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& Record Review

ULTIMATE HI-FI 2011

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UK £4.50 US \$10.99 Aus \$10.50



AUDIO
FILE

Medium output moving-coil pick-up
 Made by: Clearaudio Electronic GmbH
 Supplied by: Audio Reference UK Ltd
 Telephone: 01252 702705
 Web: www.clearaudio.de; www.audioreference.co.uk

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 HIGHLY
 COMMENDED

Clearaudio Concept MC (£530)

Clearaudio has a range of MM cartridges in its portfolio with price tickets to suit all pockets, but its moving-coils are decidedly high-end. So this new Concept MC is pitched at enthusiasts wanting a delicious moving-coil instead, and one that won't break the bank.

Its body is of aluminium magnesium alloy with a ceramic surface layer; it features a boron cantilever and Micro Line Contact stylus profile, with oxygen-free copper (OFC) coil windings in its generator. The angular body shape with centre line at the front makes it easy to align, threaded holes meaning that you don't have to fiddle with screws and nuts. Clearaudio includes a full cover stylus guard.

The Concept MC's 0.42mV output is comparatively high, so there's no requirement for a super quiet phono stage and you certainly need not be concerned about system noise. Using an RCM Audio Sensor Prelude MM/MC phono stage, with appropriate gain setting and recommended 100ohm loading, we were surprised when the stylus landed in the run-in groove for the very first time. Ouch! Playback level was extremely

'No longer were we resting in the lap of the trombone player'

loud, blaring out from a silent background with not even the faintest low-level background hiss to suggest the system was turned up way too high for comfort.

We enjoyed listening to it over an extended period in both Clearaudio's Innovation Compact turntable with the company's elaborate Universal arm and also in VPI's excellent-value Classic 1.

Should you read a review of the Concept MC elsewhere, remember that the sound the writer will describe is the sound experienced in his/her own system. Obvious you say, yet it's no exaggeration to say one could relate the sound character of the Concept MC in two different ways – two quite different presentations.

HIGH OCTANE

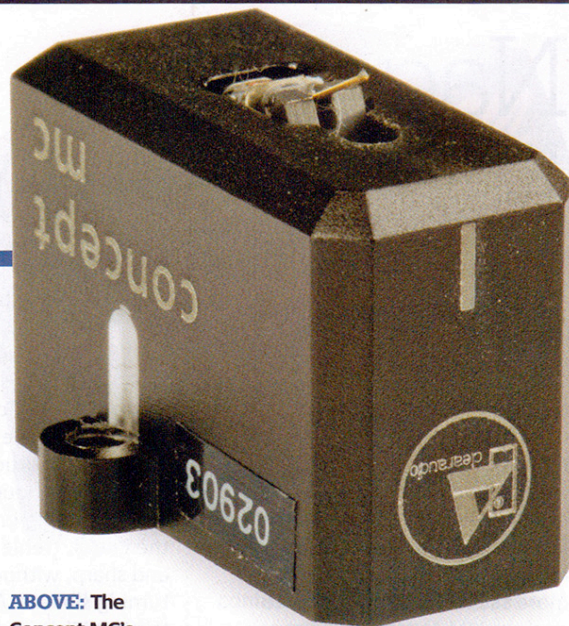
Playing a familiar audiophile reference LP, Harry James' *Comin' From A Good Place* [Sheffield Lab, LAB 6] showed the Concept MC to be really fast and forthright in the VPI, the supremely vivid recording of rasping brass and percussion catapulting out from the loudspeakers. Here, the Concept MC seemed to shift our usual listening seat from the middle of the stalls right up to the front of the stage.

The sound was magnificently palpable, you felt you could reach out and touch the musicians, but it was a little hard. Swapping out the Concept MC for Ortofon's ruby-cantilevered Cadenza Blue, we found the sound had more warmth and body, was less monochromatic and stark in character, with silkier high frequencies and more air. (At twice the price, what else should we have expected?)

The Concept's grippy and metrical quality made listening to tight, intricate jazz-rock recordings a high octane experience. Brand X's 1980 *Do They Hurt?*

[Charisma CAS1151], a collection of studio out-takes from the *Product* album released the previous year, was really in yer' face and charged with energy. But it seemed a tad hard and bright.

Yet this comparison between the 'crystalline' Concept MC and 'liquid' Cadenza Blue was turned on its head using the Clearaudio turntable/arm. Here was a marriage



ABOVE: The Concept MC's body is in a tough, ceramic-coated aluminium alloy. Clearaudio's choice of a stiff boron rod cantilever is visible here along with its micro line contact stylus and moving-coil generator assembly. Stylus guard is removable and the MC comes in a handsome transparent pyramid case

made in heaven, the lightning-quick Concept delivering a holographic soundstage. No longer were we resting in the lap of the trombone player with the Harry James: the listening seat had shifted further from the stage so one could better appreciate the space the band was performing in. And the shimmer of the ride cymbal was tremendous.

The velvety quality of the Clearaudio combination (largely attributable, we feel, to the tonearm) then made the Ortofon sound thick and syrupy where the vivid and super-clear Concept MC defined each of the band's performers clearly within an airy, grain-free soundstage.

VERDICT

The Concept MC may not have the refinement of Clearaudio's luxury models, but it's a great cartridge notwithstanding, and so can be regarded as excellent value. Ⓣ

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Generator type/weight	Moving coil / 8.0g
Recommended tracking force	1.8-2.2mN (2.0mN)
Sensitivity/balance (re. 5cm/sec)	425µV / 0.52dB
Compliance (vertical/lateral)	12cu / 28cu
Vertical tracking angle	24 degrees
L/R Tracking ability	>80µm / >80µm
L/R Distortion (-8dB, 20Hz-20kHz)	0.57-12% / 0.49-4.5%
L/R Frequency resp. (20Hz-20kHz)	+1.6 to -2.4dB / +1.1 to -0.9dB
Stereo separation (1kHz / 20kHz)	30dB / 16dB