

APERTURA AUDIO FORTE

Review by Hifi i Muzyka—Poland



English version

<https://www.hi-fi.com.pl/testy/kolumny/apertura-forte/>



Christian Yvon and Eric Poyer have been active in the Hi-Fi industry for more than 40 years. The former has worked with Goldmund, Sonus Faber and Focal, among others, while the latter is also a respected engineer. Together, they founded Stentor, a manufacturer of loudspeaker units under the Apertura brand.

The company is based near Nantes, west part of France and its designs are filled with proprietary solutions. Despite of this, it does not dazzle with technical terminology or mysterious acronyms. The range includes a monitor and seven floor stands. They have not been assigned to a series, but it can nevertheless be divided into two parts, which mounts either a ring tweeter or a ribbon. Forte is the largest model with a ring radiator.

Construction

The company materials state that Forte speaker is a lifesaver for weak amplifiers (mainly tube ones) but also solid-state Class A. They are supposed to need a dozen watts only, with sensitivity of 93 likely. The manufacturer recommends this model for room of 25-30 m² and then suggests leaving at least half a meter from the rear wall. Such a set of features is rare and when we add to it a reasonable price, it turns out that the French manufacturers have few competitions in this niche segment.

Forte are quite large floor standers. They stand at 115 cm with spikes and fronts are wider than most contemporary speakers. The shape remains characteristic of Apertura: fronts are bent inwards and sides are rounded while the narrow rear is mounted at a slant. The irregularity and lack of parallel surfaces reduce the risk of standing waves. Resonance is prevented by internal reinforcements, recesses and panels, dividing the interior into zones in which different damping materials are located. The walls are made of compression-moulded sandwich panels. Their thickness varies from place to place, but does not fall under 25 mm. Unwanted vibrations are reduced by yet another solution: mechanical earthing in the form of the thickest spike in the very centre of the column bottom.

Figuratively speaking, we could say that it acts as a lightning conductor to dissipate vibrations to the ground. The columns rest mainly on it and the others are merely supports to prevent boxes from tipping over. When setting up the Forte, it is essential to remember to level all the spikes as carefully as possible; this will ensure that the greatest weight precisely stays on the invisible central steel cone. The solution is supposedly the result of many years of experimentation, so the user should also try.

Ring tweeter

A wide bass-reflex tunnel outlet blows at the rear; below this, we find a pair of convenient terminals.

Good vibrations come from a trio of transducers symmetrically combined on the front panel. The 18-cm low-midrange drivers have reed fibre-reinforced paper diaphragms. Baskets are aluminium casted with narrow shoulders and the drive is provided by magnets not much smaller than the diaphragms. The manufacturer emphasises that long coils can operate with a large excursion and the entire system maintains linearity over a wide excursion range. The annular tweeter uses a double neodymium magnet. It must be very strong, as it is the size of standard ferrite discs. The crescent next to the tweeter doesn't hide anything - it's a piece of felt, presumably to dampen the first wave reflections.

The crossover divides the bandwidth at 3.1 kHz. It is assembled on a board with thick paths, using Jentzen components: coils wound with solid wire and polypropylene capacitors. The internal connections were realised with 2.5-mm oxygen-free copper stranding. Forte is available in three finishes: Piano Black and White, Satin Walnut Veneer.



System configuration

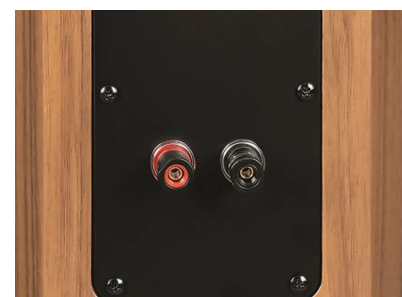
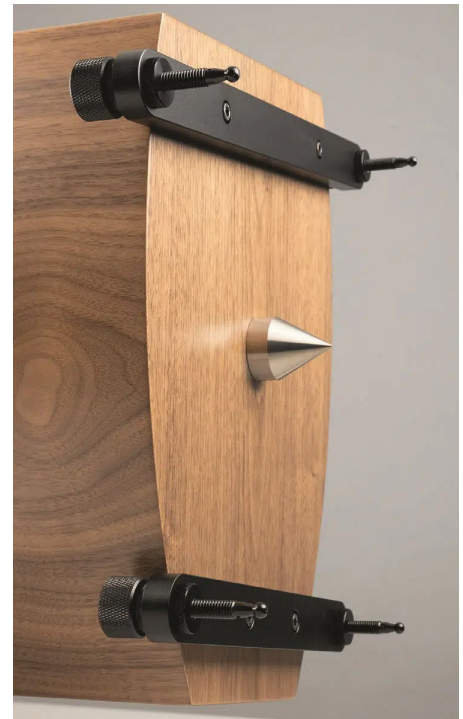
I have used the editorial McIntosh MA12000 for the test. I did not have a weak tube at my disposal; then, I managed to meet the recommendation for the size of the listening room. Perhaps to the point, but 25 m² turned out to be a friendly environment for the Apertura. Records were played by a C.E.C. CD5, and the signal was transmitted by Hijiri cabling (HCI/HCS). The current was filtered by an Ansa Power Tower. Electronics stood on the Base Audio 6 furniture, and the 'grounding' spikes rested on 3 cm thick stone slabs.

