



Michael Fremer Feb 13, 2025 | **Analog Corner**



Miyajima Labs Madake moving-coil cartridge

Cartridge cantilevers can be made of aluminum, ruby, boron, even diamond. In fact, Robin Wyatt of Robyatt Audio, US importer of Miyajima Laboratory products (footnote 2), once showed me a Sony cartridge featuring a one-piece cantilever-stylus of diamond. Break it and you break the bank. Soundsmith's Hyperion moving-iron cartridge sports a cantilever of cactus needle, which combines superior stiffness and excellent damping properties.

Miyajima Laboratory's Madake moving-coil cartridge (\$5895) boasts yet another exotic cantilever design, this one of bamboo—a particular kind of bamboo said to grow only on the mountains surrounding Kyoto, Japan (*madake* is Japanese for *bamboo*). Bamboo is lightweight, but exceedingly stiff and inherently well-damped. The cantilever is not 100% bamboo; it combines a bamboo shaft fitted with a short aluminum shaft, to which is affixed a Shibata stylus. For all intents and purposes, the Madake is a



Miyajima Kansui fitted with a mostly bamboo cantilever. (I favorably reviewed the Kansui, which costs \$3600, in the November 2011 issue.)

Like the Kansui and all Miyajima cartridges, the Madake has the company's unique cross-ring motor, which centers the fulcrum within the coil former. Also like other Miyajimas, the Madake's generator is housed in a curvaceous body of African Blackwood, through which pass long brass bolts, secured to the headshell with brass nuts. You could say that it takes brass nuts to market a cartridge with a cactus or bamboo cantilever, but the proof is in the listening.

Again like the Kansui, the Madake has a mass of 9.7gm, an output voltage of 0.23mV, and a low compliance of 9×10^{-6} cm/dyne. Its severe, detail-grabbing Shibata stylus is best tracked at 2.5gm, or 0.5gm less than the Miyajima Shilabe (\$2995). The Shibata demands a stylus rake angle (SRA) of precisely 92°—or, if you don't use a digital microscope, whatever your ears prefer.

Like all Miyajima cartridges, the Madake's internal impedance is 16 ohms; a good starting point for loading is 10 times the internal impedance, in this case around 160 ohms. Since the 16-turn Ypsilon MC16 step-up transformer presents a 200 ohm load with no loading plugs inserted in its primary or secondary loading sockets, that's how I initially ran the Madake.

Much as I love the rich sound of these Miyajima cartridges, and understand why they're so popular, their sonic signatures—a uniquely understated but not-dull top end and a meaty midrange—make them, in my opinion, ill suited for a reviewer's system, which I feel should more closely approach neutrality.

The miraculous Madake was something else entirely—it took but a few minutes for me to realize that, for whatever reason or reasons, the Madake is not your father's Shilabe. It was a much faster performer that manages to considerably extend the top end without making it sound thin or bright, as the indictment reads against many more extended-sounding cartridges, while at the same time it somewhat reins in the midrange riches that make the Shilabe sound so attractive to some but pleasingly colored to others. The Madake nips and tucks some of the Shilabe's lower-midband-to-midband meatiness and transplants it to the fast, extended upper octaves. The result is the most neutral-sounding Miyajima cartridge to date, but one that retains the qualities that make Miyajimas so attractive to so many.

Footnote 2: Miyajima Laboratory/Otono-Edison, 1-45-111, Katae 5-chome, Jounan-ku, Fufuoka 814-0142, Japan. Web: www.miyajima-lab.com. US distributor: Robyatt Audio, Web: www.robbyattaudio.com