

The History Man

by Richard S. Foster

The Brothers Dorian

I seem to have been a bit of a cartridge snob. I've always tended to look at a company, like Lyra, and see what fruit is blossoming in the highest branches. This decision of course is made after listening to other products the company makes and also having an opportunity to listen to the product I'm about to buy.

I've gone through various phases of what I want and expect from a cartridge. There was the 'midrange' phase which was followed by the 'give me the bass' phase. These soon passed and I added that 'open silky highs' phase to the equation. Always searching but never completely being satisfied.

I remember a few years ago very much enjoying the early Helikon stereo cartridges. I've always been a fan of the Lyra products even before they were manufacturing products for themselves (the Spectral MCR comes to mind). My first Lyra was the Clavis around 1990-1. I moved on up the line over the next few years until I reached the Parnassus dc/t. Wonderful cartridge and one of the best around at the time of its release (mid 1997 I think).

I got caught up in another phase at this time . . . the age of information retrieval let's call it. I went over to the camp of Clearaudio. I traveled the path from Signature (very briefly) to the Accurate. My next move was the Insider followed by the Insider Gold which ultimately led to the Insider Gold wood body Reference. I loved the Clearaudio cartridges . . . especially my last one. There was nothing happening on that piece of vinyl

I wasn't hearing. Every chair that moved, each cough or rustle and even that drumstick which may have fallen. What began to happen however, was that I was listening to the information and not the music and wasn't getting the satisfaction from my system I required. Now, please, don't take this as a negative against Clearaudio. They make a fine product. I just think I began to grow into a different phase.

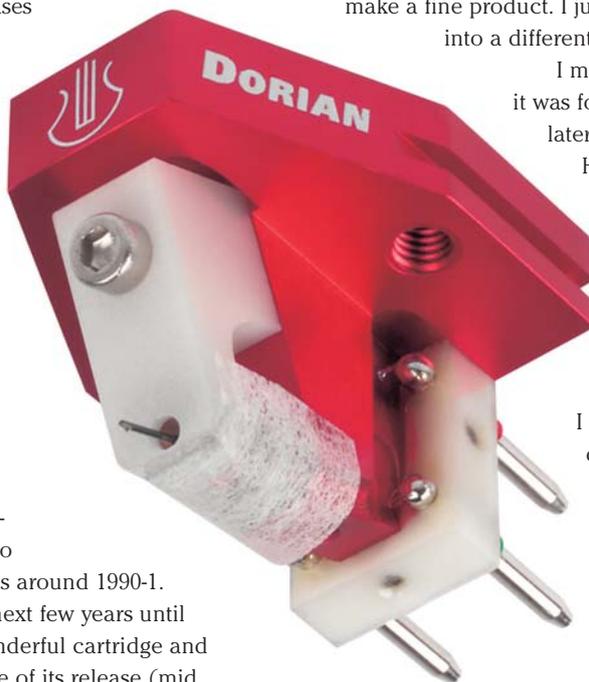
I moved back to Lyra. This time it was for a Helikon SL and then later, the addition of the lofty

Helikon mono. I was a happy puppy. Things were fine... and then the Titan came along. Well of course, how could I be happy with having fruit that was in the middle branches when

I knew the ripest, most delectable example was just a few feet higher in the tree? Sick . . . yes, I am. What else is new? The Titan is very special (especially those Titan stereos available after the fourth quarter

of 2004 - Lyra discovered a different way of inserting the cantilever into the suspension which improves tracking and has the added benefit of dramatically improving the sound).

Since the Titans have arrived on the scene, Lyra has released the Argo stereo which I've not experienced, but have heard very positive comments about. I heard about the Dorian's from Jonathan Carr at CES in 2005



► when he said he was hopeful to have the stereo available later in the year, but wasn't sure he was going to do a mono. Fortunately for everyone, Mr. Carr had designed both (see sidebar) and I for one am quite shocked at how awfully good they are.

Both cartridges obviously contain the same sonic characteristics. There is good separation of instruments, fine depth and in the stereo, excellent corner fill. The layering of first, second and third tier instruments in an orchestra or in a choral setting is very easily unraveled. I don't hear any congestion with either product and this was something I was concerned about in demanding passages. The cartridges are a little up-front sounding, perhaps a row seven designation.

I've been tracking both cartridges at 1.9 grams with a 47K ohm loading from my Herron VTPH1-MC plus. Of course, those across the pond might well differ in this regard and I know that RG loads his Titan at 200 Ohms, so establish your own preferences here. These cartridges are open and airy while offering lightning fast transients and a sound that's a little on the cool side. I don't find this a bad thing. (Also keep in mind I have less than 100 hours on these cartridges and they continue to improve.) Loading them down will tend to add focus and a little body at the expense of some air and speed.

What thoroughly impresses me is the amount of information and musical integrity the Dorians offer at this price point! Think about it: one-seventh the price of the Titan and one-third the price of the Helikon. These offer truly amazing value! I honestly don't know how Lyra has done it. But I can tell you this; as of this review, had I never heard the Helikon or the Titan mono, I would be very happy with the Dorian mono. It's that good. Anyone even remotely thinking about purchasing a mono cartridge simply has to listen to this. The EMI ALP 1496 (mono only), Mozart: *Vesprae Solennes De Confessore, K339; Exsultate Jubilate, K165* and *Benedictus Sit Deus, K117* with Erna Berger, Marga Hoffgen and Karl Forster conducting the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and the Choir of St. Hedwig's Cathedral, Berlin, is an absolute,

sheer aural delight, the Dorian revealing it in all its glory. This is one beautiful record and I wish you all the luck in the world in finding a copy. I've only seen two copies in the last few years and I'm looking at one of them. I'm sure there is a German issue and if any of our German readers have a copy, I'd love to have the opportunity to audition it. Of course it would be returned.

