



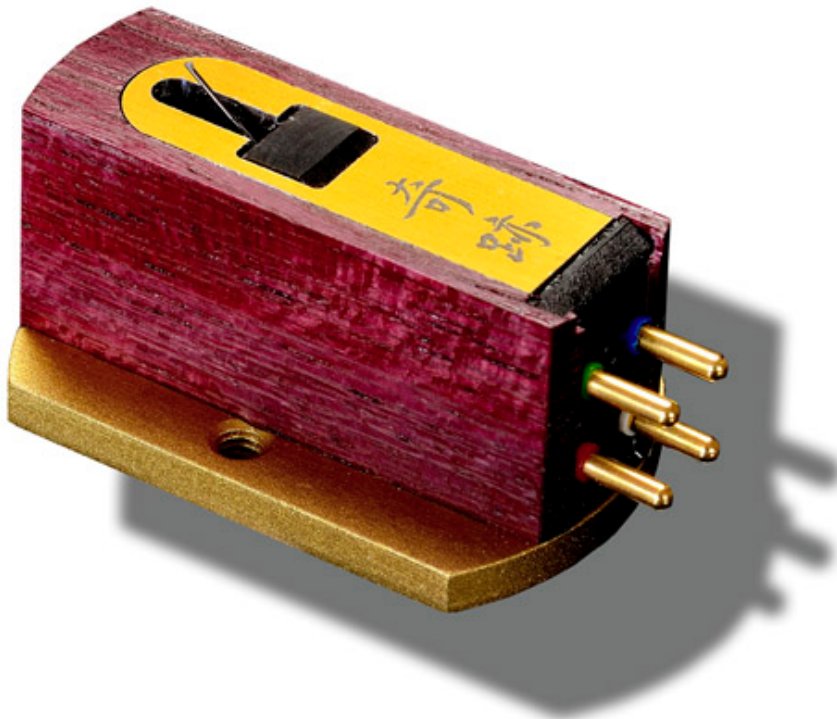
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kiseki

PurpleHeart MC Phono Cartridge

as reviewed by Robert H. Levi



A legendary cartridge with a pedigree that spans three continents returns to the marketplace and to audiophiles everywhere, thanks to some fantastic entrepreneurs who believe in the LP! With the brilliant engineering efforts of Herman van den Dungen of PrimaLuna fame in the Netherlands, and the superb marketing and financial efforts of

Kevin Deal of Upscale Audio in Upland, California, the Kiseki N.S. (which stands for "new style") has been renewed, improved, upgraded, and perfected. It will be sold through a select group of dealers that understand analogue.

The Kiseki PurpleHeart N.S. is a true beauty in every sense. Physically, it is made of rare Purpleheart wood, which turns from brown to a golden purple in direct or indirect sunlight. It sports a boron cantilever the size of a human hair, and a diamond so small that my 66-year-old eyes cannot see it, even with a magnifying glass. Though 30mm long, it weighs only 7 grams. Its edges are all right angles which make for easy setup. In addition, its strong .48mV output is a chip shot for all MC step-up devices that exist in the world.

MC Kiseki PurpleHeart N.S.

(Specifications provided by Upscale Audio)

- Body: PurpleHeart Wood, 30 mm long
- Cantilever: Solid Boron Rod: 0.3 mm diameter
- Stylus: 0.12 x 0.12 Nude line-contact diamond, mirror polished
- Stylus tip radius: 4 x 120 µm
- Vertical Tracking Angle (VTA): 20 degrees
- Coil: pure iron coil
- Weight: 7 grams
- Output voltage: 0.48mV at 5cm/s
- Internal impedance: 42 ohms
- Frequency response: 20 – 30,000Hz ± 1dB
- Channel balance: 0.2dB
- Channel Separation: 35dB at 1kHz
- Tracking ability at 315Hz at a tracking force of 2.6 grams: 80 µm
- Dynamic Compliance: 16 µm/mN
- Recommended loading: 400 ohms (I disagree! 800-1000 ohms)
- Recommend tracking force: 2.0 – 2.6 grams (I disagree! 2.1-2.4)
- Optimum tracking force: 2.46 grams (I disagree! 2.3 grams is perfect)
- Recommended tone arm mass: Medium
- Optimum working temperature: 20 °C
- Break-in period: 50 – 100 hours

The sample provided for review was off the assembly line; only 10 to 15 are made per month. No sample-to-sample variation is allowed, as each cartridge must be perfect. This will limit supply.

Pricing will be kept at the introductory level as long as possible. As the Kiseki delivers superior definition to a Dynavector XV1S at about \$6000, I would consider the PurpleHeart a very good value.

I also thought that Pavarotti had a very good hum.

Setup

I mounted the Kiseki in a Helius Omega Tonearm on the Paravicini Disc Master Magnetic Turntable. I used the

Jorma Origo interconnects, Kubala-Sosna Elation! interconnects, and the WyWires Platinum Interconnects to connect the E.A.R. 324 Phono Stage. The 324 is connected to the E.A.R. 912 Preamplifier and dual E.A.R. 890 Tube Mono-blocks with Jorma Origo Balanced Interconnects and Kubala-Sosna-Elation Balanced Interconnects. Speakers are the Marten Bird 3-way floor standers with Accuton drivers, supplemented with the REL Stadium 3 Sub-Woofer dialed in at 22 Hz. Power cords were Kubala-Sosna Elation! and Emotion and Jorma Prime.

