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PHOTO CANOR/HAN/REDACTION

CANOR ASTERION V2
+ HANA UMAMI BLUE

Astronomical union

Similarly to the famous partnership of the spacecraft Soyuz and Apollo, today's audiophile section brings the union of the two technological jewels from the two faraway corners of the Earth - Japanese cartridge Hana Umami Blue in connection with the brand new phono preamplifier Asterion V2, manufactured by the Canor company. Asterion shares its name with one of the stars of the "Hunting Dogs" constellation and umami is a term whose origin can be traced back to Japanese cuisine and which stands for a delightful flavour or the fifth taste. Notwithstanding, I am more than curious if this combination will bring us the unrepeatable taste of the out-of-this-world sound performance.

For the testing, I have joined the Melody studio in Žilina.

There is no need for a special introduction to the brand Hana, as our magazine has brought reviews of their cartridges several times. I will only remind the readers that the creator of the cartridges is the Japanese legend, master of the craft, Masao Okada San. The name indeed has a "samurai" sound to it and magically transports me to the days of my youth, when I used to watch the heroic deeds of the samurai on the silver screen. It was in the year 1970 when the company Excel Sound was founded.

Umami Blue

It is only logical that blue in the name of the cartridge points to its original colour. The Auricle™ blue body design created for the category of Umami is CNC machined from duralumin and polished with blue malamin. All of these contribute to its uniquely elegant and original appearance. The front part car-

ries the name Hana in Japanese symbols. For us, who are not language experts, the name in its westernised version might be found on one of the sides of the cartridge. Precision-cut diamond Microline stylus is attached to the boron cantilever with high-purity copper wires - the details of this craftsmanship might be observed by a magnifying glass from the bottom of the cartridge. The tension needed in the cartridge is induced by the aluminum, nickel, and cobalt magnets and the signal output pins are, of course, gold-plated. A good message for those installing the cartridge is that the threads for the bolts are placed right inside the body of the cartridge and thus the often tiring manipulation with the nuts can be avoided.

Canor Asterion V2

Despite the distance between Japan and Slovakia, the Japanese cartridge fits surprisingly well with the simplistic, almost zen design of the preamplifier Canor. We have had the opportunity to test its silver, more colourfully unified

version. The silver colour is contrasted with the black control panel consisting of a sizeable, easily-readable display and a set of control buttons. The front panel is dominated by the massive, backlit control component used in the majority of the products by Canor. For a technician, however, the back panel would probably prove to be the most interesting. It contains the inputs for both MC and MM cartridges alongside a balanced input for MC cartridges, and RCA and XLR outputs. This suggests that we are talking about a symmetrical construction, and that, if allowed by other components, the whole set might be plugged in symmetrically. This was the case during our sound test. The moment we unpacked the preamplifier, my heart leaped, as it was clear that the creators tried hard to prevent any unpleasant surprises. Sets of four vacuum tubes per channel were included in the package to prevent electromagnetic interference. Apart from them, you will also find black MCap Mundorf capacitors. Each channel has its own panel, separated from the power voltage.

CANOR
ASTERION V2

The power transformer is encapsulated in a separate welded metal cover. Vacuum impregnation, encapsulation in a special anti-vibration compound, and primary and secondary windings covered in copper foil shield prevent interference from external voltage sources. One vacuum tube is used to rectify anode voltage and behind it, you can find a filtration of a power voltage.

The creators utilise CMT™ technology, which has become closely associated with Canor products, to achieve the impression

