



An advertisement for the Uberlight Flex LED task light. On the left, a black desk lamp is shown over a turntable. The text reads: "You can't clean what you can't see." In the center, the product name 'UBERLIGHT™ FLEX' is displayed in large, bold letters. Below it, the tagline says "The perfect LED task light for vinyl lovers" and the website "reliablecorporation.com" is listed at the bottom.



An advertisement featuring a large red vinyl record graphic. The text "MADE IN JAPAN?" is written in white across the top of the record, and "- Buy in Japan!" is written in white across the bottom.

An advertisement for the fidata Network Audio Server. The brand name 'fidata' is written in a stylized font on the left. In the center is a photograph of the silver server unit. Below the photo, the text reads "Network Audio Server" and "An audio server engineered for use in high-end audio systems."

An advertisement for DAILY AUDIOPHILE. The text "DAILY AUDIOPHILE" is centered in a large, bold, sans-serif font. Below it, the website address "www.dailyaudiophile.com" is displayed in a smaller font.

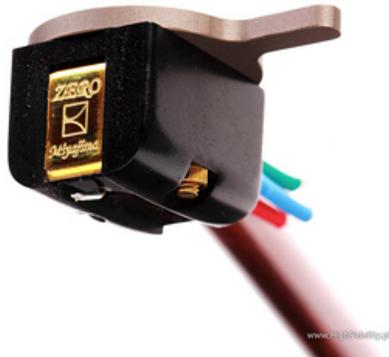
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Miyajima lab

I was meant to be the first to review this cartridge. I received the Zero from Miyajima Labs soon after it was designed and it was one of the first copies made. Housed in a small box, with a dedication to "High Fidelity" and an own stamp from Mr. Noriyuka Miyajima, it was waiting for a right time and a worthy environment to audition it. I felt safe. That is, until I realized that half a year had gone and I hadn't even unboxed the cartridge, not to mention reviewing it. What eventually pulled me out of my stupor was a review of the cartridge penned by Michael Fremer and published in the March issue of "Stereophile" (vol.36 No. 3, March 2013). On the same day that I received my copy of the magazine, I organized a review that was finished two weeks later. Thus ends my belief that we have plenty of time; no, we don't. The Zero is a mono design. It is not the first mono cartridge from Mr. Noriyuki and we previously reviewed the Premium BE. The Zero, however, is supposed to be the flagship model. Quite heavy, weighing 11.8 grams, it has a body made of African Blackwood. It has a different shape than stereo designs as its front is flat. It helps tremendously to set the azimuth which is very difficult with the Kansui, for example. Its design is a reflection of the philosophy of company's owner, which I wrote about before. The cartridge's needle pressure is up to us - literally. Manufacturer leaves us a wide margin of freedom, stating a range between 2g - 4.5g. Listening to multiple records it turned out that I got the best tracking, best color and weighing with the pressure of about 3.5g. The 0.7 micron needle is made of diamond and has a conical shape.

Next - dynamics. Vinyl record is considered by its supporters to be the champion in this respect. I have doubts about it as it's not always the case. What played a major role in the shaping of popular opinion is the fact of psychoacoustic masking effects that occur in the LP format. It is known that mastering for vinyl uses heavy compression, otherwise it couldn't be stored on the record. At the same time, however, I accept "by faith" what I have over and over again confirmed by subsequent auditions: vinyl seems to sound a whole lot more dynamic than a CD. Most CD players in this comparison sounds flat and boring, unfortunately. The Zero, the work of Mr. Noriyuka Miyajima, would be "Vinyl" in the above comparison and a classic stereo cartridge would be a digital player. I'm exaggerating? Maybe a little, but not too much. I compared head-to-head two versions of The Doors debut album released in a box set by Atlantic Records - mono and stereo. I paid a special attention to the track *The End* since I consider it the best on the album, but also as the closest track to the disc center it has the lowest linear speed (and thus quality). Stereo version is very endearing. It's just that mono blows it out of the water with its fullness, power and dynamics. The possibility of setting a higher needle pressure results in truly outstanding groove tracking. Classic 1.5g - 2g cartridges are not capable of that. Although good ones hold out nicely and don't jump out of the groove on sudden transients, they compress the sound, nevertheless. Even the Kansui, which I compared with the Zero. With a cartridge of this quality, however, we get a physical transfer of sudden transients,

And what about the name? Certainly, there is some reasonable explanation. Was it meant to refer to the Zero, the brilliant Japanese fighter of World War II? Probably not, but it would make sense to me. The cartridge is available in two versions - for LPs and for 78 rpm. Important: Do not play discs with Zero stereo!