The Speakers Corner Re-issue of Sonny Boy Williamson's *The Real Folk Blues* is offered a spectacular presentation by the mono Dorian. Now of course this can be played with either cartridge, but I have this mental thing about mono records and mono cartridges. (Actually as you are all aware, the presentation should be the same as these records were not cut with mono cutting heads).

Having said that, one minute of 'One Way Out' will convince you you're really listening to a cartridge that

I consider a bargain with a capital B. Which raises an interesting question that I'll return to later.

The stereo is a delight as well. There is a US Columbia entitled *Waltzes from Old Vienna* (no, I won't tell you the number) that is quite the torture test when

evaluating string instruments.

It contains small ensemble works featuring three violinists, a violist and bass player. Now, throw into the mix the fact that we're talking about US Columbia, and you could be running from the listening room holding your ears. The sound is not bright at all. The Dorian passed the test with charm and grace. Listening to Rachmaninoff's *Sonata Op. 19* for piano and violoncello with Emmanuelle Lamasse, piano and the great Guy Fallot, violoncellist (Gallo VDE 3019), the artists are accurately portrayed at proper height and breadth. This is an 'in your room' recording and one of my reference recordings for the violoncello. (Gallo is a Swiss label for those of you on the hunt). The sound is rich, reverberant and luxurious as is the hallmark of this recording. Again, the Dorian stereo sailed through this with ease. To hear just how confident and secure the Dorian is, play the opening of Respighi's, *The Birds* (can you say Pulcinella) on the Speakers Corner re-issue of US Mercury SR90153. This is another torture track not only for brightness if mistracked, but also with



Model: Dorian

Designer: Jonathan Carr

Adjusted and tuned by Yoshinori Mishima.

Type: Moving Coil, low-impedance, low-output, medium compliance

Frequency range: 10Hz - 50kHz

Channel separation: 30dB or better at 1kHz

Cantilever system: Lyra-designed cantilever assembly with solid boron rod cantilever, and natural diamond, Namiki MicroRidge line-contact stylus (2.5 x 75 micrometers profile). Cantilever assembly mounted directly to internal structure of cartridge body.

Electromagnetic generator system: Lyra proprietary polepiece-less, dual neodymium discs, balanced symmetrical field, magnetic system with permalloy core and 99.9999 (6N) copper coils

Internal impedance: 9.5 ohms

Output voltage: 0.6mV (5.0cm/sec., zero to peak, 45 degrees)

Cartridge weight (without stylus cover): 6.4g

Compliance: Approx. 12 x 10⁻⁶ cm/dyne at 100Hz

Recommended tracking force: 1.8 2.0g

Recommended load direct into non-inverting RIAA equalizer amplifier or head-amplifier: 100 Ohms - 47kOhms (determine best impedance value by listening)

Recommended load via step-up transformer: 5 - 15 Ohms (step-up transformer output must be connected to 47 kOhm MM-level RIAA input)

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Electromagnetic generator system: Lyra proprietary polepiece-less, dual neodymium discs, balanced symmetrical field, magnetic system with permalloy core and 99.9999 (6N) copper coils.

For optimal monaural playback, core and coils are oriented at 90 degrees rather than the 45-degree orientation that is appropriate for stereo playback.

Internal impedance: 3ohms

Output voltage: 0.25mV (5.0cm/sec. RMS, horizontal movement, 1kHz)

Cartridge weight (without stylus cover): 6.4g

Compliance: Approx. 12 x 10⁻⁶ cm/dyne at 100Hz

Recommended tracking force: 1.8 2.0g

Recommended load direct into non-inverting RIAA equalizer amplifier or head-amplifier: 100ohms - 47kohms (determine best impedance value by listening)

Recommended load via step-up transformer: 2 - 10ohms (not more than 10ohms) (step-up transformer output must be connected to 47kohm MM-level RIAA input)

Signal output format: Although the Dorian Mono is a monaural cartridge, for enhanced ease-of-use, the Dorian Mono provides two identical sets of outputs, that should each be connected to one channel of a stereo playback system. For optimal sound with a dedicated mono playback system, either of the Dorian Mono's signal outputs can be connected to the phono stage and the remaining output left unused, or the two outputs can be connected in series (via a jumper) for higher output voltage.

► respect to how open and airy the sound truly is. There was not the slightest hint of congestion. The cartridge tracks like a dream and all I can say is I am most impressed with what the gentlemen at Lyra are doing. Should you pass by your local audio emporium and pick from the lower branches of this particular cartridge tree, you could be in for a very pleasant surprise indeed.

Which brings me back to the question to which I alluded earlier. I dedicated vinyl listener with an existing or burgeoning interest in recordings that pre-date stereo must surely by now be aware of the startling benefits of a true mono cartridge when it comes to playing mono discs. Given that such a customer might easily spend his hard-earned cash on a Helikon (just like I did) would he actually be better off buying a pair of Dorians, one stereo and one mono? That depends on just how

good the stereo Dorian is – and believe me when I say that it's very, very good indeed. It might sound like a strange recommendation but I'm suggesting that you consider exactly that. You'll be surprised by how little the stereo Dorian gives away. When you come to the mono you'll be blown away.

