

HI-FI WORLD

Musically Transfigured

Tony Bolton enjoys the updated Transfiguration Axia MC cartridge, hand crafted in Japan.

The Transfiguration brand of moving coil cartridges, made by Immutable Music of Japan, have recently signed a new distribution deal in the UK and are now imported by County Durham-based Decent Audio.

This has coincided with the release of new versions of all three cartridges in their range; the £1375 Axia S (under review here), the Phoenix S, priced at £1995 and the range-topping £2995 Proteus.

The Axia S, like its siblings, has a body made of machined, solid aluminium. Within this are two magnets arranged in a yokeless, double ring configuration which results in the 5N silver coils being positioned inside the magnets. This model boasts a samarium cobalt magnet at the front and a neodymium one at the back. The cantilever is made of 0.3mm diameter solid boron and is tipped with a 3 x 30µm stylus.

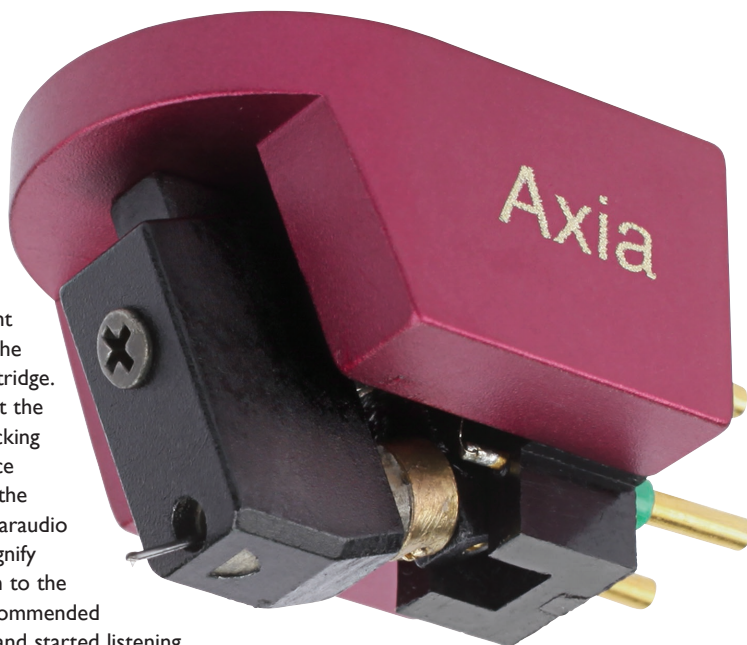
Installation of the cartridge was easy due to the square edges to the body and the cantilever being easily visible where it sticks out of the

front of the cartridge. I set the tracking force on the Clearaudio Magnify arm to the recommended 2g and started listening. The instructions recommend 30 hours of running in time and although I understood that this had already been done, I felt that the sound benefitted from a few hours more. I then started tweaking the set up a bit, finding that this cartridge proved to be very sensitive to fine tuning of both the tracking force and the SRA (stylus rake angle). Very small changes had the ability to change violin sounds from being on the edge of shrieking at me to being a correctly-toned rendition of a bow sliding across a string. Once I was satisfied with my fettling of the set-up I

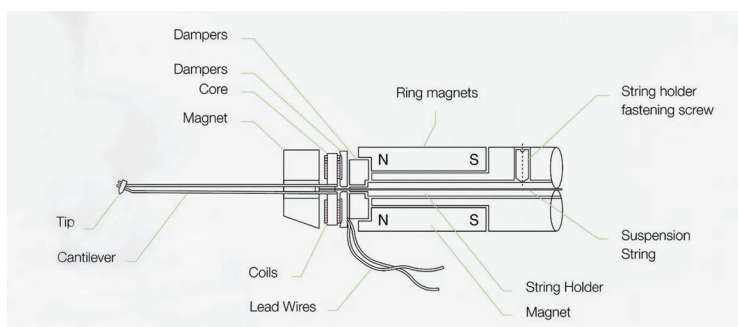
spent a few very pleasant evenings exploring my record collection before settling down to do more intensive and focussed listening. I also tried it on the SME M2-9R which is currently gracing the Master Solution and found a similar sonic response with both arms.

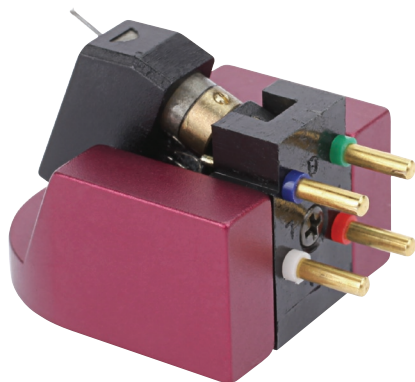
I started off with a 1968 stereo pressing of Smokey Robinson and the Miracles 'Greatest Hits'. This record, like a lot of my collection, was acquired by me second-hand and had obviously been enjoyed, but reasonably cared for; by the previous owner; it displays odd moments of groove damage when played with most cartridges. I was pleased to discover that the Axia S seemed to ignore this and get on with the task of reproducing the music held in the grooves rather than the condition of the groove walls themselves.

Smokey's distinctive voice was placed very firmly in front of me with the band placed around and behind



This diagram shows the internal layout of the Axia S cartridge. The unusual arrangement of the magnets can be seen.





The square edges and easily visible cantilever make installing and aligning this cartridge an easy task.

him on a quite expansive soundstage. Each of the musicians was clearly visible in my mind's eye and I enjoyed this almost panoramic display of the band at work. The dance-able rhythms of such Soul classics as 'Shop Around' and the melancholy of 'The Tracks Of My Tears' flowed out of the Ursa Majors quite effortlessly.

