



PRICE	£575 (cartridge); £690 (arm)
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Naming a cartridge 'Musicmaker' raises a lot of expectations from the listener. Add the fact that this model, unusually, is described as a 'moving-iron' design, and the fact that at £575, it finds a place in circles that are almost exclusively moving-coil populated, and my curiosity was aroused. I received the review sample whilst I still had custody of the Roksan Xerxes X [*HFN* Feb '03]. Leonard Gregory — aka The Cartridge Man — recommends a good 50 hours for running-in, and my experience tends to agree with this. The usual new needle rattiness quickly disappeared, but the opening up and filling out of the sound took a lot longer. It went through definite stages until the sound stabilised.

The result was one of the most impressive non-moving-coil sounds that I have had the pleasure of hearing. Fitted to the Artemiz tonearm, the bass transformed from a tight, lightweight sound to one that went very deep without the 'coming up from a pit' sensation that often accompanies substantial bass from m-m orientated designs. The second thing that I realised was the agility of the sounds, reggae having a definable 'strut' to it, whilst *Latin Jazz Dance Classics Vol 2* [Ubiquity Recordings CBLP010] allowed Cal Tjader's 'Manuel Deeghit' to

The Cartridge Man Musicmaker and Hadcock GH242 SE

How well do a moving-iron cartridge and classic unipivot tonearm work together?

groove and sway in perfectly timed abandon.

Being aware that the Xerxes/Artemiz combination is particularly well behaved in this respect already, I moved the Musicmaker to the Linn Ittok LVII attached to my Origin Live DC-powered Sondek. The result was not total harmony. The Ittok and the Musicmaker made an effort to work together, but the sound acquired a hard-edged firmness that was not enticing. Putting a £500 Ortofon Kontrapunkt A m-c cartridge [*HFN* June '01] on to the Ittok restored normal musical abilities and provided an interesting comparator for the rest of the review.

At this point the Hadcock arm arrived and was installed on the Sondek in place of the Ittok. This proved to be a relatively straightforward job,

requiring an armboard with a cut-out for SME arms (other armboards might be suitable depending on whether the 228mm or 242mm arm option is chosen).

The bearing housing was attached to a mounting plate screwed to the arm board, position being easily set by using the template provided. The wiring fitted through the on-board cord grip, but was left loose until the arm was fully assembled and the Sondek's suspension adjusted for the different weight of arm. The fiddly bit was setting up the arm.

With a unipivot bearing, full movement is allowed in all planes. This means for instance, that an increase in the antiskate force can pull the cartridge off correct azimuth, unless the large



counterweight (which has an off centre hole for this purpose) is rotated to rebalance things. Each adjustment affects the other parameters, and it took a little while to get used to this. Cartridge alignment is accomplished by moving the headshell along the arm (but maintaining it in alignment with the bearing housing) and tightening the hex headed screw. A laminated protractor, specifically for use with the 242mm arm, is provided, but a sharp blade is needed to cut out the spindle hole.

The good news was that the Musicmaker made installation an easy job since it is one of the few cartridges I have come across that sounds at its best when set up exactly as per the instructions. Less than a tenth of a gram either side of the 1.5g recommended tracking weight was enough to cause noticeable degradation of the sound (measured on both manual and electronic scales) and the slightly tail down posture that I find exposes the sweet spot in most transducers doesn't apply here. Once it had been set up with the front of the unit at 90° to the record, the high frequencies just flowed in a natural and uninhibited manner.

It seemed to be in this area that this cartridge differed from most non-m-c types that I have heard. Most moving-coils tend to give the impression of an unrestricted high-frequency response, whereas moving-magnet cartridges can leave the impression that they run out of steam at the extreme top end. The Musicmaker behaved more like a m-c in this respect — my ears left me with the feeling that the response goes very high, easily and cleanly.

Sometimes a well defined treble can have a downside of excessive surface noise being reproduced as part of the package. Here the Musicmaker left the Kontrapunkt A standing, behaving in a manner far closer to its £750 sibling the Kontrapunkt B. The combined tracking capabilities of the three-part cantilever and the fine-line stylus extracted the music from the groove, but showed little disturbance from scratches or record wear.

