

X-quisite VORO Cartridge Review

April 13, 2024 | Matej Isak



Over the years, I have had the pleasure of testing a whole range of products from Micha Huber, the proprietor of Thales, X-quisite, Goldenberg, and EMT Tonetechnik. Huber has a unique vision and out-of-the-box mentality that pushes the boundaries and somehow manages to pack the essentials into minimalist products that focus solely on the music.

VORO

The latest model in the X-quisite family features a unique ceramic transducer with a double-layered iron core. This technology enables distortion-free transformation of the music signal with outstanding dynamic performance. Thanks to its high efficiency, it works seamlessly with all types of MC phono stages.



The VORO's generator is housed in a skeletonized ceramic enclosure with a patented organic design. This is a familiar, natural pattern found in nature and is fathered by a Voronoi diagram depicted by the mathematician Georgy Voronoy. This format assures optimum resonance demeanor as it combines maximum rigidity with the lowest accumulation of airborne noise.



The recommended tracking force is between 1.9 and 2.1g. With the TIDAL For Bugatti MP-1 phono stage, I found a happy place with 2.0g and 200 ohms. The weight of 10.2g required some extra weight

on the counterbalance with SAT and Kronos Discovery tonearms to find the required equilibrium, which then allowed for excellent tracking.

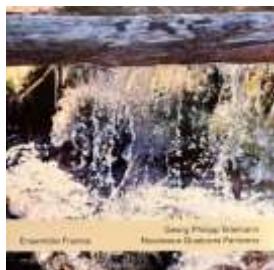
The Music

The X-quisite VORO cartridge proves that a transparent, modern pickup does not have to be raucous. What's more, VORO puts the music in the forte without getting in the way.

As with Thales, Huber has found a way to do things not just differently, but with a higher degree of balance, completely diaphanous yet tonally rich and textured.

As always, here are some reference tracks and albums that demonstrate the Voro cartridge's ability to penetrate deeper into the black grooves and decode far more information than you would expect at this price.

Ensemble Fratres – Georg Philipp Telemann Nouveaux Quatuors Parisiens – HiFiction



Georg Philipp Telemann Nouveaux Quatuors Parisiens was released exclusively for HiFiction business partners. This high-quality LP with music from last year's concert, which took place as part of the Analog Manufaktury event in a small church exemplary in capturing a live concert by a small classical ensemble.

This record clearly shows the main advantages and qualities of the unique X-quisite and what sets it apart from other cartridges.

Live acoustic music is one of the most difficult musical materials to reproduce, as it not only hand-on reflects reality and provides a reference point to which everything can be compared, but also requires a higher level of information, a higher number of acoustic points, and nodes, and if these are of adequate density, this is where the magic happens.

In this beautifully recorded and produced recording, the X-quisite VORO allows the instruments of the ensemble to resound with their natural presence and the necessary raw natural energy that VORO was able to transmit with a unique sonority.

The overlay of notes, reflecting the bounce of the notes in the natural space of the church, was reproduced with a higher level of cognition, not sounding metallic at any point, as is too often the case, even with some cartridges that cost much more than the VORO given price.

The X-quisite pickup grabs the listener's attention with its unique ability to escape inharmonicity, mirroring exactly what normally happens with the presence of a natural acoustic instrument in the natural environment.

The ability to cut through the cloth of the music, bypassing the sensory guards and directly hitting the epicenter where the music is decoded by our brain and receptors is one among many of the outstanding highlights of this cartridge.

VORO simply does everything right musically, allowing the flow of music to course undisturbed and enabling the distinctive impulsion where everything comes together in a true-to-life manner.

VORO has created an impressive three-dimensional and holographic aural exposition where music doesn't feel like sonic chaos and a mere sum of its parts, but a complete whole, a harmonic unity that transcends rationalization. It simply captivates the listener with what has been captured on the record, and X-quite VORO accomplishes this task with flying colors.

Your Mother Should Know: Brad Mehldau Plays The Beatles LP



The impressive, VORO cartridge impact was further, revealed with the Your Mother Should Know by Brad Mehldau, a fantastic pianist who paved his way with a very different kind of lyricism, skillful piano playing that always appeals to my inner calm and affinity for the higher plane, improvisational piano playing and musical escapism. The X-quite cartridge handled the golden trinity of timbre, tone, and color in an exemplary balanced fashion portraying Brad Mehldau's Plays The Beatles remarkably.

Many cartridges, regardless of price, misreproduce Mehldau's playing and make the piano notes sound like an artificial stringing together of notes, rather than making them a pleasing sort of mechanical euphonic kaleidoscope of tones and notes that are uniquely responding to the music and eliciting an emotional reaction that is obligatory and a clear indicator that the cartridge is working properly without introducing its signature or imprint. And this is also one of the qualities that make VORO so unique, interesting, and stimulating to explore the endless realms of the analog world.

