

Wilson Audio WATT Puppy Renaissance d'une icône

Magico S5 2024

Un millésime majeur

Trio d'étoiles

3 cellules d'exception

CH Precision

L'art de la bi-amplification

Rekkord M600

German vinyl

Heed Asterisk

Le minimum vital



CELLULES

TRIO OF STARS

par Vincent Guillemin

Initially intended to showcase an Etsuro Urushi cartridge, this review gradually became a true comparison, in which three ultimate cartridges each bring their own unique characteristics to analog music. While some still believe that the higher up the range, the less choice one has to make regarding the desired sound style, this "review" in the truest sense of the word demonstrates the opposite. With a trio of the world's best moving-coil cartridges, we were able to redefine to the highest levels the characteristics sought by the creators of Etsuro Urushi, My Sonic Lab, and Soundsmith, in an attempt to explain to you, as precisely as possible, the musical components inherent in each vision.

Before getting into the heart of the matter and sharing our different listening experiences with you, let's first look at the technical characteristics of the three jewels in question.

SOUNDSMITH HYPERION MKII-MR

The only American cartridge against two Japanese cartridges (we even almost added a third with the Phasemation PP-5000), the Soundsmith Hyperion MKII-MR is the star cartridge of the brand created by Peter Ledermann in Peekskill, 50 km from New York. Handcrafted by the creator himself, it weighs 12.25 g and is distinguished by a spine cantilever.



MY SONIC LAB SIGNATURE PLATINUM DIAMOND

ORIGIN

Japan

PRICE

15 000 €

WEIGHT

13 g

OUTPUT VOLTAGE

0,5 mV/1 kHz

IMPEDANCE

<1,4 ohm/1 kHz

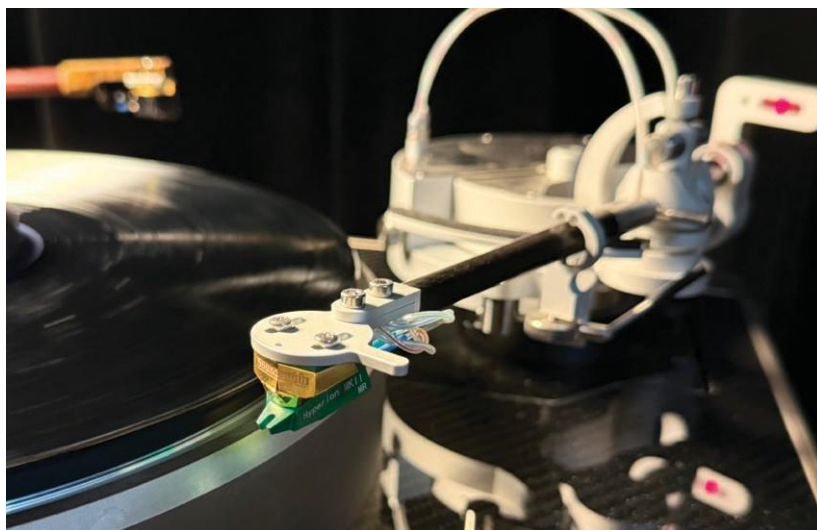
SUPPORT FORCE

1,9 g - 2,2 g

RECOMMENDED IMPEDANCE

100-800 ohms (ideall : 400 ohms)





cactus (you read that right!), introduced on the first Hyperion and chosen for its extreme rigidity, as well as its perfect lightness. The coil technology is new because if the cartridge remains in the Moving Coil (MC) category, here with a recommended impedance of 470 ohms to be set on the phono preamp, it actually uses a fixed coil with a moving iron around it, resulting in an ultra-light moving mass. The bend radius is based on an optimized contour contact line, and the stylus is made of 0.08mm Microline diamond. Priced at €11,900 in Europe, the most optimal of the current SoundSmiths remains the cheapest of the three competitors tested in this comparison, but is undoubtedly in the same category as the other two.

MY SONIC LAB SIGNATURE PLATINUM DIAMOND

Almost exclusively available worldwide at the French retailer Ana-MightySound, the Signature Platinum Diamond cartridge is an even superior version of the Signature Platinum. So exclusive that it is still not on the brand's website or the retailer's website at the time of our tests. This cartridge is even bigger than the Signature Platinum (€7,600), in particular because of its price twice as high (€15,000), but above all because of its even more optimal technologies. Created in 2003 by Yoshio Matsudaira (a high-fidelity engineer since 1959), the Japanese brand My Sonic Lab continues to innovate to present its best cartridge ever created.