After weeks of experimenting, I set the impedance at 1000 Ohms (necessary to get even frequency response.) I set the tracking force at 2.3 grams. Higher or lower ruins it in subtle ways in this system. I set the anti-skate at 1 gram, which was where it sounded best on this arm. By the way, the cartridge at 400 ohms is unlistenable; my specified 800-1000 Ohms is where it should be. At 2.3 grams the Kiseki will not mistrack anything!

Use the protractor that came with your arm, or a fine after-market version. It must be near perfect to sound right. Level the cartridge using a 170-180 gram LP, then lower the rear of the cart a smidge. That is the sweet spot. 50 hours of LP play time is minimum break-in.

Overall Performance

The Kiseki PurpleHeart is STATE OF THE ART in three parameters.

1. Though the specs state 35dbs of left to right separation, I heard much more. In fact, no other cartridge I have heard on my best stereo LPs does better than kiss the L-R walls of my listening room. The Kiseki tries to remove the sheetrock. It does this on most of my top stereo LPs, not just a few of them. This affect you must hear for yourself. Plus, there is no hole in the middle whatsoever! Jazz LPs sound superbly alive. Orchestral LPs shock you with a realism that I have only heard with reel-to-reel tape.

2. The PurpleHeart has the very best bass definition with the mightiest visceral impact and the lowest distortion I have ever experienced in 50 years of LP enjoyment. You hear the bass, see the instrument, and feel it, all at once. You will grab every album with a bass fiddle and replay it just to find out what it really sounds like. I have never heard the equal of this. My reference London Cartridge, known for amazing bass, sounds sloppy by comparison.

3. The Kiseki produces vocals more authentically than any other cartridge in my experience. Vocals live and breathe in an undistorted realistic way that is profound. Most cartridges which are neutral are a bit lean...not the Kiseki. Kiseki is the new neutral. It has some profoundly perfect form of generator operating at a level of such super-low distortion that it adds nothing and removes nothing from the human voice. I played dozens of vocal recordings, mono and stereo, and I have never heard anything like this until now.

Other Achievements

The Kiseki tracks flawlessly at 2.3 grams. It would track my finger if I held it there. Very well made, indeed.

I am very impressed by the overall definition of the cartridge. The Kiseki mines the grooves exceptionally well, and never disappoints when it comes to imaging or front to back information. Depth perspective is right in there with my best references. It is a quiet cartridge, though not quite as quiet as my more damped Stein Music Aventurin 6, which costs over twice as much.

The Kiseki produces air and ambience in a way that is not forced or difficult. Many cartridges seem to strain in this area, but not the Kiseki. This kind of definition is unheard of in this price range! As a big jazz fan, I love hearing horns decay a bit and rise with amplitude, and then fade away. This cartridge does it for me on jazz with a bullet!

The exceedingly low distortion I wrote about earlier also impressed me in other ways. I did not know how really tremendous my phono stage was until I heard the Kiseki. The E.A.R. 324 is Paravicini's only solid state phono stage, using mostly transformers to boost signal. It is about as neutral as they come. I heard the Kiseki perform with the 324 like a chameleon... sweet and mellow with sweet and mellow LPs...crisp and bright with crisp and bright LPs... alive and open with my direct to disk LPs. I felt like Forrest Gump every time I put on a record! I truly believe I have chosen the correct reviewing tool with the 324 as a result of listening to the extraordinary Kiseki... the first cartridge to sound like nothing at all.

This does beg the question of what do you do if you want warm lush sound, even if the recording is not warm and lush? I suggest that the Kiseki is not the cartridge for you. The good news is there are many darker, rich-sounding cartridges on the market in all price ranges for you to choose from. Can you spell "Koetsu"?

By the way, Kiseki in Japanese means "Miracle." That just about says it all.

Summary

The Kiseki PurpleHeart N.S. Phono Cartridge truly is an outstanding cartridge, excelling to the limits of perfection in several parameters, and merely excellent in all others. There is no other cartridge in its price range that can shine its stylus or bring such truthfulness to the reproduction of LPs. I am gob smacked by how it reproduces music like the real performance. It gives you a big taste of reel-to-reel tape sound without having to buy a RTR machine. Its utter lack of identifiable colorations put it in a league of its own.

Kiseki PurpleHeart N.S. Phono Cartridge, welcome back to America!

Enthusiastically recommended! **Robert H. Levi**

Some of Newest LPs Used for this Review

Rachmaninoff, *Symphonic Dances* Reference Recordings RM-1504

Elgar, *Enigma Variations* Reference Recordings RM-2508 45RPM

Johnny Hodges 1961 APO Verve V6-8452 45RPM

Yuko Ohashi, *Two Chords* Terasima Records TYPL-1039

John Coltrane, *Red Garland Trio* Prestige7123 APO

Two of a Mind LSP2624 RCA 1962 Speakers Corner

Ella Fitzgerald and Louis Armstrong, *Porgy and Bess* Verve 6040-2 Speakers Corner

Retail: \$3299