Mehldau's almost dystopian, melancholic artistic expression was superbly conveyed by the X-quite VORO, with superbly consistent delicate micro and macro dynamic control tracking with feather-like lightness through all the dynamic changes, bringing out new subtle details without losing sight of the essentials or blurring microscopic details.

Sebastian Sternal Trio – Paris



This is another one of my all-time favorite albums that may not live up to all expectations, but underneath the surface of these compositions lies something very different and most highly emotionally connecting. "La vie en rose", sang Edith Piaf, buoyed up by the atmosphere of a city that has inspired decade after decade numerous artists – painters, poets, and musicians – from all over the world. This album is a tribute to this city that has fascinated Sebastian Sternal since his childhood.

On this record Sternal is accompanied by old friends, Sebastian Klose on double bass and Axel Pape on drums, as well as vocalist Anne-Marie Jean.

Not only traditionally crafted and voiced Japanese micro machines, but also many Western high-end audio cartridges are mid-emphasized, with the focus of voicing on the mids to capture the listener's attention and create a pleasant saturation. In complete contrast, the VORO cartridge covers a complete frequency spectrum evenly, without accumulating the energy at any particular frequency or creating a specific frequency bump.

X-quisite captures the ephemeral nature of the moment and directs the listener's attention to interpretation without the simplicity of displacement phenomena. Yes, it is a fully-fledged micro music machine, that charms where needed; emotionally.

With the VORO cartridge, the musical presence is clear and direct, everything blends and effortlessly escapes what too many cartridges deal with; the inherent colorations. Being familiar with Huber's work over the years and having high expectations myself, the latest X-quisite cartridge comes with a bit more music brilliance than I dared to expect. Hats off for that.

The sheer music splendor, along with the true-to-life reproduction was immediately apparent with Anne-Marie Jean's voice, which can too quickly become harsh, unbalanced, brittle, and begin to cut unpleasantly through the mix.

X-quisite VORO not only reproduces Jean's voice without unpleasant siblings, with the full three-dimensional scope and, above all, emotional resonating with a life-like impact but also exposes layer upon layer of these almost cinematic compositions, imbued with atmospheric, archaic but elusive and close-knit Parisian vibrancy.

The conclusion

We have seen the specs of high-end audio cartridges improve over the years, with many new technologies and exotic materials becoming commonplace, but in essence, many cartridges are simply reinterpreting existing concepts. As with everything to do with Micha Huber, the X-quisite takes a different approach with the VORO cartridge.



VORO was conceived from the outset as the finest MC cartridge and with its patented ceramic

transducer, double-layered iron core, pure copper coil, and skeletonized ceramic housing, it promises much from the start.

There is little doubt that the VORO is a very unique cartridge by design alone, and you could already read in the music section of the test that it captures the essence of the music remarkably well.

I have tried and tested numerous cartridges over the years, but there is something about the VORO that is closely linked to the music immediacy the way it strips away the thick layers of the sonic blur and the way it derives more of what is normally hidden in the black grooves.

VORO also comes along with a speed that is hard to grasp on first listen, but it reveals itself in the lightning-fast attacks of the percussion and plucking notes and the way micro and fine dynamics reveal themselves, as well as with a higher-than-usual spaciousness and acoustic density, resulting in a far greater horizontal and vertical musical expanse and yet a matter-of-fact presentation.