Miyajima Laboratory in "High Fidelity"

SOUND

A selection of recordings used during auditions

- Billie Holiday, *Lady Day*, Columbia/Pure Pleasure, PPAAN CL 637, 180 g, LP (1954/2010).
- Chico Hamilton Quintet, *Chico Hamilton Quintet*, Pacific Jazz, PJ-1209, LP (1955).
- Clifford Brown and Max Roach, *Study In Brown*, EmArcy/Universal Music K.K., UCJU-9072, 200 g, LP (1955/2007).
- Dinu Lipatti 3, *Werke von J.S. Bach und D. Scarlatti*, EMI Electrola, 1 C 047-01 406 M, LP (?).
- Frank Sinatra, *The Voice*, Columbia/Classic Records, CL 743, Quix SV-P, 180 g LP (1955/1999).
- J. S. Bach, *Schweigt stille, plaudert nicht*, Archive Production, „IX Research Period“, ARC 3162, LP (1960).
- Julie London, *Julie is her name... Vol. 1*, Liberty, LRP 3006, LP (1955).
- Louis Armstrong, *Louis Armstrong in Prague*, Panton, Mono 8015 0075, LP (1980).
- The Doors, *The Doors*, Elektra/Rhino, RH11 74881, "Vinyl Box", 7 x 180 g, LP (1967-1971/2007).
- The Jazz Greats, *Reeds – Part I*, EmArcy, MG-36050, "Giants of Jazz. Volume III", LP (?).

In order to understand the phenomenon of mono cartridges you need to hear one of them. It does not have to be as sophisticated model as the ZERO; the simplest cartridge will do, provided it has been designed from the beginning to the end as a mono cartridge. Let me repeat: you need to hear it. I will try to introduce you to the kind of sound we get with these cartridges and how it differs from similarly priced stereo models from the same manufacturer, but please treat it as a guide, as an invitation to your own auditions. Reviews serve primarily as indicating the direction of search, are supposed to make you sensitive to certain things, the task of the reviewer is to find solutions; reviews, however, will never replace your own auditions. In the case of mono cartridges the matter is even goes deeper, to the more basic aspects. The problem is that few music lovers remember the sound of a monaural system. The vast majority were born in the stereo system era and knows no other reality. But even those whose first albums, first audio systems and hence cartridges were monophonic, and who are still active music lovers, audiophiles, have for years now been using stereo cartridges and – I bet – no longer remember how it once

with superb resolution and definition – these are again advantages of the Zero that I have never before heard in any mono cartridge.



For at the end I need to say something about definition. Records released in the 1960s by Archive Production on heavy vinyl, prepared with great diligence, sound very good. With the mono cartridge they sound unique. We get clear imaging and accurate soundstage, even though there is no information about space that we are used to (stereophony is not natural but after adapting to it can convey a very credible soundstage).

The sound is very distinct when needed, e.g. at cymbals opening album *Study in Brown*, and sometimes delicate, ethereal, like on the album by Dinu Lipatti playing Bach; it all depends on how they have been recorded. The ability to show differences between the two is much better with monophonic than stereo cartridges, and it is just brilliant with the Miyajima Zero. Its frequency response is very wide and low bass and upper treble are strong, "physical", more tangible than with stereo cartridges, even the best. Higher harmonics are outstanding and a cleanness of this frequency band is simply shocking even after very good cartridges. Here, there is additionally more depth and solidity of sound.