SOUNDSMITH HYPERION MKII-MR

ORIGIN

USA

PRICE

10 950 €

TYPE

Voice Coil (MC)

WEIGHT

12,2 g

REQUENCY RESPONSE

20 Hz - 20 kHz \pm 1 dB

OUTPUT VOLTAGE

>0,4 mV

OUTPUT BALANCE

<0,5 dB/1 kHz

CHANNEL SEPARATION

>36 dB/1 kHz

TRACKING FORCE

1,8 g - 2,2 g

IMPEDANCE

10 ohms

COMPLIANCE

10 μ m/mN

RECOMMENDED IMPEDANCE

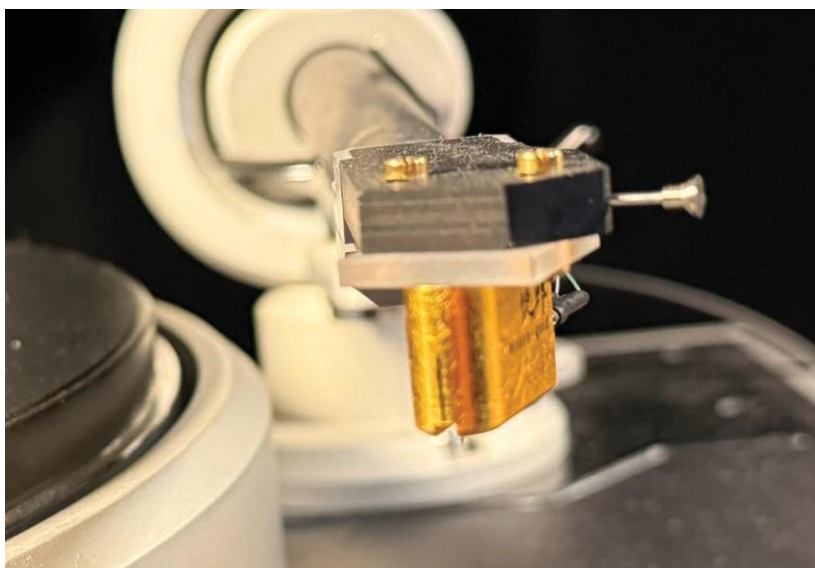
\geq 470 ohms



In a black ionic titanium body (SH- μ X internal material, #50 neodyne magnet), the Signature Platinum Diamond retains a semi-linear contact stylus present on the classic version, but on a cantilever with a conical tube (a very important innovation!) in hollow diamond, of absolute rigidity and lightness. The magnetic circuit is also further improved to achieve an internal impedance close to 1 ohm (the Signature Platinum is already just 1.4 ohms, while the few competing square-supported cells with an output voltage around 0.5 mV normally run at more than 4 ohms). Even if we don't compare it in this review to the classic version, we were able to listen to both during a preselection, and if the Platinum Signature already goes very far in both precision and musical realism, the Diamond puts all the elements on an even higher level.

ETSURO URUSHI GOLD

A partner of Excel Sound (known in particular for Hana) to develop his own brand, Dai-Ichi Shoji created Etsuro Urushi in 2016 as a tribute to the history of Japan, Urushi being a precious Japanese lacquer created from the sap of a tree, made by the manufacturer Urushi Sakamoto. On an A7075 duralmine body, a layer of Urushi, cobalt or burgundy for the manufacturer's first two cells is covered by hand, and a 24K gold leaf finish applied like a lacquer by the Hon Kin-paku technique for the Gold cartridge. The Stylus



FICHE TECHNIQUE	
ETSURO URUSHI GOLD	
ORIGIN	Japan
PRIX	15 000 €
TYPE	Voice Coil (MC)
WEIGHT	8,7 g
REQUENCY RESPONSE	10 Hz - 50 kHz
OUTPUT VOLTAGE	0,3 mV/1 kHz
OUTPUT BALANCE	<0,3 dB/1 kHz
CHANNEL SEPARATION	33 dB/1 kHz
SUPPORT FORCE	2 g
IMPEDANCE	4 ohms/1 kHz
TRACEABILITY	>70 μ m/2 gr



TRIO OF STARS

Microline also has a contact surface of only 0.08 mm (80 µm), placed on a 0.22 mm diamond cantilever. The magnetic circuit uses a combination of soft iron and samarium cobalt on a 2.5 mm sapphire base on a cross-coil support. With an internal impedance of 4 ohms, it offers an ultra-low output voltage of 0.3 mV (at 1 kHz) and weighs only 8.7 g; it is positioned like the previous one at €15,000.

THE INSTALLATION

During three phases of tests on various electronics (Boulder, Phasemation, Thrax) and with Thrax, Stenheim and Goldmund belts, we were able to study the behavior of the cartridges first separately, on several arms but always on a Döhmman turntable. With François Saint-Gérard from AnaMightySound, the choice of tonearms finally led us to validate the 12" Reed 5T (€17,160) for the Soundsmith cartridge, the 12" Schröder Die Referenz SQ (€8,450) for the My Sonic Lab and a 9" SAT LM (€33,000) for the Etsuro Urushi.

