



Founded on March 27th 1980, the Miyajima Labs company is housed in the city Fukuoka-shi in Japan. Its owner, Mr. Noriyuki

## Miyajima lab

Miyajima is a very humble, nice man who personally assembles all his cartridges and only fitting the cantilever and diamond is made by a woman, an artist in what she does, whose name I do not unfortunately know. You can see her on the pictures by Stefano Bertoncetto [HERE](#). There we can also see Mr. Miyajima's stereo, which includes Electrovoice horn loudspeakers, replicas of WE 66A with WE555 speakers and a Garrard 301 turntable with a modified 12" Audio Technica tonearm. The amplifiers are all vacuum tube ones, and the phonostages work with step-up transformers. You may say this is fully fledged anachrophilia – let me remind you that this name (“anachrophiles”) was conceived by Art Dudley, the journalist from [“Stereophile”](#).

This is not the first Miyajima cartridge I am reviewing. Or even the second. This is the fourth model from this manufacturer, but the first one made especially for me, as certified by the writing on the box. Because I am a fan of this company. Each of their cartridges I heard had something in it, something that I am searching for in music, namely the truth about the musical event, musical truth and performance truth. They aren't cartridges that pretend to be ultra-neutral. We do not get that here. But we'll get true emotions. And this is priceless.

I already mentioned that – this Japanese cartridge is very communicative, because keeping the definition of the sound it also conveys the emotions related to music. And although we cannot show the dominating frequency range, mostly the midrange profits from the density of the sound. Listening to Frank Sinatra from old Columbia recordings, coming from the 40-ties, Bing Crosby's recordings for Decca or Nat “King” Cole's S&P Records remasters I could not recover from the shock when I realized how my Harbeth 40.1 loudspeakers sound. This is not the ideal sound, or even an accurate (neutral) one. But it so compelling, that... Well, that I buy it immediately. The Japanese cartridge added to that “the heart”, the emotions I thought I already had before. But it added something extra, something I did not hear with any digital source yet.

It was easiest to be enchanted by vocal recordings. It is much more difficult to get that with worse recorded discs – like the *First and Last and Always* by The Sisters of Mercy, or discs cut from digital tapes, like *Black Celebration* by Depeche Mode. With both kinds of discs the issues were clearly visible. There was no effect of masking but truthful reproduction of what is in the grooves. And there are not only technicalities, but also the energy present in the group during the recording, the drive, etc. When we have a brilliant rhythm section, like on the discs *Smokin' at the Half Note* by Wes Montgomery & Wynton Kelly Trio and *Study In Brown* by Clifford Brown and Max Roach, we will appreciate what I am talking about.

We will have the very warm, mature guitar of Wes, who played with his fingers and not with a guitar pick and wanted to have such sounds, but also the rapacity of Brown's trumpet, which is not always smooth or “pleasant” in the sense that you not always listen to it at your lazy comfort.



**To date we reviewed:**

- Miyajima Laboratory SHILABE, review [HERE](#)
- Miyajima Laboratory WAZA + PREMIUM BE, review [HERE](#)

**SOUND**

**For the listening session I used the following discs:**

- Bing Crosby, *Bing Crosby's Greatest Hits*, Decca Records/MCA Records, MCA-3031, LP (1977).
- Clifford Brown and Max Roach, *Study In Brown*, EmArcy/Universal Music Japan, UCJU-9072, 200 g LP.
- Dead Can Dance, *Into The Labyrinth*, 4AD/Mobile Fidelity, 140 g LP;
- Depeche Mode, *Black Celebration*, Mute Records, DMLP5, Limited Edition, (2007), 180 g LP;
- Frank Sinatra, *The Voice*, Columbia/Speakers Corner, CL 743, Quix SV-P, 180 g LP.
- Kari Bremnes, *Norwegian Mood*, Kirelig Kulturverksted/Strange Ways Records/Indigo, 9389-1, 180 g LP (2004).
- Kraftwerk, *Man Machine*, Capital Records/KlingKlang/Mute Records, STUMM 303, 180 g LP (2009);
- Nat „King” Cole, *Just One Of Those Things*, Capitol/S&P Records, Limited Edition: 0886, 71882-1, 180 g LP (2004).
- The Sister of Mercy, *First and Last and Always*, Elektra/Mobile Fidelity, MOFI 1-006, Silver Label, Special Limited Edition No. 1382, 140 g LP (2010).
- Wes Montgomery & Wynton Kelly Trio, *Smokin' at the Half Note*, Verve/Universal Music Japan, UCJU-9083, 200 g LP.

In the last issue of the [“Stereophile”](#) I read with pleasure the review of our today’s cartridge by Michael Fremer (*Two MM cartridges & a phono preamplifier*, Vol.34, No.11, November 2011, p. 31-37), who – nota bene – had a seminar this year during the Warsaw Audio Show 2011. He summarized his text in the following way:

“I liked Miyajima Labs Shilabe really well, but I love the Kansui. This is a brilliant cartridge, well made and sold for a reasonable price.”