Conclusion

The combination of all the mentioned components results in the sound you will never forget. The Miyajima Labs Zero is a tool I would wish to all lovers of good music. It is the best mono cartridge I've ever heard and one of the best in general. It shows things one may have guessed but hardly ever experienced. It conveys a large volume of instruments in a dynamic way, with great definition. It is also incredibly effective in differentiating recordings. That helped me establish a certain hierarchy of pressings, undoubtedly familiar to many music lovers but for me so badly obvious for the first time. The best sounding are classic pressings from the 1950s followed by those from the 1960s. Even if they are a bit worn out, if cracks occur more often than you would like, they are amazing in showing the presence of vocals, instruments, and space. And cracks are not as troublesome as with stereo cartridges as they come only from the axis in front of us, never from the sides! The next in my hierarchy are re-editions by labels specializing in analog remastering, such as Analogue Productions, Pure Pleasure, and others. And at the end, re-editions of mono records coming from the 1970s. Regardless of pressing, the Miyajima offers big sound, meaty, dynamic, focused and well defined. A dedicated long tonearm with this cartridge or even a second dedicated turntable, just for it, seems to me something mandatory in advanced systems.

DESIGN

The Zero cartridge from Miyajima Laboratory has a unique design. Its inventiveness lies in a novel coil geometry. In most

sounded. For we have an "imprinted" picture, a sort of "structure" of the sound played back at home, and this image is a stereo. The first contact with a good mono cartridge on a good turntable is shocking. Suddenly we realize so many new things, so different from what we've grown used to, that we can feel overwhelmed by this wealth. Key aspects of such audition immediately stand out but it is hard for us to evaluate them as we are busy with simple categorizing of new experiences.



First – the volume of sound. Mono recordings from the 1950s and even early 1960s were the peak of mastery of sound engineers. They were always considered as the most important and were the focus of attention of their producer and recorded musicians. Stereo versions, prepared in parallel if at all, were treated as a backup, as a curiosity. That's why good mono recordings are extraordinary! Due to their huge volume of sound.

One might expect that mono sound played back from two speakers will be focused on axis and auditioning, and will be really tiny. It is not. Such sound fills the space between the speakers and if we play it for people unaware they are listening to a mono record they will not believe us if we tell them about it; so expansive is that sound and so incredibly full. Then – naturalness. The said fullness results in an impression of normalcy, of naturalness. Listening to *Cry Me a River* sung by Julie Garland on the original edition of her album *Julie is Her Name Vol. 1* will leave us dumbstruck. The Miyajima cartridge allows conveying warmth and resolution to such degree that the same recording played back from a good HQCD seems pale, sickly thin. There's something about mono vinyl that just can't be reproduced on CD. I remember auditions at Janusz's, a member of the Krakow Sonic Society, when he was very much into vocal jazz from 1950s and I remember the amazing sound of good, mono CDs (almost exclusively Japanese mini LPs). But I have never heard anything like this.

solutions on the market the cantilever with the stylus on one end and the coil on the other connects to the cartridge by means of a thin wire that keeps it close to the magnet behind the coil. Between the coil and the magnet sits a shock absorber made from an elastic material like rubber or silicon. This is not the best solution because the axis of the coil's suspension and sweep is not in the center of the coil but moved back. The moving coil has to overcome the resistance of the wire which diminishes sensitivity and increases suspension inertia. Moreover, the coil wound around an iron core has to overcome additional attraction generated by the core in a strong magnetic flux. Miyajima champions another solution in which the cantilever is supported on a pin coming from the back magnet and tightened to the front yoke. Here the absorber is placed between the coil and the front yoke. The clear advantage of this solution is the support point for the cantilever. It's exactly in the coil's axis. This allows for more effective transformation of movement to electric current. This type of suspension does not introduce additional resistance. It also has much lower inertia. The core of the coil is made from resin, which does not interfere with the magnetic flux. This avoids additional distortion. The Zero is a true mono cartridge, and not an adapted stereo design. Mr. Noriyuki Miyajima began his cartridge adventure just from mono cartridges. His first design appeared in 2002 and a stereo cartridge was developed only three years later.



Specification (according to the manufacturer)

Weight: 11.8 g
Material: African Blackwood
Needle pressure:

- LP version - 2.0 g - 4.5 g (3.5 g recommended)
- 78 rpm - 3.0 g - 5.0 g (4.0 g recommended)

Impedance: approx. 6 Ω
Output voltage: about 0.4 mV
Compliance: about 8×10^{-6} cm / dyne
Recommended operating temperature: 20-30° C (most suitable 25° C)
Stylus shape:

- LP version - conical, 0.7 μ m
- Version 78 rpm - conical, 3 μ m

Distribution in Poland