

Etsuro Urushi MC Cartridge



My how time flies! It seems like only yesterday when I purchased a Musical Life Symphonia's turntable along with their 12" Vocalista tonearm and that great sounding Lyra Kleos cartridge as a birthday present to myself five years ago. The Kleos is an excellent sounding cartridge attractively priced for its performance, while it produces music with outstanding tracking ability, detail retrieval and transparency . But, lately I've been feeling that seven-year itch a little early! It is time to purchase another birthday present for myself?

At last year's Munich High-End audio show, I ran into Jay Bertrand of Bertrand Audio Imports in the Analog Domain/Marten Design room. I was impressed with the sound of the room and I immediately started to talk to him about my interest in the Analog Domain amplifier as he is the U.S importer. A couple of months after the show I called Bertrand to say hello and see what he might be up to. During that call he asked me if I listened to analog; "I said of course, how could I not?" I told him I was using the Lyra Kleos and that I was looking to find a reference quality cartridge to review. I was surprised when he told me he was importing the Etsuro Urushi moving coil cartridge from Japan. He told me that it's a state of the art cartridge that can compete with the other big guns and said if I were interested he'd send me one for a listen. Naturally, I told him, "Yes!"



Within weeks of that conversation, I received a small package via USPS. Yes, it was the Etsuro Urushi cartridge! Beautifully packaged in a delicately hand-finished wooden box. Upon opening it, this gorgeous looking Etsuro Urushi cartridge shone through like a jewel. Etsuro Urushi owns Excel Sound Corporation, a Tokyo based company that has been producing OEM cartridges for more than 50 years. The Excel Sound Corporation designs and manufactures the Etsuro Urushi cartridge. I tried to find out much as possible about the Etsuro Urushi design and their designer, but for some reason they remain very secretive. It's kind of unexpected because usually it's the other way around; the

manufacturers willingly give information, but not Etsuro Urushi. I do know that the Excel sound Corp has been producing OEM cartridges in all price ranges for many years.



Etsuro Urushi is a low-output moving coil cartridge that outputs 0.25 mV/1kHz. The lower outputs are produced by winding the coil with fewer turns of wire. This results in higher resolution and transparency. The EU features a super fine line (80u) diamond mounted in a sapphire cantilever. The copper wound coils are suspended in a field generated by a Samarium Cobalt magnet. The mounting plate is made of 2.5 mm sapphire and the Duralumin(A7075)

body is hand-coated by artisans with Urushi lacquer. The EU is finished exquisitely; it's a work of art; it is truly eye candy. At this price range, I think all cartridges should look as good as this one.

I'm not an expert setting up cartridges so for this review I had Mike Trei, an analog setup specialist, install the cartridge (and also to make sure my table was set up correctly). After he recalibrated my table and installed the cartridge, we gave it a listen. Immediately, it was impressive. As good as my Kleos is, the Etsuro Urushi rendered music with incredible fluency and superb inner detail while the solidity of the instruments was captivating. Bertrand recommended about 30-50 hours of break-in for it to sound its best but truth be told, right out of the box it bettered the Kleos in fluidity. At double the asking price of my Kleos, I had expected great things and now I found what I was looking for. I couldn't wait until I logged in more hours.



I listened for hours and hours at a time, enjoying my favorite music as I'd never enjoyed it before on my analog set up. It didn't matter what genre, whether I was listening

to Jazz, vocals, or Classical music. All were exceptional. As good as my Kleos is the Etsuro Urushi proved to be in a different class. Don't get me wrong, the Kleos is an exceptional sounding mid-priced cartridge. Listening to music with the EU was music to my ears. It rendered music with first class immediacy and transparency with solidity, weight, dynamics and power. The EU goes lower with much better timing, focus, and resolution with greater power and control, and greater width and depth soundstages than the Kleos. This resulted in very a real sounding and remarkably detailed, transparent rendition of *Blue City* by the Isao Suzuki quartet (PAP-20015 TBM-24). The EU is a champ in soundstaging as it produced a floor-to ceiling wall-to- wall spaciousness with three-dimensional images of instruments that was stunningly big and wide. The double bass produced a stunning low throb and a full-scale image that was remarkably real, as if Isao Suzuki were in the room doing his thing. The sound was rendered with great realism and musical engagement with an extraordinary presence, image solidity and scale. Tetsujiro Obara's shimmering cymbal work came alive with an incredible detail, openness and sheen. Kunihiko Sugano's piano work was exceptional and Kazumi Watanabe's guitar flowed effortlessly. Each instrument was solid, rich, vibrant and present in space. Isao Suzuki's quartet was in perfect harmony; it was poetry in motion.



Listening to one of my favorites, Mozart's Concerto for Violin and Orchestra No. 3 in G-major, K, 216 (DG2531 049) performed by the master, Anne-Sophie Mutter and the maestro Herbert Von Karajan conducting Berliner Philharmoniker was mesmerizing. I have listened to this extraordinary recording countless times. Incredibly, Mutter was only fourteen when this was recorded and she had nothing of the precocious "child prodigy" about her. Everything is in order, both technically and musically. Mutter's virtuosity was remarkably rendered with a natural attack, and it was rich, full-bodied and created a physical, three-dimensional image of the violin and the orchestra which were almost palpable. The orchestra was lush, lustrous, and full-bodied. The Etsuro Urushi performed superbly as it extracts what's cut into the LP's grooves. Its portrayal of individual images is exemplary as it consistently fleshed out delicate subtle details. The bowing textures on strings and cello - in particular - were more apparent than I was accustomed to.



The Etsuro Urushi's midrange is superb in tone, color and liquidity. The EU rendered vocals naturally and with an organic quality. Listening to Sarah Vaughan's recording of the "How Long Has This Been Going On?" (Pablo Records 2650-101), was more captivating than any time previous. I dimmed the lights and poured a glass of Bordeaux and I was in heaven. It can't get better than this ...(and if it can, I don't want to know)! I have listened to this recording many times. Her rich soulful voice was sensual and addictive as it should be. The EU conveyed Sarah's beautiful voice with sense of immediacy and the solidity of her voice in a truly three-dimensional space. The sound was authentic and closer to the live event than I would ever have thought possible. I can listen to Sarah for a lifetime!

As I said before, "I'm in trouble". I'm keeping the Etsuro Urushi as my new reference cartridge. The range of musical expression is an essential attribute of analogue and the Etsuro Urushi takes it to new levels. It is one of the new breed of harmonically enriched, full bodied, yet ultra-detailed and organic sounding cartridges that will

compete with the best. The Etsuro Urushi is highly recommended and I voted this gorgeous sounding cartridge as my 2016's Most Wanted component!

Key Kim



Specifications:

Etsuro Urushi MC Cartridge