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Armed Force

Scheu Analog's unusual Cantus tonearm makes a strong impression on Adam Smith...

The good old arm tube and what it brings to the record playing party (or doesn't) has been the subject of many a debate over the years. The unit itself is often referred to as the "tonearm" which dates back to the days of acoustic reproduction and 78s, when the big chunky arm that bridged the gap between the sound box and the horn did indeed impart its own tone onto the sound. Had there been internet forums in the nineteen twenties, I'm sure there would have been protracted arguments over the relative merits of tapered, straight, curved, brass, and steel tubes and what to stuff/line/coat them with, so the modern arm with its theories regarding bearings, tube material, etc., are just a natural evolution!

Interestingly though, few manufacturers have ever moved away from the central tube idea. Variations have come and gone, such as wooden arms from Grace, Garrard, Tonearm Audio (see *Hi-Fi World* April 2008), and even Scheu Analog themselves, with their flagship Tacco arm, but generally the tube reigns king.

Of course, things have evolved, with the tubes themselves made of exotic materials and featuring all manner of exciting drilling, damping and general fettling in order to obtain that holy grail of a neutral performance that minimises the inherently resonant nature of such an item. However, why not just dispense with the tube altogether? Scheu Analog have done just this!

Their new Cantus is a clever design that bears more than a passing resemblance to the original flat NAD 5120's arm from the early 1980s, but is quite a different beast. The arm itself isn't a tube at all, but a flat piece of acrylic which Scheu claim "reduces resonances to an absolute minimum, creating an unbelievably energetic but still 'relaxed' sound". The idea of making the whole arm and headshell combo from a single piece of material is not new, but to make this plastic and carefully machined is definitely a break from the norm.

Also relatively uncommon around this price point is the fact that the arm is a unipivot; as far as I know the only competition is the Roksan Nima, so the Cantus is in good company. Available in 9 and 12 inch variants and black or clear finishes, the Cantus is not difficult to set up, as everything is easily accessible and can be clearly seen. Tracking force is applied by a simple weight that is slid backwards and forwards in a machined slot (a stylus balance is required) and can also be rotated horizontally to set lateral balance correctly. Interestingly, no bias

compensation is fitted as Scheu claim it is not required. The instructions provided are basic but tell you all you need to know, except what the 45mm diameter rubber belt/washer in the box is for - I never did find out...

Fit and finish of the Cantus is superb, as we have come to expect from Scheu Analog, and belies the £760 retail price. My only real niggles are the lack of an armrest - which I generally view as highly desirable, especially given the rather wobbly nature of a unipivot - and why doesn't the balance weight have the lovely bright chrome finish of the other metal parts?

SOUND QUALITY

So far, every unipivot arm that I have encountered has been blessed with a lovely sense of air and spatiality when compared to a conventional pivoted design, and the Cantus is no different in this respect. The soundstage really does stretch far and wide beyond the loudspeakers and between its extremes is positively packed with fine levels of well sorted detail. Across the top end the Cantus is remarkably clean and detailed, without the slightest hint of sibilance or 'spitch', and it maintains this performance across the entire side of the record, thanks to its twelve inch length giving lower tracking distortion.

Midband detail was equally impressive, the Scheu pulling lead instruments well to the fore of the performance and placing backing aspects precisely where they should be around this. Lead vocal performances were vivid and strong, stretching out into the listening room in a highly convincing and impressive manner. Van Morrison sounded suitably gruff on his 'Enlightenment' album, and the emotion of Kurt Cobain's 'Nirvana: Unplugged in New York' performance was quite striking, especially when coupled to the atmosphere with which the Cantus endowed the whole concert.

The Cantus definitely strikes a quite forward balance, however, which is something that should be borne in mind when matching cartridges. Sounds4Enjoyment provided a Scheu Analog MC Scheu for the review, which is a fine Benz Micro-sourced design, but I felt that this combo was too hard and forceful across the upper midband, especially with electronica such as OMD's 'Forever Live and Die'. The

rather smoother Ortofon Rondo Bronze was a much better match in this respect, and really showed the Cantus off to the best of its abilities.

The one area in which I have sometimes felt it necessary to be a little forgiving when it comes to unipivots is in their bass performance, which can sometimes lack the focus and depth of a conventionally pivoted design. It was here however that the Cantus played its trump card, as it has one of the tightest and most detailed bass performances you are likely to find, south of the likes of the £1,300 Audio Origami PU7.

Combined with the Black Diamond turntable which is itself no slouch down the bottom, the result was a setup that simply floored pretty much anything else I have heard at the price when it came to sheer bass grunt and pace. I would quite easily place the deck in the SME10A category in this respect and even within shouting distance of my Garrard 301, which is about as high a level of praise that I can offer!

Bass lines started and stopped with alacrity, and the detail that the Cantus pulled from the grooves at the low end was nothing short of astounding. The bass guitar from The Blue Nile's 'Tinseltown in the Rain' provided a positively granite-solid foundation for the track to build on and the Cantus hung the backing percussive effects outside the loudspeakers most convincingly. Briefly swapping back to our Pioneer PLC-590/SME M2-10 combo added a lovely dose of SME top end sweetness to alleviate that slight upper mid hardness that still lurked somewhat, but shrank the soundstage and pushed the bass guitar back into the mix.

REFERENCE SYSTEM

Scheu Analog Black Diamond turntable
Scheu Analog MC Scheu/Ortofon Rondo Bronze cartridges
Emille Labs KPE-2AS phono stage
Creek OBH22 preamplifier
Quad II-eighty power amplifiers
Spendor S8e loudspeakers

Grateful thanks to Dave Barker of Sounds4Enjoyment [+44(0)23 9271 7628, www.sounds4enjoyment.com] for supplying our review Cantus!

CONCLUSION

The Scheu Analog Cantus 12 is a highly impressive arm design that departs from the conventions of such devices to deliver an impressive result. As mentioned, it requires a cartridge with a rather smoother nature to achieve a really well balanced result but the clarity, dynamics and sheer low end agility that it offers are rare at the price.



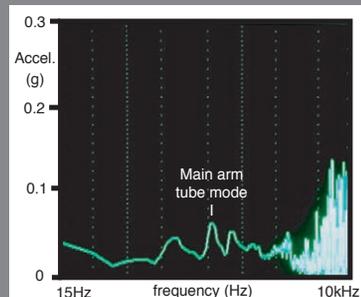
MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Just as its appearance is quite different to all other arms, so the Scheu Analog Cantus measures unusually as well. Thanks to its skeletal structure the main arm modes are well distributed, as there is no main 'tube' as such to resonate. The largest of the resonant peaks is at 550Hz, corresponding nicely to the half wavelength of a twelve inch item, but it does not reach 0.1g in magnitude so the arm structure is very well behaved.

Equally good is the headshell itself, the design of which is more related to other arms and shows the usual pattern of closely crowded peaks. However, once again, these peaks are at a lower level than we are used to seeing, most likely due to the headshell being much thicker than usual and thus better damped.

All in all the Scheu Analog Cantus turns in one of the best measurements we have seen under the accelerometer so far at Hi-Fi World. It is highly likely to be a neutral and accomplished performer without too much of a sonic signature of its own. AS.

ARM VIBRATION



HI-FI WORLD

VERDICT ●●●●●£

Sounds as different as it looks - superb detailing, dynamics and ambience make for a thrilling listen.

SCHEU ANALOG CANTUS 12 £760

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FOR

- bass detail
- spatiality and atmosphere
- dynamic alacrity
- top end clarity
- design

AGAINST

- slight upper mid hardness
- no arm rest!