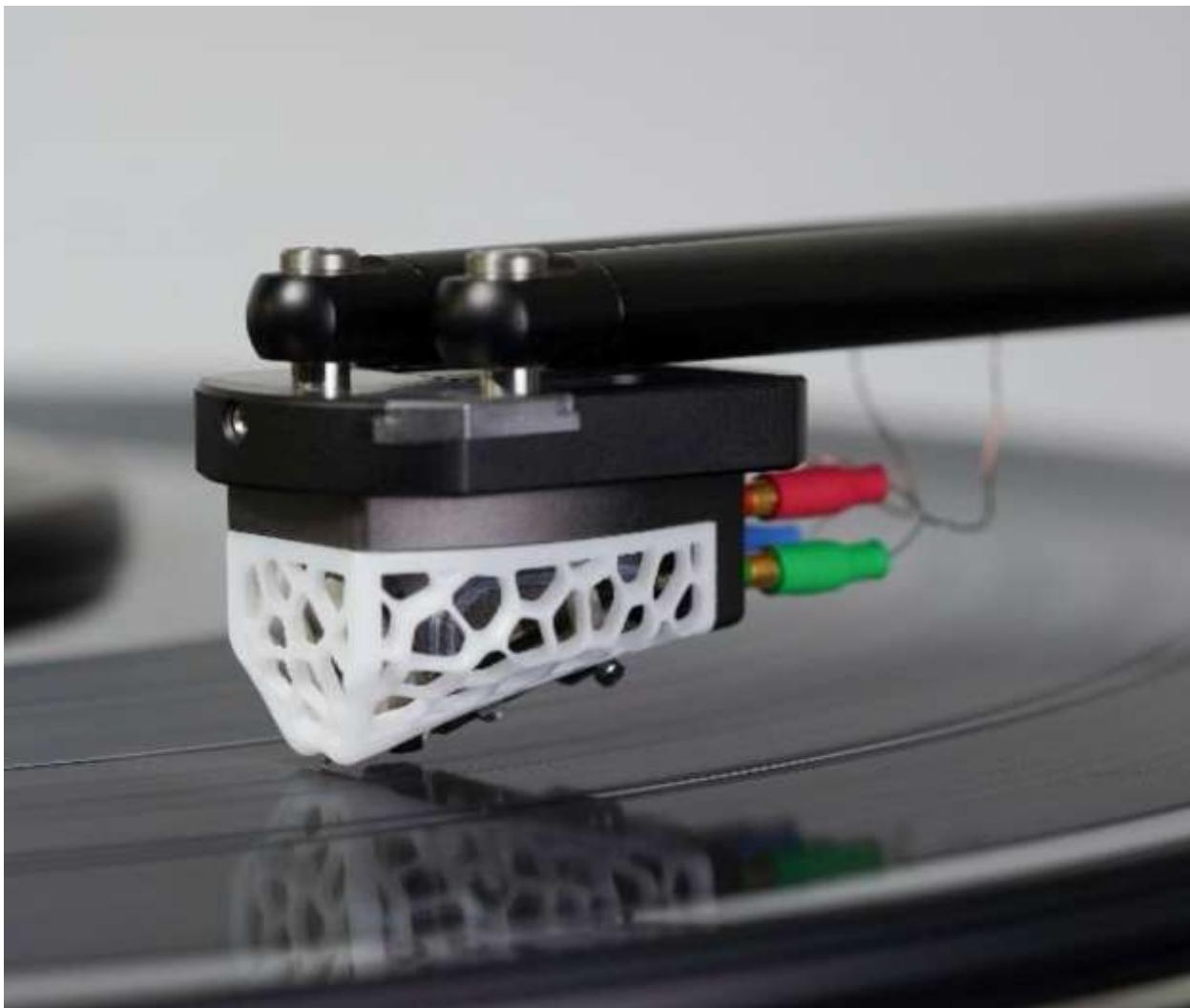
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The VORO cartridge captivates the listener with a superb, tantalizing musical reproduction that transcends the usual norms and expectations and comes with a chameleon-like sonic palette, easily tracking all the genres of the music.

Its compact, relatively lightweight, and unique sculptural design helps to minimize resonances, and implementing and embracing other proprietary technical solutions helps to avoid as many tracking errors as possible and consequently deliver improved spectral sound quality.



VORO simply does not do its own euphonic thing with sound but acts as a shrewder aiming for a precise, well-balanced, and musically balanced presentation. And it succeeds with the high marks.

But there is more...

Its juxtaposition is unusual in that it offers a choice between two audio paths that are too many times out of the question. The very transparent sounding one and the sonically and harmonically very rich one.



This is another of VORO's outstanding qualities that can be taken into account, as it offers a great way to tune in and find that excellent high-end audio system balance, which is not

always the case, especially with many cartridges aiming at a specific sonic imprint. In addition to a completely natural, Zen-like quietness and balance, it also offers a true sonic lushness, thus allowing a greater-than-usual sonic matching within a high-end audio set-up.

As with the CA cartridge, the X-quisite VORO defines its exquisite nature, as the name suggests. It is a perfectionist, handcrafted, innovative high-end audio and high-performance cartridge that exposes another level of analog music reproduction and represents another step towards the higher appreciation of what is hidden in the black grooves of vinyl records.

For what it represents sonically, and especially for its value compared to what is available at that price, it is an outstanding value rivaling some cartridges that cost almost twice as much, and that makes it a very enticing option for analog aficionados and music lovers.

Like all of Mika Huber's other proud creations, this exquisite (pun intended) cartridge pushes the boundaries by delivering a technically and musically mature cartridge that was designed from the outset to focus on the essence of music.

If you nail the basics right, there's every chance that the product will be a winner, and VORO boasts everything you'd expect from an independent analog manufacturer and more.



For what it represents design-wise, and technically, and what it delivers in terms of sheer musical potency, I am delighted to acknowledge the X-quisite VORO cartridge with the 2024 Mono and Stereo, Upper Echelon Product Award. ♦



MATEJ ISAK

The Price

MSRP = EUR 6'900.-

Specifications

Cantilever and coil body: Ceramic/Armco unit, patented design

Coil: Pure Copper 4N

Diamond shape: FGS

Magnet unit: Neodym-Armco

Body: Ceramic-aluminium

Connection: 1/2" – 4pin, gold plated

Vertical Tracking Angle: 20°

Weight: 10,2g

Tracking force: 1,9...2,1g

Output voltage: 0,7mV @ 5cm/s

Compliance: 12µm/mN

Frequency response: 20 – 30'000Hz

FIM distortion: max. 0,2%

Impedance: 2x 12Ω

Recommended load: 100 – 200Ω

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