Once the three cartridges were screwed to the tonearm most in tune with each one, we were able to compare them in turn on more than fifteen vinyls, old pressings on Decca, Columbia or Teldec curves as well as recent ones on RIAA curves, alternating 33 and 45 rpm, audiophile and more conventional mastering (always of high quality) as well as some monophonic vinyls.

THE SOUND

As we mentioned in the introduction, we might think that at such a level of range, a cartridge must sound perfectly neutral and not bring any typicality to the music, responding to both dynamics and timbres. But the world is a land

And if in a lower budget you must first seek to gain in precision, better timbre quality and less surface noise, with three wonders like these, all these components are basics, pushed to remarkable levels. On the other hand, once outdated and even surpassed, these elements considered intrinsic to such ultimate products do not prevent us from noting characteristics specific to each model and each brand, rediscovered here at their most extreme level.

To start the first test, we first used the new Lieder album by soprano Fatma Saïd (Warner Music), and delicately placed the Hyperion MkII-MR, to find on Schubert's "Ständchen" an extremely balanced and flawlessly precise rendering. Etsuro Urushi seeks more substance and provides more breathing, resulting in an increase in the presence of the voice. The My Sonic Lab is finally positioned on a mid-range sound, with very natural timbres close to those of the Etsuro, but more sharpness in the extremes and a precision in the treble more similar to that of the Hyperion MkII-MR.

With the rapper Channel Tres, the Platinum Diamond Signature perfectly holds all the registers and particularly highlights all the electronic sounds around the singer, placed in the middle of the sound image. The Etsuro Gold feels like it's going back to a more analog sound and further separates the sound exchanges between the left and right speakers. But the dynamic, marvellous as one had already heard on the piano during a past listening (Chopin: Preludes; Pollini DG), is almost too important here and the shimmering midrange corresponds less to the rapper's "Camp-ton" style. The Soundsmith is fully in line with the

M



/ TEST

This "dirty" side of the sound, much more percussive and with much more marked bass, which make it the best reference for this music.

With the Dire Straits live, the sax is clearly visible in front of us by keeping the Hyperion to start, and the bass particularly magnificent, but we manage to add nuance on the voice and an even greater room atmosphere with the Etsuro, which however, by its naturalness, loses a little of the power of the guitar, more detailed just before. Here again, the My Sonic Lab cartridge is in the center, with a better overall balance, a beautiful material and color, but above all it brings a swing that we felt less with the other two.

On Bill Evans, the same Signature Platinum Diamond, visibly in perfect harmony with the Schröder arm on which it is firmly integrated, deploys a splendid light on the midrange, to gently envelop the pianist exactly as if he were in front of us. Note that on this second test, we went from a Boulder 1108 phono preamp to a Thrax Orpheus, without really impacting the sound of the Soundsmith, while it clearly enriched and purified the other two cartridges. The American seems to us here a little too clear to totally free the music of the jazzman, who we think is coming back on stage in front of us with the Etsuro, in a more marked focus on the mids.

With Bruckner's Symphony No. 7 by Bernard Haitink in Berlin (we were in the hall for this last concert with the orchestra), we immediately identify the acoustics of the Berlin Philharmonic thanks to the hallucinatory realism of the Etsuro Urushi, as if we had returned to the floor. The mass effects and the movements of the conductor seem to be visible at the

every measure. These sensations are maintained on the My Sonic Lab, but in a less lively approach. The bass stands out again more on the Soundsmith, superbly held in the attacks, while the sharpness makes us gain in clarity on each group of instruments. The presentation of the forms is exemplary, perhaps just slightly too precise, as if the Berliner Philharmoniker had become the New York Philharmonic.

OUR CONCLUSION

These many hours of comparative listening were fascinating, above all able to show us how far each vinyl cartridge manufacturer had managed to go. Since our own tastes make us listen mainly to classical music, and on vinyl mainly jazz, we would tend to favor Etsuro Urushi Gold if we had to keep only one. But on many tracks, this one was less ideal than the other two, since rap or electro fully benefit from the Soundsmith Hyperion MkII-MR, and rock and sometimes also jazz or variety come out ideally balanced with the My Sonic Lab Signature Platinum Diamond.

Finally, the best advice we can give when listening to these three exceptional cartridges, if you have a substantial budget to invest in an analog system and eclectic musical tastes, is to choose a turntable on which you can mount at least two tonearms, or even two turntables, in order to always validate the ideal arm-cell pairs according to the musical styles and the mood in which you will be at the time of listening. This is also what is fascinating about high-fidelity: knowing that you will always be able to discover even more impressive and even more fascinating to listen to your favorite tracks, with a different result depending on the system! ■