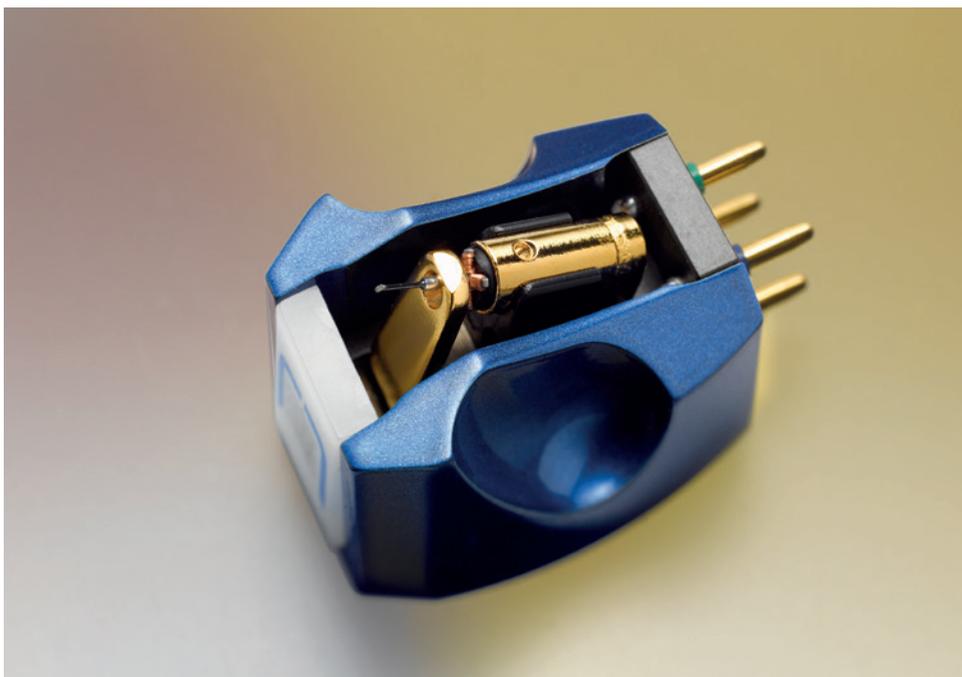
of the so-called "wire-to-wire connection". All the tubes are carefully selected and I have witnessed during the visit to one of the factories how these already paired tubes have been strictly assessed so that the maximal harmony of the left and right channels would be established.

Both MM and MC cartridges can be connected to the device simultaneously and switched between the performances. The high-level Lundahl transformer is responsible for the preamplification of the MC. It is important

to note that the device can accommodate all kinds of cartridges through a wide range of amplification, resistance, and capacity settings.

Uncovering the secret of the listening room. The other components in the listening room, except for filtration, were also supplied by the Canor company with the Kuzma gramophone presiding over the sound system. And I have heard the speaker Focal Viva Utopia in this space before. One of the most important aspects of the listening room is acoustics,

HANA UMAMI BLUE (UB)



Stylus: MicroLine

Cantilever: Boron

Output level: 0,4 m.v

Magnetic Circuitry: Pure Iron/Cryo Treatment

Coil Wire: High-Purity Copper

Magnet: Alnico

Output Balance: 0.5/1kHz

Vertical Tracking Force: 2 g

Trackability: 70 µm/2 g

Channel Separation: 30 dB/1 kHz

Frequency Response: 15 Hz – 50 kHz

Coil Impedance: 8 Ω/1 kHz

Suggested Load Impedance: >80 Ω

Cartridge Weight: 10,8 g

Body Material: Duralumin (A7075)

Body Colour: Blue – Melamine Thermosetting

Process (MTP)

Price: 2 390 EUR

www.nisel.sk

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CANOR ASTERION V2

Input Impedance MC1/Gain:

10, 20, 40, 80, 150, 300, 600, 1 200 Ω /Gain: 70 dB

Input Impedance MC2/Gain:

2, 5, 10, 20, 40, 80, 150, 300 Ω /Gain: 76 dB

Output Impedance: < 250 Ω

Inputs: XLR -> MC, RCA -> MM/MC

Outputs: RCA/XLR

Total Harmonic Distortion: MM/MC < 0,1 %/1 VRMS

Subsonic Filter/Threshold Frequency:

18 dB/oktáva/18 Hz

RIAA Accuracy: 0,3 dB/20 Hz – 20 kHz

Signal-to-noise ratio MM:

< 72 dBV (87 dBV – IEC – A)

Signal-to-noise ratio MC:

< 72 dBV (87 dBV – IEC – A)

Power: 230 V/50 Hz/70 VA

Size (w x h x d): 435 x 170 x 485 mm

Weight (net): 18 kg

Price: 7 199 EUR

www.melodyshop.sk



which is brought nearly to perfection by the company Melody. The only thing left for me to do was to sit back in a chair and let the stylus of the tested Hana Umami Blue touch the surface of the first LP.

