

Vertere MG1MkII to the power of Imperium

Wednesday, August 23, 2023
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Vertere MG1 MkII, Imperium, Mystic and Phono 1

Hello again dear readers. Those of you who have been with us for a while may pick up on the fact that this is my third review of the Vertere MG1 Magic Groove record player and the second of the MkII version. I therefore do not propose to rehash the most recent one published in March 2022. Suffice it to say that our editor awarded it 5 stars on the strength of the review and I selected the MG1 as one of my products of the year for 2022, which it thoroughly deserved.

So what's different this time around? In the previous review the external power supply was the excellent Tempo motor drive unit supplemented with the Challenger power supply, here we have the upgraded Imperium motor drive in place of Tempo. This time I also had my core reviewing system in place, consisting of the Primaluna EVO400 integrated amplifier and my Harbeth Compact7 ES-XD loudspeakers mounted on their custom made HiFi Racks Fortis stands. My Gold Note PH10/PSU two box phono stage was replaced by Vertere's own Phono 1 MkII L phono stage.

I was greatly helped in the set-up of the system by Mike Burn, head of UK Sales for Vertere who brought all the equipment with him (I say helped, in fact Mike took care of the whole installation). I have known Mike since his days in retail and have seen his meticulous approach to system set up many times, and was very confident that once he had done his work the set-up would be optimal.

Once the player itself had been carefully placed on the top shelf of my equipment rack and checked several times to ensure that it was perfectly level, using a spirit level and minute adjustments to the players feet. The drive unit was then attached with the DIN cable supplied. The next task was to tune the Imperium motor drive precisely to this individual motor to make sure we enjoyed absolute speed stability during playback. These tasks would normally be undertaken by your dealer and I would suggest leaving it to them - they have had the necessary training to accomplish the optimum set-up.

The arm's output cables were then plugged into the Phono 1 MkII L, whose loadings had been set for the Mystic moving coil cartridge. Finally, a pair of Vertere RCA cables were installed between the Phono 1 MkII L and the Primaluna amplifier. Power to the Imperium and the Phono 1 MkII L was supplied through Vertere's Pulse-HB cables (£2,795). We were good to start listening.

You got your stacks of wax

We allowed all the electronics to warm up for about an hour before Mike suggested that we should play something. That something turned out to be a very special treat. Mike produced from



first album. Miles Showell at Abbey Road Studios, whose name you may recognise as the guru behind all sorts of half speed mastered album reissues in recent years, happens to have chosen Vertere turntables for use in his development lab, and gave the acetate to Mike as a thank you for the work that he and Vertere have done there. But I digress.

Mike had me sit in my usual listening chair and cued up Killer on the MG1. Oh. My. Goodness! This was a truly ecstatic experience. The music leapt forth from the Harbeths, with





pulsating bass of a level that almost made me check that my subwoofer was not switched on, and with every aspect of the production laid bare, with that magnificent voice weaving above and through the dense instrumental fabric. I was absolutely transfixed and when the stylus on the Mystic hit the run-out groove I found myself totally lost for words, with my guest grinning from ear to ear.

Once the dust had settled and I had regained the power of speech, Mike selected my original copy of Pink Floyd's epic post-Waters live album *Pulse*, which still gets regular play here. He and I share love of almost all things 'Floyd, and if time had permitted we might have gorged on all eight sides. As it was we, settled for playing the last side, which is perhaps the most exciting single side of any live album in my collection. *Wish You Were Here* starts it off, followed by *Comfortably Numb* and what may be David Gilmour's very best guitar solo on *Run Like Hell* finishes the whole show. I have never heard this music sound better than it did on my relatively modest system that morning. If anyone tells you that valves sound too warm or that Harbeth loudspeakers don't play rock, I can promise you that this first morning with the Vertere equipment put those mistaken opinions to the sword.

With his work done, Mike departed on his long drive home from deepest Devon, leaving me to continue playing, and play I most certainly did. What the Vertere front end made me want to do was to reach into my record collection away from my usual fare, to gems that I forget to play because they are stored outside the listening room. I have acquired quite a lot of jazz albums in recent years and I thought after the aural fireworks this would be a soothing return to more sedate sounds. Wrong again Kelly.

