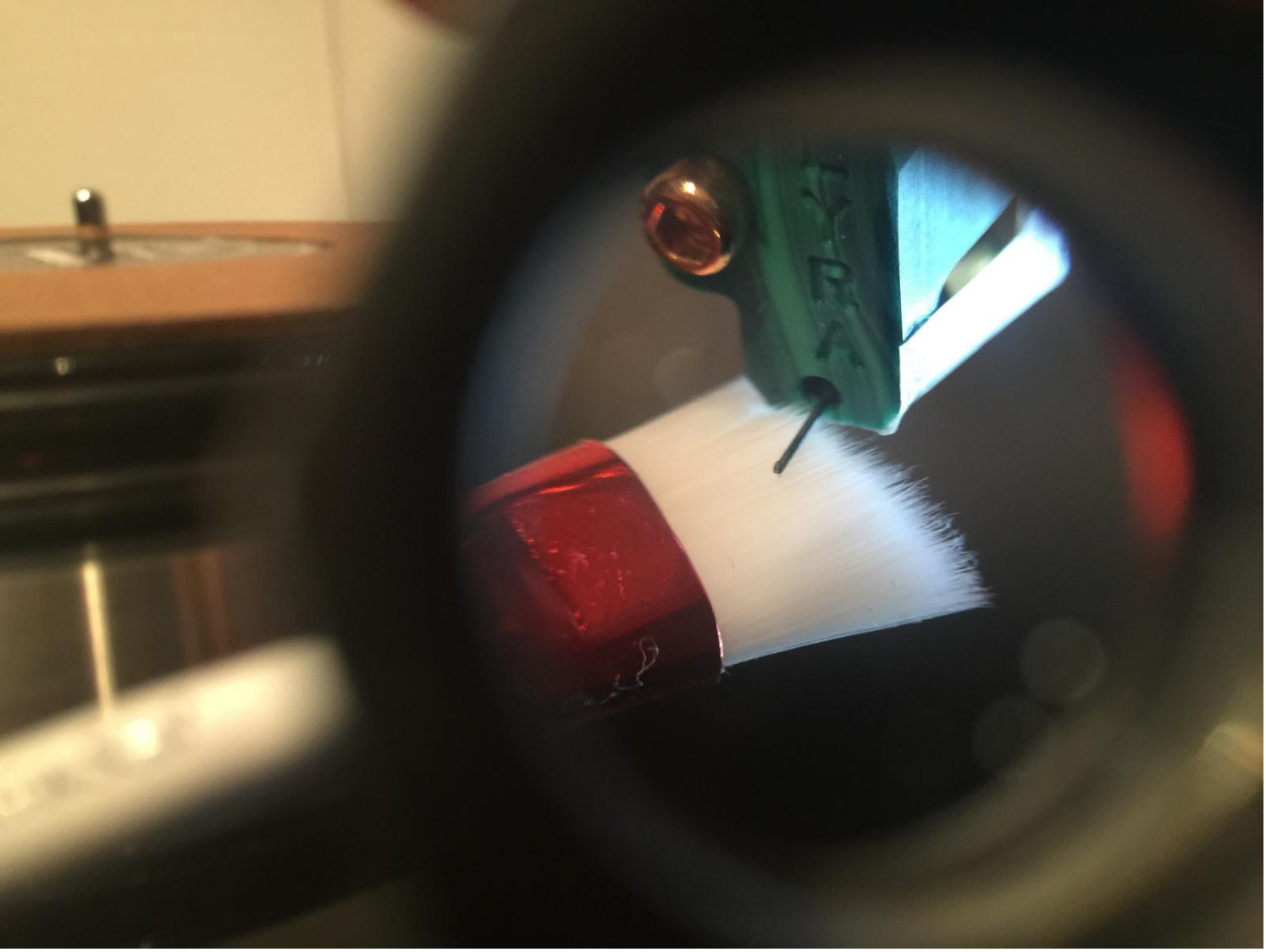
Joachim Pfeiffer's
HiFi
SOUND & MUSIC

One Drop

Accessories are the esoterica of the analog world – plenty of voodoo, little effect, sometimes even harm. All the better when a small bottle proves it can be different: your records sound as if freshly bought.just bought them brand new.

by Joachim Pfeiffer





Good, better… Schöner. Yes, that's her real name – and her stylus cleaner from L'Art du Son does it justice. Some products you use without thinking; others quietly reset your worldview. The new stylus cleaner from L'Art du Son, developed by Martina Schöner, unquestionably belongs to the latter.

