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Miyajima Saboten: sweet dreams are made of this



When its stylus touched the LP I realised I was not liking it. It was a strange sound. Especially it was dynamically constricted, dynamically muted. The biggest problem was that this was not balanced by some other magnificent quality so that you could say : yes, you don't like it but have you ever heard its 3D presentation? or something like this. No, nothing at all. I thought it was a bad cartridge. Moreso it was on the lowish output even for an MC and this proved a

problem for the first preamp it was connected to. And this was the only reason why I realised I had made a mistake. The thing was not properly loaded. I have made a big mistake with my step up. You know sometimes, even though you need glasses, you just say to yourself you know by heart where the settings are. But when I was ready to change my phono preamp I had my glasses on and said : what the hell ! I have loaded it at 37 ohm !

I started it all again. I used a step up transformer on my Lamm phono preamp and things... changed. Yes they changed. Dynamic it was sure not its forte, but was acceptable, normal, not too good not too bad, but it was immediate to my ears that it had something special and unique. It had a kind of sweet fluidity with a certain timbre density coupled with not really muted transient attack. Generally when we hear a certain fluidity we also hear diminished transient attacks, and especially fluidity and density of timbre don't go often together, but in this case, it's not that it had great transient capability, but the fluidity of its musical reproduction was perfectly balanced with everything else in a way that I was feeling nothing was missing. I perfectly know this trick. And is a rare one. So the thing that gets you captivated is this kind of uniqueness of sound. When you hear it after a while you realise that all other MC cartridges really have something in common, you realise that all belong to the same family with some variations that make certain cartridges more appealing to you than other ones. But this one is like it has a different nature. In a way it is extremely interesting since it is really like a new interpretation of the music. On the other side the way you have learned to judge and to select cartridges is challenged to the point that you ask yourself who got it right. While keeping on listening to those cartridges a few times I have thought all the others got it wrong, since there was a certain expression a certain charge in the music that was completely absent from all the other MC cartridges I have listened to. They all sounded mechanical in comparison to this one. And the ones that sound less mechanical and more fluid were achieving this at the expense of body, or transient attack.

The only really fastidious point was that after so many years of being used to MC sound whenever I went back to another cartridge, I was feeling more "at home" in its wrong doing. I am sure that if I had lived with this cartridge for much longer time I had to seriously readjust to all my other cartridges with some difficulty.

For this reason I can surely affirm that this cartridge has some kind of magic. Not because it immediately will blow you away but it will suck you in a strange world. In a world where things are there like suspended in a different reality you are used to.

You can buy some cartridges that have some universal pleasing sound like Dynavector. I don't know anyone that does not like Dynavector. That he prefers something else yes, but that dislikes Dynavector never. Then there are other cartridges that are disliked only by people that don't let them express as they were supposed to sound like Ortofon. Ortofon sound the way they should only with step up transformers in my opinion if not they sound uninvolved. But if you use with the right step up they are not going to be disliked by anyone. Then you have some others like VDH that are either disliked or loved like it happens with Naim electronics.

In this case, with this Miyajima, it is absolutely impossible to predict by who it is going to be loved. I guess it will fit well in a reproduction chain with low power amps and horn speakers.

It is a cartridge that all vinyl lover should hear. I guess this is valid for all Miyajima cartridges. Right now I am listening to another Miyajima, the Shilabe. It has the same family sound of the Saboten, so I think this is the sound of Miyajima cartridges.

One thing is sure: if you like this sound nothing can be an alternative to it.