

HP's
the absolute sound
GOLDEN EAR
AWARDS 2009

cartridge (1.8 ohms) and the reduction of the amount of coil wire in his design provide that breakthrough low-level resolution. (High impedance, he believes, blocks the flow of the electrical signal.) A not unintended benefit of the design is a relatively high output 0.5mV at 1kHz. The magnet itself is a neodymium

50. Of course, we experimented and did some things our way, including selected an impedance load of 47k Ohm in the Zanden 1200 phonostage, instead of the 400-ohm load the designer recommends. Matsudaira suggests a tracking pressure between 1.9 and 2.2 grams. We tried pressures up to 2.5 grams with no

VPI Classic Turntable System

What has Harry Weisfeld been up to of late? Well, he is up to the creation of yet another new turntable. This time, with a vengeance. He has created a turntable he calls The Classic, one that, in my opinion, exceeds the performance of his Scoutmaster series—yes, even the recent rim-drive update version—and breaks new sonic ground. And, all this, at a breathtakingly low price, some \$5000 or so below the cost of the best SuperScoutmaster.

That new ground is the result of his continuing analyses of the best designs of yesteryear, dating back to the dawning days of the stereo age. He used eBay to acquire some of the 'tables, then took them apart to find what makes the best features of their world turn. (Their number, by the way, includes several vintage Empires, which he thinks one of the best buys on the used market.)

The Classic costs \$2500 with the JMW 10.5i pickup arm and \$200 more with his new stainless-steel arm tube. And he is now, for the first time, using a 600-rpm motor as opposed to the 300-rpm versions he has always relied upon before. Sounds better that way, he says. No added cost. But if it's extras you want, you can purchase for \$900 his VTA Tower Hat allows you to adjust the cartridges' vertical tracking angle as the disc is playing. Another thousand will get you the SDS speed control unit, which he says is not essential since the speed control on the Classic is superior to any of his previous designs. But you will hear a small improvement, says he, if you have the SDS. The version we used had all these doodads, with the stainless-steel arm coming in at the last minute. It added a bit of mass that brought out the best in the Hyper Eminent cartridge, and flattened out its audible response. I did compare it with the standard arm, and it was no contest.

What I particularly liked about the 'table, aside from its excellent immunity from feedback, was its character, or rather its lack of an easily identifiable one. Instead of the sound of the older VPI tables, a dark (yin) character, we now have something approaching the completely neutral. I haven't yet been able to put my finger on its specific character, that is, if it has any. But it has allowed a kind of freedom in the sound of LPs being

ill effects, indeed, with seemingly deeper extension and a more natural sound below 30Hz. As I said at the beginning of this evaluation, if there is a better moving coil on the market, I have yet to hear it. But I do understand that Matsudaira has designed the Air Tight line of cartridges, imported by Axis Audio and Arturo Manzano, and, over the years has authored many another moving coil, including some of the earliest Koetsus.

Price: \$6000 (the price may vary depending on where you are). yamasinc.com



played back on it, one that closely resembles one aspect of the Clearaudio Statement.

Weisfeld's notes about the 'table reveal much more. He was aiming for a totally rigid system and writes: "Back in the old days, the Linn and the AR made the arm and platter a rigid system, but left the motor—the third part of the puzzle—in limbo." They settled for a variety of isolation devices which "added random motion to the drive system." Instead, his Classic has motor, platter, and pickup arm on the same wooden chassis, "mass damped by two separate pieces of metal, but all mechanically and electrically grounded together. Noise can be further lowered if you use the SDS power supply." [It doesn't come with the package.] "Then I made the belt as short as possible...the shorter the belt the faster and cleaner the table sounds."

And one more thing: He used in the drive shaft "an inverted bearing which has zero teeter-totter effects." He's used this before, but not at the level of sophistication here. He says: "On most 'tables the bearing assembly has the shaft coming down from the platter into a well, and the ball is below. On the Classic, the well is inverted and placed in the platter, the shaft is rigidly mounted to the chassis and the platter simply spins on the ball and Teflon thrust disc—the belt is pulling the platter through the center of the bearing, therefore no teeter-totter effect."

As I said at the outset, I think this is Weisfeld's best (meaning least) sounding design. It does not have a magnetic drive nor magnetic bearings, but in direct comparison with the fabulous Clearaudio Statement, it holds its own, despite the occasional noises all non-magnetic drive 'tables suffer from. If ever there were a best buy in 'tables, this is it.

Price: \$2700-\$4600. vpiindustries.com