative walnut veneer glued to the top. The rubber feet are hollow so they can absorb vibrations. There is an outboard power supply to run the single-speed motor — you select the desired platter speed by looping the monofilament drive thread around the appropriate pulley.

The LTD arm, which is also available separately, does not have its own output cable. Instead, it is fitted with a pair of good quality output jacks, into which you plug the interconnect cable of your choice. That adds to the cost, to be sure, but considering the mediocre cables supplied with all too many turntables, we can only applaud.

Now we come to the Achilles heel of the Versalex and especially the LTD tone arm. It would be difficult to assemble them properly even if the instructions were adequate, but they are not. The text is sketchy in the extreme, and the few illustrations are dark and murky. Even adjusting the stylus pressure is maddeningly difficult. Worse, with our Goldring Excel cartridge (the LTD arm is supplied without cartridge), we could not achieve exact lateral alignment. We were close, but we wished we had been right on (your experience with another cartridge may be different). We think you'll want to have a dealer whose dexterity you trust do the heavy lifting.

We listened to the Well Tempered in our Alpha system, comparing it to our Audiomeca J-1 turntable and SL-5 tone arm, equipped with the same Goldring Excel MC cartridge. Both were connected to the usual chain: a Bryston transformer, Copland CTA-305 tube preamplifier, Moon W-5LE amplifier and Living Voice Avatar speakers. We used the same Atlas Navigator All-Cu cable to connect our reference arm and the Well Tempered LTD.

We began the session with one of Reference Recordings' original LPs, *Holst* (RR-39), from which we selected the *March* from the *Suite No. 2*. This is lively, dynamic music, with percussion



that will challenge the entire playback chain.

We were off to a good start, with clean highs and midrange, and very good definition in the woodwinds. The bass drum was less powerful and the highs were more discreet, which might actually be a good thing. Rhythm was well maintained. "For me," said Toby, "it was easier to 'see' the orchestra in a 3D field. I kind of liked it."

We continued with a long-discontinued choral recording, *Laudate!* (Proprius 7800). This once famous recording has a magnificent image you could walk into, projecting a sense of space about as good as you can hope to hear from a mere electronic reproduction. It remained magnificent with the Well Tempered. The sound stage was huge, even larger than with our own table, with a hint of reverberation. The illusion of depth was palpable. Voices were gorgeous, with fully natural sibilance. The singers were well separated and easy to pick out. Steve especially admired the delicate soprano voices.

SUMMING IT UP...

Brand/model: Well Tempered Versalex turntable and LTD arm

Price: C\$4975

Size (WDH): 48 x 41.5 x 18.2 cm

Most liked: Superb clarity, spacious reproduction.

Least liked: Finicky adjustments, terrible instruction manual.

Verdict: Bill Firebaugh's magnum opus

Was there an occasional midrange roughness in some louder passages? Two of us noted it, and we wondered whether the small error in lateral alignment (whose magnitude of course varies over the radius of the record) might be to blame. We must emphasize, however, that it *was* minor, and that the recording was entirely enjoyable.

We had two female voices we wanted to hear, and the first was going to be a challenge. Thelma Houston's *I've Got the Music in Me* is the title song from one of Sheffield's original direct-cut LPs, numbered LAB-2. The grooves on this recording are huge, and it sounds astonishingly realistic...if, that is, everything is working well.

On the evidence it was. Houston's powerful clarion-like voice emerged from our Living Voice speakers with a force that pushed us back into our chairs. Yet the voices and orchestra were clear, not merely loud. The energy of the song filled the room. "There are buckets of excitement!" enthused Steve. "Super duper," he added. The piano and the backup singers sounded clear and strong. Toby praised the percussion and the bass guitar.

Had we expected less? Can you really get this sort of performance from a tone arm made from a golf ball and fishing line? Yes you can — we had just confirmed it. We were at once surprised and impressed.

The other female voice we had on hand was that of country singer Dolly Parton. We listened to *Here You Come Again* from the album of the same name (RCA APL1-2544). Though Dolly's voice is very different from Thelma