Listening experience

Thanks to the high efficiency, we get up to high volume levels much faster. I do not usually exceed 50-55 on the MA12000 scale. Forte reaches fortissimo already at 45-46, and 55 is already a guaranteed police intervention(!), even though I have really tolerant neighbours. Such loudspeakers will ensure that a 15-watt tube is comfortable.

The sound has been also tailored with this in mind. It is good I was informed of this at the outset, otherwise, I would have started to complain about certain aspects, which, as it turns out, were consciously designed.

The basis of the sound is built by a strong, slightly pushed, though not bloated bass. It remains collected and precise for a bass-reflex enclosure. It does not go to the very edge of the bandwidth but is characterised by evenness and differentiated timbre. It does not drag the sound and can show a springy inflection. And what kind of bass do we get from a weak tube? Rather light and slowed down, with loosened control. Even if stronger, it is certainly not held in check. One that adds softness to Forte and gently slows it down. In this way, the qualities of amplifier and loudspeakers will complement each other instead of overlapping. Without the tube, the bottom end of the Apertura is also good, as it is clear but not too hard. It retains energy and pace. There is certainly enough power, and depth is replaced by timbre and nuance readability.



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I was a little worried about the treble, as the ribbon is supposed to improve it. Meanwhile, it turns out this is not necessarily the case, as Forte has probably even more interesting treble than Armonia. Those are maybe more refined, but these are more powerful and present information more clearly. They also give the feeling of being faster, reminiscent of the JBL compression drivers in the successful HDI series. They provide a sense of precision, keeping pace, but also a punchy attack. The sound is varied and doesn't betray a tendency towards uniformity which is where it proves superior to the JBL tubes. When signals are layered, we are able to separate them from each other without any problems. Legibility is not accompanied by coldness. Nor is it spoiled by unpleasant clatter and hiss. Instead of softening, we get literalness and directness, projection straight into the ear. All right, but where's the so-called atmosphere? What do you mean where? In the triodes and EL84s.

The midrange looks like a place in a jigsaw puzzle into which the tube's spell will perfectly fit. It is as transparent as the treble, but slightly receding and with a neutral, room-temperature timbre. Not even a trace of warming is to be found, and if a chill, it is one that does not require a jumper to be put on, refreshing and pleasant. Ready to be warmed by the warmth of glass bubbles.



These love detail and legibility, and there is certainly no shortage of these here. With the transistor, the sound remains healthy, unadorned, bright, but without perceptible intervention. I didn't happen to have the Notte Sound Labs split amp at hand. Its density and colour saturation combined with the neutral acuity of Forte could create a synergy.



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The French speakers build quite a good space. There will be monitors at this price offering a bigger and more evocative stage, like the Eggleston Works Nico. Among floor standers, Gradient comes to mind, but Forte seem more versatile and will expose the foreground better when they get the right signal, which is again: from a triode or EL84.

If you got the feeling that between the lines of this description I am trying to smuggle information about playing soulless, mechanical or drained of emotions, you are wrong. In spite of their theoretical absence in building timbre, Forte system turns out to be very listenable and can provide genuine pleasure of listening to music. Do not underestimate correctness, because this is where all starts.

Without it, we enter a slippery slope and what seems to be an attraction at first may quickly turn out to be a trap. Our ears choose the truth, and Forte are close to it, probably closer than any other Apertura speakers I have encountered.

This means they can be paired with any cooker, including a transparent transistor, and nothing bad will happen. Anyway, a symphony orchestra will tell you everything. Granted, it might use more meatiness in the midrange, but the sound of the instruments is convincing.

Conclusion

I love it when things are so straightforward! The manufacturer has got it spot on. He perfectly knows who he is targeting with his offer, the set-up and the venue conditions. It's so clear to see that he really understands the needs of his audience and knows just how to meet them. This is what we call professionalism!

The complete review can be read here:

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