

Miyajima

Kotetu Mono MC Cartridge

THERE'S SOMETHING ABOUT mono recordings that can provide a really special listening experience that has to be heard to be believed. When we talk about monophonic, we mean a true mono recording not a mono mix of a stereo master tape, which is no different from hitting the mono button on your receiver. Also, beware of "electronically re-processed for stereo" mixes, which are made from the mono recording and have been through a process to give a stereo effect – they sound awful! What we're talking about here are real monophonic recordings that have unique mixes that are separate from any stereo counterparts that may exist. These are generally what the music team has spent more time producing and, therefore, offer a truer representation of what the album should sound like.

The one and only

To enjoy such recordings you'll need a dedicated mono cartridge. Why not simply use a stereo one, we hear you ask. It will work, but the quality is inferior to a mono model. Although the signal on the left and right channels should in theory be identical, that is never going to be the case in practice. Any differences between the channels will be distortions and surface noise from the playing process and these will be faithfully reproduced by the two halves of the stereo amplifying process. A mono cartridge produces a single signal from the record and many of the distortions from the left and right groove walls are cancelled out at the source.

The Miyajima Kotetu Mono moving coil cartridge is a true audiophile-quality cartridge for mono aficionados. Every cartridge is handcrafted in-house by a team of six full-time staff that's based in Fukuoka, Japan. The company has been making phono cartridges for more than three decades, but these have only recently found their way into the American and European markets. With several patents under his belt, founder Noriyuki Miyajima



is a passionate music lover who started off making only mono cartridges. He now also makes high-end stereo cartridges.

The Kotetu is the entry-level mono offering from the range of high-end Miyajima mono and stereo cartridges. Two versions are available – the monaural cartridge for LPs reviewed here that is fitted with a 0.7mm conical diamond stylus and requires a tracking force of 3.0-4.5g and a version for 78rpm records fitted with a 3mm conical diamond stylus. Both provide an output of 0.5mV and have an impedance of 40hms.

The cartridge makes use of the Miyajima vertical axis concentration, which ensures that it responds accurately to the horizontal modulation of a mono signal. It should be noted that the cartridge is intended for mono records only and should not be used to play a stereo record as the internal structure of the cantilever support is different and may damage your LP.

After installing the cartridge and setting up my tonearm, I put on a mono recording of Miles Davis' *Kind Of Blue*. My stereo copy is clearly a separate derivative from the master as it is very much 'sax on the left, trumpet in the middle and drums on the right!' This mono recording, however, is a totally different experience, with all the instruments

totally blended together and I get the feeling that all the performers are working as a team. The trumpet has a staggering clarity that somehow seems positioned more forward than the other instruments.

Next up is a great Parlophone mono record of instrumental versions of The Beatles' hits entitled *Off The Beatle Track*, performed by George Martin and his orchestra. The first track – *All My Loving* – demonstrates the classic evocative strings sound, typical of recordings of the sixties. George Harrison's *Don't Bother Me* has the melody played on a harmonica which, as with the Miles Davis track, seems to be situated in front of the orchestra.

The difference is clear

Finally, I try a selection from a set of mono library music LPs from the publisher Mozart Edition. These contain light orchestral music that was popular in the sixties and seventies. Once again, I am struck by the amazing clarity combined with an apparent openness to the sound where the music feels in no way constrained.

If you have a collection of mono records and can easily swap cartridges, or better still, if you have two arms fitted to your turntable, this is without doubt the best way to listen to your recordings. **NR**

DETAILS

PRICE
£295
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OUR VERDICT

