

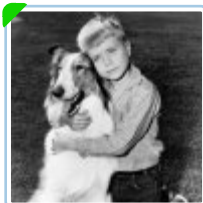
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Kiseki "PurpleHeart N. S. (New Style)" moving coil cartridge, beautiful looking and sounding.

Discussion in 'Audio Hardware' started by Steve Hoffman, Jun 15, 2015.

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Steve Hoffman

Mastering Engineer

Your Host

Thread Starter

Location:

Los Angeles CA, USA



So back in 2014, Kevin Deal of Upscale Audio pulled me into his room at the Newport Audio Show and handed me a little round wooden box, it was marked "PH 16 of 30" and he told me to try it and if I like it, review it. It's taken over a year but I've tried it and I like it. Heck, I love it. When my Audio Note buddy Warren Jarrett found out I had it he said (and I quote): "I've wanted a Kiseki PurpleHeart for 30 years."

Apparently he is not alone, because others have said the same thing. Well, here it is again after many years. This is a fun time to be into vinyl. Herman van den Dungen in Holland (oops, the Netherlands), and our tube maven Kevin Deal of Upscale Audio in Upland, California have made this Kiseki adventure happen again. The Kiseki "New Style" version of several of their classic carts have been reborn.

<http://www.kiseki-eu.com/index.php?...ckheart-in-the-works&catid=49:front-page-news>

Beautiful and rare Purpleheart wood, a boron cantilever and a teeny tiny diamond. This cartridge is made carefully, slowly, not many a month and it sounds, well, it sounds like heaven. I think the price is \$3,199.00 (or it was last year when I got my sample).

The King of cartridge/arm set up is David C. Shreve, the man who first started writing about the importance of VTA way back when in magazines like TAS. He came over to the house to personally install and set up the PurpleHeart in my VPI Classic 2 turntable. We are using a British MUSIC FIRST AUDIO step up transformer into an Audio Note UK M6 RIAA moving magnet phono stage. This is fed into my Audio Note UK M9 preamp and then into AN UK Ginrei 211 monoblocks. The German Voxativ 9.87 speaker system makes it all come alive. David spent all afternoon fussing (his usual way of setting up) and he settled on 500 ohms loading. Then we listened and loved. After some break-in (not that much needed, IMO) I gave a serious listen.

I use the same 4 test records all the time when I explore new turntables and carts, helps keep it simple for me and I've discovered over the years that using records that are NOT sonic wonders in the first place makes it easier to listen to the sound of the cart than using a mind-blowing recording which sounds good on everything. Make sense? So the records I always use:

"Rosebud: Marches & Rags of SCOTT JOPLIN", Lee Erwin, pipe organ, on Angel. Noisy surface, fun music, DEEP soundstage, a "scratch your head" recording that seems to have the mics placed as close to the noise of the organ as possible and as far away from the actual pipes as possible. This makes for a spooky deep soundstage and a good system can give you front-back chills if you are in to stuff like that. Important for me for judging cart tone (the more "in your face" the cart is, the less realistic the sound is for me). I've had this record since school.

"The Cotton Club" soundtrack on Geffen. Diana Reid Haig turned me on to this one in 1986. A digital recording, really shockingly good on vinyl with the right cart, totally headache inducing with the wrong cart. A nice, accurate (believe it or not) reproduction of horns and saxes.

"Presenting THE BACHELORS singing Diane, Whispering, Charmaine" on (British cut and pressed by Decca UK) London/ffrr. This one was given to me by Bill Drake (radio guru). I use this because the stereo version of "Charmaine" impresses the hell out of everyone who hears it. If only Decca had recorded the Stones like this. Produced by Shel Talmy.

And of course, my trusty test lacquer cut by Kevin Gray of Merle Haggard & The Texas Playboys doing "Cherokee Maiden", from the 1976 30 ips Capitol Records master tape. A perfect example of a "dead" recording from the middle 1970's that I use to judge tracking ability and any kind of front-back that a good system can pull from this dead recording. I have it on a locked groove 33 1/3 RPM lacquer with the "flat" version on the outer grooves and each additional version with more and more EQ (of my choosing) until the last, hard to track, version, with full volume and full EQ, a needle torture track. Very useful for me for many years in testing

turntable gear. Many other records are tested, of course....

Listening impressions: My usual test albums reveal that the PurpleHeart lets so much of the music shine through, it's a pleasure to hear old favorites like it is the first time. The bass is quite lovely, just right for me, not too lean or full, just right. The midband is wonderful, just like I like it. The top end is beautiful. The 3D image is palpable and believable. In other words, the thing sounds bitchin' (as well as it should for that amount of money, although I've heard carts that cost much more and do much less).

On my "torture track" albums there is no mistracking whatsoever, none. When one swaps out cable, the difference can clearly be heard, there is no typical moving coil rising and out of control top end, just a sweet but balanced reproduction. The Kiseki reproduces what is on the record exactly like it is on the record. If you have a nice sounding album, you'll get that back. If you have a crappy sounding album, you'll get that back as well, but even a badly recorded record still has good points revealed when played. In other words, there is no "house sound" for this cart. It is too accurate for that (a very good thing). Kiseki means "miracle" after all..

The choice of phono stage is crucial to the sound of the Kiseki. I tried a Soundsmith MCP2 which was nicely dynamic but very clinical sounding, my CAT SL-1 Ultimate which was very nice, 3D sounding and an LA Audio (Denmark) phono stage which was nice but the dynamics were lost. The Audio Note UK M6 RIAA seemed to bring out the best, dynamics, tonality and overall goody-ness.

In this price range, the PurpleHeart is a really great deal, sold by a really great Deal (Kevin). Even as I'm typing this I'm looking forward to playing some more vinyl today using the Kiseki. In fact, I'm going downstairs right now to fire up the system.

MC Kiseki PurpleHeart N.S. – SPECIFICATIONS

- 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 body: pure iron
- 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
- Recommend tracking force: 2.0 – 2.6 grams
- Optimum tracking force: 2.46 grams
- Optimum working temperature: 20 °C
- Break-in period: 50 – 100 hours

Kiseki U.S.A. 1042 N. Mountain Ave #B PMB 406 Upland CA 91786 Tel
909-931-0219 info@kiseki-usa.com

Steve Hoffman, Jun 15, 2015

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