Reading this I had both mentioned cartridges in front of me, their sound in my head, and in my memory what Mr. Noriyuki Miyajima wrote me about the Kansui, namely that although it is a more expensive cartridge, maybe even his best, yet – at least for him – it does not replace the Shilabe at the top of his catalog, but rather complements it. Now I know why. And, I think, I understand what both gentlemen meant.

Kansui is a brilliant cartridge. With no ‘buts’ or other words conditioning its position. I do not say that it is “the best” one, because this is a question of personal preferences, and for me in

I remember well what I thought and wrote about the cartridge Shilabe. I only had positive thoughts about it, and they were to a large extent similar to what I heard now with the Kansui. But not all of them. And not with the same intensity. The direction of both Japanese cartridges is similar, but the endpoint is slightly different. In direct comparison it turns out that the Shilabe sounds in a drier way, especially in the upper midrange, which seems a bit withdrawn. Compared to other cartridges this is still a very big sound, being very much “here and now”. But the Kansui does it even better, denser, stronger. The instruments jump a little out of the loudspeakers, not being contained in their “window” and in this aspect the Shilabe may seem better balanced, better fit to listening at home. But its treble has less shine, is not as vivid as with the Kansui, which can be heard with recordings like Kari Bremnes or the mentioned Clifford Brown. They are slightly thinner, less noted in their weight and three-dimensionality.

The sound stage is similar in both Miyajima models, but the Kansui presents the first plane closer and has better defined further planes. There are not many cartridges that can go even further – from those I heard, only the PC-1 Supreme, and to some extent the [PC-1](#) can do it. The Shilabe shows the instruments slightly further away – still in a very palpable way, yet further – which will prove itself with some recordings, especially with classical music. Both cartridges are made in a similar way, very nice, very solid, but with a characteristic “retro look”. Their sides and front are rounded, which makes setting them up very difficult – there is no flat surface that could act as the “reference” one for the lines on the protractor (the device used to setup the cartridge).

Listening to them side by side it is hard to choose which one is better. I understand Michael Fremer who likes the more dynamic, “stronger” sound of the Kansui – I understand and I agree with him. It is just that some characteristics of the Shilabe which the Kansui does not have, like the slightly higher delicacy, slightly bigger distance from the first plane and general “politeness”, lead to the result that in some systems the Kansui may seem too offensive in its richness, in its internal energy. This is why I would prefer to have both of them, mounted on headshells of SME tonearms (best) or Jelco (still good), also in the Transrotor modification, and choose between them depending on what I am listening. Because the design of both cartridges is very similar and their external dimensions are identical, it is enough to make a mark on the counterweight for both of them – and done.

**CONDITIONS OF THE REVIEW**

I listened to the cartridges using three different turntables: SME 20/3A with the SME V tonearm (review [HERE](#)), Kuzma Stabi S with the Stogi S 12 VTA tonearm (review [HERE](#)), and Transrotor ZET1 white matt (review in this issue of [“High Fidelity”](#)). The turntables were placed on the Base rack, and the Transrotor additionally on the Acoustic Revive RHB-20 Hickory platform. The phono stage was most of all the [RCM Audio Sensor Prelude IC](#), plugged into the Oyaide MTB-4e power strip using the

some aspects the reference cartridge is still the [Air Tight PC-1 Supreme](#). The thing is that the cartridge made by Mr. Noriyuki is something outside the usual equation of “pro’s” and “con’s”. It has its limitations, its own sound and its peculiarities, but during listening it never happened that I would be disappointed with something, or badly surprised. If I was surprised, it was rather in a positive way, which involved me in sound more and more.

And the sound is very wide-band, with extended bass and treble. The latter seems almost equal to the one from PC-1 Supreme, which is an extraordinary result. Maybe it is not as detailed, and does not have such delicately shown edges, but it comes close. On the other hand, the bass reaches equally low and is equally fleshy as with the Denon DL-103SA, being extraordinary in that aspect. The main advantage of the Kansui that we get only with the SPU from Ortofon (the review of the Synergy A is [HERE](#)) is a direct sound, a physical and fleshy one. With the Kansui the sound coming from the loudspeakers is really flowing, clearly not fitting in the boundaries imposed on it by the boxes. Even if those boxes are as big as the Harbeth 40.1. But we get this impression not only with loudspeakers – as usual I spent part of the listening tests using the HD800 headphones from Sennheiser and the Leben CS-300 Custom Version amplifier. While the Sennheisers are not warm headphones, or fleshy, they could seem that way with the Japanese cartridge. Big jumps of the sound, hits, but also small noises and tastes from Jarre’s discs were very quick and direct, as if there were no middleman between them and us, no air they would have to cross – even though in case of headphones the distance between the diaphragm and the ear is not so big. What is unusual is that all this was achieved with a well balanced frequency response, without any mudding or veiling. In terms of resolution only the mentioned reference, the Air Tight cartridge, could perform better. Not as much as the difference in price would suggest, but still.