In the analog world, Martina Schöner isn't just a familiar name – she's practically the whole book. And when it comes to record cleaning, she didn't just write the chapter; she edited, typeset, and published it. Comparable efforts? None worth mentioning. While others are still polishing, Schöner is already peering through the microscope.

Back in May, she handed me this tiny, crystal-clear bottle with a small brush attached. "Give it a try," she said. I did – though only months later, after the Martion Bullfrog loudspeakers had arrived and the urge for a long vinyl evening returned. Two sides in, I suddenly remembered the bottle. Now, for context: I'm no fan of encrusted diamonds. My Clearaudio Insider Gold cartridge – venerable yet proud – receives its regular manicure, often with Audio-Technica's battery-powered cleaner. But what that tiny drop from L'Art du Son did next was nothing short of spectacular.

Nothing comes from nothing

A tiny breath on the supplied brush, a gentle stroke across the cantilever – and suddenly the music played with a precision and ease that made me lose my religion. It felt as if the needle hadn't just been cleaned, but redeemed. The diamond seemed freed from baked-in micro-particles, the sound silky, effortless – even purified. Even the run-out groove sounded like a statement against dirt. Here's how Martina Schöner herself puts it – and she hits the nail on the head: "I've worked on this formula for over ten years. Stylus cleaners often contain alcohol or solvents that can attack plastics, adhesives, or elastomers – and thus destroy exactly what they're meant to protect.

My goal was to develop a solution that avoids all of this. The L'Art du Son Stylus Cleaner contains no alcohol, no solvents, only selected surfactants. They dissolve baked-on micro-particles reliably

without endangering the system. The result: a technically precise, gentle cleaning – and a sonically captivating improvement." And indeed – this technically precise cleaning is nothing less than a rebirth of the cartridge. No exaggerated euphoria, just the sober amazement of a listener who thought he knew his records.
Of course, dust will settle again eventually – that's life. But what this "Good, better...Schöner- elixir" reveals remains: pure music.

Pure Truth

Twelve Sides Later – and the World Stands Still.
Today I listened to the entire Götterdämmerung — the legendary 1965 Decca recording under Georg Solti. Not streamed, but as it was meant to be heard: straight from the groove. One single drop of this potion — that's all it took. After that, the Clearaudio Insider Gold laid the score back into the vinyl with such fidelity it felt as though Wagner himself had signed the matrix.
The AVM 5.3 turntable held its pitch like a conductor holds his pulse; the Cello Audio Suite and Boulder 1161 politely stepped aside — task accomplished. And the Martion Bullfrog delivered the ultimate revelation: it doesn't translate the engraving into loudness, but into presence.
The Sofiensaal breathes audibly from the groove — that tangible Decca sound, shaped by John Culshaw and Gordon Parry so that stage and time align perfectly on vinyl. Main mics: Neumann M 50s, flanked by KM 56s and M 49s — creating that fine presence that keeps the voices anchored within the orchestral horizon. Through the cleaned stylus, this becomes no nostalgic filter, but a document. The potion doesn't make the sound "prettier," it makes it free: dust gone, tension gone, distortions relegated to where they belong — the archive.
Act I: Dawn and Siegfried's Rhine Journey
The strings shimmer deep into the inner groove without a hint of sibilant strain. The Insider Gold traces the violin filaments so cleanly you could count the bow hairs. Horns emerge with body, never glare; cymbals sound of copper, not chalk. Here, that single drop proves its worth: no softened consonants, no smeared vibrato — just faithful articulation, right up to the run-out.

Act II:The vocal lines are drawn like with an architect's pen. Nilsson's Brünnhilde stands firm in the panorama, Windgassen remains a man with lungs, not a measurement value. The groove breathes; the cleaned diamond lets it all pass — microinformation instead of microstress. It's not more detail, nor less — it's right.

Act III: Funeral March
The Bullfrog expands the space, the AVM sustains it, the Insider excavates it — and the potion ensures the tool stays sharp. Depth arrives not as pressure, but as structure: double basses with wood, timpani with skin, not plastic. In the final scene, it's the record that carries the glow, not the level meter. The Bullfrog turns it into tone suspended in air — so immediate that you instinctively turn down the volume just to get closer.

