

to 10kHz, after which it exhibits the usual MC high-frequency rise.

In addition to running it into the EMT 128 phono preamp, I used the CH Precision P1 phono pre via its voltage-amplification input, loading the cartridge at 200 ohms. The most significant qualities heard through the EMT 128 were also present when heard through the CH Precision, especially the generous low-frequency transient textures—fingers plucking double bass strings, for example, as noted in the 128 review.

A record label I can't reveal will soon release an all-analog cut of *The Fantastic Expedition of Dillard & Clark* (originally A&M 4158), an album that's as pleasurable as it is short (less than half an hour). On the first play of the test pressing, David Jackson's string bass had never been so delicately and incisively delivered. I went back to the original, and while the weight and extension were not quite as good, the EMT's

generous presentation of bass transient textures was there too, without overhang. In other words, it was the cartridge, not the test pressing, doing the talking.

There was nothing old-fashioned about the Novel Titan's sound, unless you consider smoothness, refinement, good timbral balance, and commendable transparency old-fashioned attributes. The Novel Titan's velvety character never produced softness where there should be edge, nor did it ever become overly analytical.

The only coloration or character I noticed was a particular vocal sibilant characteristic—a supernarrow, almost sweet peak that showed itself and then evaporated.

Both massed and solo strings sounded full, rich, and supple. *Beethoven Cello Sonatas No.3 and 5* (EMI HQS 1029), performed by Jacqueline du Pré with Stephen (Bishop) Kovacevich on piano, was effectively delivered, with piano transients neither softened nor etched. Du Pré's cello produced attrac-

tive sheen in the upper registers and full growl below, rounding out a believable, satisfying picture of two musicians playing in a studio space.

There are cartridges with more dynamic slam, detail retrieval, spatial expansiveness, rhythmic swagger, and hyper *everything* (many of them considerably more costly and some with some thinness and etch), but the Novel Titan's ability to reliably deliver satisfying musical goods while never calling attention to itself (other than that one sibilant characteristic) never disappointed. It always produced musical pleasure on a rich, colorful pallet.

If hard rock is your thing, I'd look elsewhere, but otherwise, with its relatively high output, precise build quality, and seamless delivery, if the price is in your neighborhood, the Novel Titan is worth considering. EMT has taken a classic design infrastructure and, using modern materials, made it fast and fresh.

NEW MAT CHAKRA LIMITED EDITION

I recently received a new washer for the OMA K3 clamp. I'm sure you're familiar with the concept: Screw a clamp down on a platter with a washer under the record and the record edge is forced down onto the platter. The result is better platter/record contact, which reduces vinyl vibration and thus improves the sound. It can tame warps, too.

The new washer was slightly taller, which made for a tighter clamp. The sonic difference was obvious, increased midband richness being the main (but not the only) improvement. It was subtle but significant.

The new Mat Chakra, from Sublima Research in Italy, is a thin, stiff, lightweight, moderately flexible platter mat made from an undisclosed material with a sandpaper-like finish and three other mysterious things. One is an approximately $1/2" \times 1/16"$ cutout in the groove area about an inch from the outer edge. The other two are gray, flat, circular blobs of paint (which is said to act as "an electromagnetic interactor") that fill small, maybe $1/4"$ -diameter circular holes, one located in the label area, the other close to or within the lead-out groove area of many records, depending upon speed and/or cut.

The design of the Mat Chakra is based on "10 years of experimentation and improvement on little known electro-magnetism interactions." These are never explained and so remain little known. According to the company's website,⁸ the mat is based on three "unique" principles, translated on the Sublima website as "electromagnetic interaction," "tuning and reso-



nant recess," and "understood/mechanical decoupling."

By "tuning and resonant recess," I assume the designer means that the mat is "tuned" to reduce vinyl resonances. Mechanical decoupling is easy enough to grasp: The pebbly finish could decouple the record from the mat to some degree.

The letter I received with the Mat Chakra avers that it "allows you to extract more information from the vinyl and decrease wear!" According to the website, wear reduction is achieved "by reducing the

contact charge and allowing the needle a much more natural and complete reading."

"Studies carried out in the Sublima Research laboratory in Rome have revealed that the reading of the LP is continuously error [sic] because these disturbances generate a sound degradation and a displacement of the original timbres, as well as shifting the tones and reproducing a sound of different pitch (frequency). The Mat Chakra Limited acts on the capacitive/me-

⁸ See sublimacables.com/?lang=en.

chanical behavior between the vinyl head (cartridge?) and the turntable.”

Even allowing for the obvious translation issues, there’s a lot of undecipherable gobbledegook here. I don’t know what “these disturbances” are. There’s no explanation of exactly what the “capacitive/mechanical behavior” is between the cartridge and the turntable, or what causes it. Nor is there any indication of what it is about the mat that reduces it. Also, what is the pebbly material on the surface of the mat? Don’t know. What’s the mat itself made of? Don’t know. What’s the purpose of the opening and of the two blobs, and what are they made of? Don’t know.

What I do know is this: I played a series of records placed directly on the OMA’s polycrystalline graphite platter mat using the clamping system. Then I placed the Mat Chakra on top of the graphite platter followed by the clamping washer and I clamped and repeated play.

I’ve been fixated on Shostakovich’s *The Age of Gold Ballet Suite* (RCA LSC-2322) with Jean Martinon conducting the London Symphony Orchestra, recorded in stereo in 1957 at Kingsway Hall, probably by the Decca Records recording team, but not released until 1959. It’s a sonic spectacular that can sound a bit bright on orchestral

crescendos, especially on cymbal crashes and massed strings.

With the mat in place, the stage deepened, the massed strings had a touch of added warmth, and the woodwinds were a bit less shrill. The first major cymbal crash was more natural sounding, with better control and less aggressive splash, and the pizzicato strings had more supple “pluck.” The first major orchestral explosion a few minutes in was far less aggressive, presented with greater realism and especially control—it didn’t jump forward on the stage. The recording continued to be somewhat aggressive on top, but it was far more enjoyable with the mat than without it. I heard these differences with every record, but it was more significant on orchestral and acoustic music generally.

The sonic effect is very similar to record “demagnetization,” which as of course you know is impossible, though every person who’s visited here hears the difference it makes. I don’t write about stuff like this unless I hear it and mean it!

Inventor Alex Cereda says these mats are manufactured one at a time and cost €350, which is around \$398. With a demo at an audio show, he could sell a stack of them. Otherwise, the Mat Chakra is sold factory-direct from sublimacables.com. ■

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