Once the Hadcock/Musicmaker combination was correctly adjusted I was pleased to find that the detailing and presentation of the sound was even better than the Artemiz/ Musicmaker teaming. All of the virtues of that latter combination were there but with a sensation of more space around sounds and performers. I felt that there was a better appreciation of the ambient noises that help define the size of the recording environment: closely miked vocalists appeared to be a step in front of the musicians, but without the balance of the overall sound being upset. Live recordings benefited from this staging effect, further increasing the 'being in the audience' sensation. This level of detailing produced a few interesting side effects. When playing contemporary electronic music, the



Hadcock arm and Musicmaker cartridge are, seen [far left] mounted on an Opus 3 Continuo turntable; best results were to be had [as left] with cartridge top parallel to record

quality (or lack of) of the samples used became very obvious, as did the periodic appearance of real — as opposed to synthesised — instruments. Swapping the Kontrapunkt A from a Pro-Ject

as one of the best transducers that I have had the pleasure of using. Individually, both arm and cartridge make playing records an enjoyable and involving musical experience;

It had the freedom and expressiveness of an Aro, but with a pleasing, grounded solidity

RPM9 turntable to the Hadcock/Sondek unit, and putting the Musicmaker in the 9-inch carbon-fibre arm of the RPM9 reinforced my opinion that the Musicmaker was on friendlier terms with conventional instruments than electronica. The latter had a firmness and lack of depth which the cheaper Ortofon just didn't reveal. Drums provided a perfect example of this. Sampled ones seemed to have a two-dimensional sound, whereas the real ones seemed to come with deeply dug foundations to support them. The cooler sound of the RPM9 also came to the fore, producing a slightly dispassionate but very insightful performance.

Meanwhile, the Hadcock brought out an energising effect from the Kontrapunkt A which had me checking the turntable speed with a strobe disc. (I am still using the Origin Live motor, which is easily adjustable.) Rotational speed proved to be correct, so I settled back to enjoy the little Ortofon boogying as I have never heard it do before. I came to the conclusion that the arm behaved like a good bandleader, allowing the virtuoso performances to shine through, but keeping a light but firm grip on the rest of the group to ensure cohesiveness.

I think 'cohesive' is a good way of describing the arm's performance. It had the freedom and expressiveness of a Naim Aro, but with a pleasing, grounded solidity which I found more to my taste (I find the sound of the Aro can be a bit ethereal at times). Certainly any one who has memories of the original Hadcock arms should forget them and treat this as a totally different product. It is a good example of a very successful re-execution of a good basic design principle. The same could be said for the Musicmaker cartridge. It lives up to its name, and has joined the Ortofon Kontrapunkt B

together. they build on each other's strengths to provide well balanced, open and detailed sound that I found irresistible.

WORDS TONY BOLTON

TECHNOLOGY

Nearly all 'moving-magnet' cartridges are more accurately described as 'induced-magnet' or 'moving-iron', and Grado has long used its own version of this principle. Leonard Gregory's Musicmaker is based on the discontinued Grado Signature range, but is considerably modified to include a three-piece Duraluminium cantilever, tipped by a line-contact stylus. Inside are oxygen and halogen-free high-quality copper coils around samarium-cobalt magnets. Each channel has its own internal earthing, the body shield also being earthed. Output is claimed to be 4.5mV, frequency response is quoted as 10Hz–50kHz (±2dB) with channel separation greater than 25dB. Tracking weight is 1.5g.

The GH242 SE pickup arm's bearing is made from solid phosphor bronze, which is mounted in a housing of solid brass. The arm tube, counterweight and anti-skate mechanism are all made of stainless steel, the arm tube also being seamless. The headshell is a magnesium casting. Internal wiring and external signal leads on this model are from Incognito.

KEY FEATURES

- Vibrant, energising and musical cartridge
- Arm works well with m-m and m-c cartridges
- The two work together particularly well