After this I put on Dave Brubeck's 'Time Out' LP. This is a near mint American stereo second pressing and I quickly found myself immersed in an exploration of Brubeck's unusual time signatures. All were delivered to my ears with aplomb and an easy-going flow that helped me to forget about listening to the cartridge and to focus on the tunes being played instead, which is surely the object of the whole exercise.

My next musical stop was with Bach's 'Brandenburg Concertos' led by Yehudi Menuhin. No. 3 is a particular favourite and will be known to most readers as the one-time theme tune for Antiques Roadshow. The opening Allegro movement skipped along in a precise manner with the various elements of the Bath Festival Orchestra being presented in, I would say, a tonally correct manner. Cellos had resonance without gruffness and the aforementioned violins soared

high and clear. In short it was very enjoyable.

I finished off with a trip through 'The Ultraworld' with the Orb, floating past 'Little Fluffy Clouds' and greeting a 'Perpetual Dawn'. This mixture of samples and synthesizers made full use of the staging area in front of me with sound either hanging in space or moving gracefully across the room in front of me. The seismic bass in these tracks was well portrayed without any perceptible crowding of the music further up the frequency range.

I have thoroughly enjoyed listening to this cartridge. It seems to display impeccable manners, even when provoked with records that have been mistreated during their lives, leaving the listener firmly focussed on the music before all else. A foray into grand opera during my early listening showed that this cartridge can display grandiose scale when required but can also do intimate with the same finesse.

At £1375 it is not cheap but the performance seems to be worth the money and at this price I cannot really find anything to fault. It does not seem to be genre dependent



The Axia S is supplied in this nicely made wooden box. The tools reside in the slot behind the cartridge.

to give its best, and sounded tonally consistent on both the arms that I used. As such, it comes highly recommended and will, I am sure, provide a great many hours of listening pleasure to any purchaser.

SYSTEM USED

Clearaudio Master Solution turntable. Magnify arm and SME M2-9R arm. Leema Acoustics Agena phonostage and Tucana II amplifier. Chario Ursa Major loudspeakers.

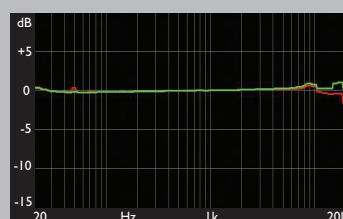
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

I first tested this cartridge in our October 07 issue. The new Axia tracked very well at its recommended 2gms downforce, clearing torture tracks at 300Hz and 1kHz, if with a smidgen of mistracking that VTF increase to 2.2gms, the maximum recommended, suppressed. This is a very good result that will translate to a confident, stable delivery of vocals in particular. This new Axia is up with the best in this area, like the '07 sample, and should sound confident in the groove.

Lateral tracing distortion was very low, vertical distortion was again high at 5%, mainly second harmonic, due to a high Vertical Tracking Angle of 30degrees. This may colour left and right images a little. Output was low at 0.42mV at 5cms/sec rms, so a quiet MC phono stage is needed.

Our frequency analysis trace of the

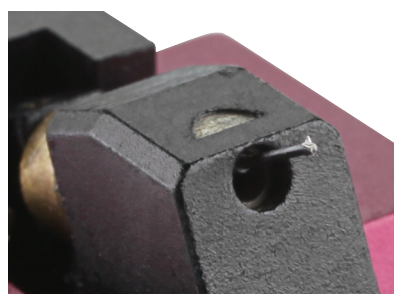
FREQUENCY RESPONSE



07 sample showed strongly rising treble above 8kHz, enough to give quite a sting to the sound from LPs with strong treble energy on them. The new sample Axia measured flat, however, as our analysis shows, so it will sound tonally balanced, accurate and sting-free. Tracing loss was minimal on inner grooves (red trace), indicating a quality stylus.

This new sample Axia measured well. It is now more tonally accurate than earlier samples and gives fine results in all areas, except for a high VTA that produces some Left and Right image distortion. Subjectively, however, this effect is difficult to detect so is not a major issue. **NK**

Tracking force	1.7-2.2gms
Weight	7 gms
Vertical tracking angle	30degrees
Frequency response	20Hz - 12kHz
Channel separation	23dB
Tracking ability (300Hz)	
lateral	88µm
vertical	45µm
lateral (1kHz)	25cms/sec.
Distortion (45µm)	
lateral	0.7%
vertical	5%
Output (5cms/sec rms)	0.42mV



The Ogura PA stylus has dimensions of 3 x 30µm and is attached to a 0.3mm solid boron cantilever.

HI-FI WORLD

MUSIC USED

J. S. Bach. 'The Six Brandenburg Concertos' Yehudi Menuhin. The Bath Festival Orchestra. EMI Records Ltd. (HMV). SXDW 3054. 1959.

Dave Brubeck Quartet. 'Time Out'. Columbia Records. CS 8192. 1959.

Smokey Robinson and the Miracles. 'Greatest Hits.' Tamla Motown Records. STML 11072. 1968.

The Orb. 'Adventures Beyond The Ultraworld.' BIG Life Records. LC 0407. 1991.

TANSFIGURATION AXIA S MC CARTRIDGE £1375



OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VALUE - keenly priced

VERDICT

smooth and well-balanced sound

FOR

- good vocal projection
- excellent surface noise control
- wide and deep soundstage

AGAINST

- takes a bit of tweaking to get it to sing

Decent Audio
+44 (0) 5602 054669
www.decentaudio.co.uk