Pleasure in Sound

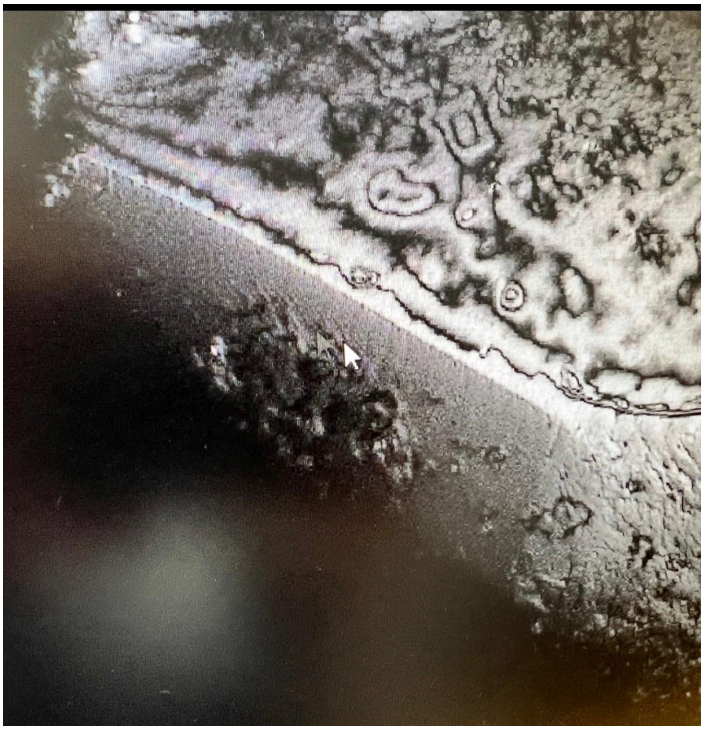
For Context: Next to it stands my pair of Canton Vento Reference 1 loudspeakers. Excellent, honest, precise – the first choice for many things. But nearly five hours of Wagner in one sitting? Hardly. The Canton informs; the Bullfrog tells a story. And when it comes to Götterdämmerung on vinyl, storytelling is what counts.
In the end, my gaze returns to the record – twelve sides of history, captured in micrometers. One drop on the diamond, one clean cut through time. The technology steps back, the groove begins to speak. And what it says is the most beautiful thing this evening has to offer: faithful music – not from a medium, but from a stylus that once again remembers what it was made for.



The unassuming little bottle that does far more than you'd expect.
Here it performs brilliantly on a venerable yet lively Clearaudio Insider Gold.
The inscription "Made in W. Germany" betrays its age – but now, it's back at its best.

No magic, just the science of sound

Hardly was the original post on HiFi Sound & Music online when Jan Schlotmann chimed in — with a comment that balanced perfectly between irony and expertise:
"Well, who wouldn't like to enjoy a redeemed cartridge… A little less sermonizing might have conveyed the message just as well… and this product is by no means alone in the field; for instance, the cleaner made by the company Last comes to mind."
A fair point. Last is, without doubt, a classic — proven for decades and a staple in many studios. But according to its safety data sheet, the cleaner contains between ten and twenty percent isopropyl alcohol. It works, yes, it removes dirt — but over time, it can remove more than one might wish.
Years ago, I managed to ruin a Linn Troika with another alcohol-based cleaner. The bond between diamond and cantilever eventually gave way — ever since, I've been wary of anything that works with alcohol.
Martina Schöner drew exactly the right conclusion from that: no solvents, no alcohols, but purposefully tuned surfactants that chemically dissolve burnt-in residues without attacking adhesives or elastomers. No marketing — just lived experience. Technically correct — and sonically, at least to my ears, the difference between clean and truly free.
Jan replied with the wonderful line: "The dose makes the poison." And yes — that's true, of course. A small amount of alcohol isn't automatically problematic. The real question is what happens after years, when glues age, suspensions harden, and microstructures become brittle. In theory, alcohol is harmless; in practice, it sometimes shows long-term effects no lab can simulate.
Schöner's approach is therefore no crusade against alcohol, but a clever form of prevention — with an audibly proven effect.
As the discussion eventually drifted into the depths of chemical edge cases and surfactant behavior, it ended with perhaps the most beautiful line of the evening:
In the end, as so often, it's a compromise — between theory and experience, between lab values and long-term behavior. What matters most: the diamond should play clean, not shine.
And those who try both approaches at least have an excellent excuse for their next vinyl night.
By the way: there are thousands of different surfactants — some aggressive, some gentle. Martina Schöner has chosen the mildest formulations, guided by her expertise, her experience, and her love for detail.
Who else could it have been?



What remains: residues on the stylus surface, revealed under a KEYENCE microscope.
Proof that cleaning isn't esotericism — it's physics.

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