Sound

I decided at the beginning of the session that "everything must go" and chose the LP with the same name by Steely Dan. Indeed, as the sound ran through the system, I was mesmerised by the raw dynamism and drive. The very first impression revealed the complexity of the sound without any inappropriate deviation of one of the parts. The space was excellent, just as I am used to in Žilina's studio.

Afterward, we brought on Dire Straits and this old, well-known LP still managed to surprise me by the thousands of new details. The respective musical instruments have been metaphorically "stripped naked" and not only in the pieces of micro information themselves, but their own natural performance with the after sound. Many of the sound systems continue to struggle with emphasising the detail at the expense of the overall musicality, causing a great deal of sharpness of the sound. Hana Umami Blue avoided such an issue - the eardrums had not been cut through and the whole performance was imbued with natural musicality.



CANOR ASTERION V2

Components of the sound system

Gramophone: Kuzma Stabi R

Tonearm: Kuzma 4 Point single

Preamplifier: Canor Hyperion P1 Black

Limit Switch: Canor Virtus M1 Black

Speakers: Focal Viva Utopia LR EVO Black

Network Filter: GMG Power Hammer 3000P Classic

Speaker Cable: XLO Signature 3-5.2 (2,44 m)

Network Cable: Cable4 SuperBlack

POWER EU-IEC 1,5 m

Bill Evans and his recording from 1968. What can I add? Piano tends to be somewhat difficult to capture, but in this case, the task had been magnificently fulfilled! The sound was natural and insistent, which is a necessity if we are to enjoy an experience similar to a live concert. Moreover, the response of the drummer on the left added to the swing mood of the piece. After a while, contrabass joined in, humming its piece on the right. An interesting aspect of the session was also the fact that the jazz recordings in a single selection came from three different years - 1996, 1975, and 1955.

The newest recording offers a grander scene and the more modern philosophy of sound engineers could also be felt in the details of the respective musical instruments. In the case of the recording from 1975, the saxophone sounded surprisingly acute. There was

no maximised vibrancy, but the instruments were absolutely natural. It occurred to me that this might also serve as the mirror of the modern era which often prefers bombastic experiences to simple, candid things. My final contribution to this session was the legendary Louis Armstrong, whose muffled trumpet transported me back to the lost past presented by the year 1955. Listening to his distinctive voice, I could not but remember his shiny wide smile and a white handkerchief, which used to be his ever-present attribute on stage.

When deciding on classics, the final choice should emphasise majesty and the immaculate quality of the recording. These requirements are all fulfilled by Rachmaninoff by Reference Recordings, reissued by Pro-Ject. From the very start, it was clear that I would expect sheer musical ecstasy. I could not but admire the craftsmanship with which the sound engineers from Reference Recordings managed to capture the vastness of space and richness of music. Certainly, one of the prominent roles was also played by the cartridge and the whole sound system which mediated this unique feat. Orchestral forte sounded so powerfully and intensely that I at times doubted if I was still sitting in the listening room or if, by any chance, I had not been transported to the concert hall itself. Oboes sang with their characteristic deep intensity. Timpani brought in vigour and monumentality. Cymbals permeated the space. Trumpets blew their odes with assertiveness and energy, but without offending the ear by unbearable forcefulness.

I have enclosed the session with Daft Punk, where the recording of the introductory word by Jovani Giorgio illustrated the capability to capture and mediate the human voice with its characteristic fullness.

CONCLUSION

Music in its essence is harmonious and delightful, despite the efforts of some to reproduce the details with a far-fetched accuracy or, in contrast, to mitigate them into the bland softness. The combination of the excellent Hana Umami Blue cartridge and a top-class preamplifier Asterion V2 brought attention to detail, musicality, candid expression, and great capturing of space together with the wonderful positioning of the instruments, and left me with a charming and authentic impression. Comparable to the union of the two spacecraft, they allowed us to reach for stars. ✖



neutrality

musicality

details

naturality

design



"Nirvana" price