The sound is slightly soft and not as contoured as in case of cartridges sounding more “modern”. This is part of what I said in the previous paragraph. But everything is glued so well together that the sound of the Kansui seems more natural, more live, normal. It never becomes “hi-fi”, in the bad meaning of that word, when we talk about introducing elements that point to the mechanical way of reproduction into the sound. The Miyajima cartridge never does that. Never. It also never exaggerates, like the Denon DL series cartridges do. There, this kind of ‘exaggeration’ is needed, because it masks the not so well resolved higher frequencies. Here it looks like somebody started with the sound of the DL-103SA and moved everything to the extremes, touching the mentioned Ortofon and Air Tight cartridges.

The lower octaves are quite strong and tight, but not as much as in the DL-103SA, the virtuoso of this element. You cannot hear that so clearly on loudspeakers as you can do on headphones – the room, the loudspeakers and their composition make the lower bass a bit unified. With headphones this issue does not exist and the

[Acoustic Revive Power Reference](#) cable.

The internal impedance of the cartridge is 16Ω and the load should be 200Ω - that was the case in my test. This is of course a function of the system, but I would recommend starting your searches there. It is important to set high gain in the preamplifier – the output voltage of the Kansui is 0.23mV. With the Denon DL-103SA with an output voltage of 0.29mV this parameter was not so important – the cartridge performed well also with lower preamplifier gain – the Kansui did not.

## DESCRIPTION

The construction of the Miyajima cartridges is so different to the conventional ones that it is worth getting acquainted with their description [HERE](#) or watch the short video on the manufacturer’s web page [HERE](#). In 2002 the company patented their own construction of a monophonic cartridge, and then in 2005 a stereo one. As you can see, it is all about a different construction of the drive system, where the coils are wound differently (“cross ring method”).

But this is still a MC (moving coil) cartridge with a quite low output voltage 0.23mV. Compared to the Shilabe, the Kansui has a higher compliance, and due to that a lower tracking force – instead of 3g only 2.25g. The diamond is Shibata cut, so it is very long and very narrow. This means that you have to pay special attention to VTA. The body is made from exotic wood, African Blackwood, also used for musical instruments like oboes or clarinets. The cantilever is very wide and thick – Mr. Miyajima also tried out much thinner ones but he decided that those bend too easily. The cartridge has no straight edges so it is very difficult to setup in the headshell. It has to be mounted with long screws. The pins are rhodium plated.



### Technical data (according to manufacturer):

Type: stereo MC  
Internal impedance: about 16 Ω (about 0.23mV output)  
Frequency response (-3dB): 20Hz-32kHz  
Tracking force: 2.0g-2.5g (recommended 2.25g)  
Needle: shape – Shibata I material – diamond  
Compliance (100Hz): about 7×10<sup>-6</sup>cm/dyne  
Weight: about 10.4g  
Body: African Blackwood

### Distribution in Poland:

#### [Audio Classics](#)

#### Contact:

tel.: 600 44 66 64 – sales  
tel. kom.: 500 291 856 – tech&faq

e-mail: [biuro@miyajima.pl](mailto:biuro@miyajima.pl)

clarity of the audio range is much better. And exactly in that listening session it could be heard that the lowest passages from Kraftwerk discs, and I listened to them all, are a bit homogenized by the Kansui, a little softened. And I am talking about really low bass.

URL: [audio-classics.pl](http://audio-classics.pl)

But this could be unavoidable if the goal was to keep all the other parameters, to – what is much more difficult to achieve – accommodate things that usually exist separate from each other. Like resolution and palpability; bass extension and clear treble; dynamics and delicacy.

As it seems, as it seemed to ME during listening, Mr. Noriyuki succeeded to “catch” something very volatile, something related to the spirit of music. I do not want to use the “musical emission” and its weight to cover the basic elements of the sound, its “accurateness”, but only mention something that struck me during the test and gave me much pleasure and joy. I mean “communication”.

## g a l l e r y



# cdjapan



### ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

- CD player: Ancient Audio Lektor Air V-edition, review [HERE](#)
- Phono preamplifier: RCM Audio Sensor Prelude IC, review [HERE](#)
- Cartridges: Miyajima Laboratory SHILABE, review [HERE](#), Miyajima Laboratory KANSUI, review [HERE](#)
- Preamplifier: Ayon Audio Polaris III [Signature Version] with Re-generator Power Supply
- Power amplifier: Soullution 710
- Integrated amplifier/headphone amplifier: Leben CS300 XS Custom Version, review [HERE](#)
- Loudspeakers: Harbeth M40.1 Domestic, review [HERE](#)
- Headphones: Sennheiser HD800, AKG K701, Ultrason PROLine 2500, Beyerdynamic DT-990 Pro; 600 & #8486; version, review [HERE](#), [HERE](#), and [HERE](#)
- Interconnect: CD-preamp: Acrolink Mexcel 7N-DA6300 (article [HERE](#), preamp-power amp: Acrolink 8N-A2080III Evo, review [HERE](#)
- Speaker cable: Tara Labs Omega Onyx, review [HERE](#)
- Power cables AC (all equipment): Acrolink Mexcel 7N-PC9300
- Power strip: [Acoustic Revive RTP-4eu ULTIMATE](#)
- Stand: Base; under all components
- Resonance control: Finite Elemente Ceraball under the CD, Audio Revive RAF-48 platform under the CD and preamplifier
- Pro Audio Bono platform under Leben CS300