If you are not familiar with the work of American vocalist Lyn Stanley you owe it to yourself to rectify that as soon as possible. I have several of her albums on vinyl and also on SACD. Her story is an interesting one. She only took up singing professionally after a career as a business woman and started her recording career at a stage in her life when she might have been forgiven for considering early retirement and a life of leisure. Thank goodness she chose another option and started to sing for her supper. She is also fanatical about sound quality and oversees every stage of the creative process, from choosing her material to appointing musicians, producers and everyone needed to get a record to market. She also insists on her recordings being all-analogue (alleluia). I chose one of her earliest efforts to play on the MG1, called *Potions*, released in 2014. This a collection of well-known songs from the 1950s and by the time I got to the second track *Cry Me A River* I was totally immersed in her sound world. Her voice fits the material perfectly, and the skilled musicians behind her never impinge on her space but provide wonderfully sympathetic support to her own gorgeous voice. I have never met Ms Stanley, but I can tell you that she was in my listening room that afternoon, her voice sounding so real within a perfectly formed soundstage that it was almost holographic.

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Staying with the jazz theme, my next selection was the Paul Chambers Quartet's 1957 recording *Bass On Top*. This reissue on Blue Note Tone Poet label is a regular spinner, because I am awed by the interplay between four very fine musicians and the fact that they recorded the whole album in just one day at Rudy van Gelder's studio in Hackensack, New Jersey. Van Gelder himself was the engineer for the sessions and he did a fine job. The sound of Paul Chambers' double bass, whether being bowed or plucked, is full bodied and almost organic, and the Vertere system more than did it justice - I have never heard it sound better.



Having already played Pink Floyd I then went through some of my other usual test albums, including Love's timeless recording *Forever Changes*. At the risk of becoming repetitive, I have never heard it sound better than this. The complex arrangements sound perfect, but through the Vertere I was able to enjoy the broad sweep of Arthur Lee's 1967 vision but also follow different strands within every track.

At this point I thought I should switch out the Imperium and install the Tempo motor drive. Having heard this during my review last year I was surprised at how the change in this one component had such a profound effect on the sound. Don't get me wrong, the Tempo is a fine piece of kit but the overall sound of the system was somehow diminished. That magic sense of unforced musical flow which had so mesmerised me with the Imperium driving the player had to some extent gone and I only played a few sides through the Tempo before reinstating the Imperium. If you decide to audition the MG1MkII (and you really should), make sure that your budget can accommodate the Imperium before you listen to it because I am very sure that once heard it will become a 'must have'. Once the Imperium was back in its rightful place the system immediately sounded more full-bodied and the timing on everything I played was simply unbeatable.

A few days later I switched the Phono 1 MkII L out and replaced it with my own Gold Note PH10/PSU. I set the values to those which suit the Mystic cartridge, and let the Gold Note pair warm up before resuming my listening. I worked backwards through the play pile of albums that had accumulated, starting with *Forever Changes*. Where through the Phono 1 MkII L it had been an almost visceral experience, it now sounded more polite, less immediate. The Gold Note is my day-to-day phono stage and I hold it in high regard but in this context it had to yield to the Vertere. As with the motor drive, be prepared to make space on your rack for the Phono 1 MkII L if it forms part of your dealer audition, because you may conclude that it is indispensable if you have the same set up as I had here.

MG1 MkII conclusion

I have written before of my admiration for Touraj Moghaddam, the founder and chief designer of Vertere Acoustics. He is a modern renaissance man, a musician, a music lover and collector, a scientist and an engineer, whose passion for his work is undiminished after decades. He is continually striving to improve his products while adding to the Vertere catalogue with new ones. I doubt he has ever uttered the words "that's good enough". I had heard the Phono 1 MkII L previously, using my own analogue front end, and had thoroughly enjoyed it. However,

hearing it in the context of the complete record player that I had here this time it makes complete sense.

Similarly, my previous experience with MG1 MkII had been with the Tempo drive unit, and at the time I thought it made a great pairing with the player. Then in comes the Imperium and I have to recalibrate, because with this in place the MG1MkII reached another level of performance. In the context of an all-Vertere analogue front end, the Mystic cartridge is also a must-have item. I have heard many fine cartridges over the years, including some exquisite Japanese examples, but I cannot think of one that would be a finer match in this system.

If you have the requisite funds, and are in the market for a new vinyl replay system, I would insist that you put this Vertere set up at the top of your list to audition. It sounds amazing, is built to the highest standards and should give you many years of musical joy. But do you know the scary thing about all this? The MG1 MkII Magic Groove is only the third of four record players in the current Vertere catalogue. The RG1 Reference Groove and the SG1 Super Groove sit above it in the hierarchy and although they of course cost more again I suspect that with Touraj's magic dust on them they would be worth every penny. However, for most mere mortals the MG1 MkII is an absolutely magnificent and appropriate system and once again worthy of all the praise that I and others have heaped upon it, and I was very sad to see it go.

