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MEZZO MOVING IRON PHONO CARTRIDGE

rev 2

Owner's Manual and Technical Description

Mounting Instructions

The Mezzo has the ability to accept long mounting screws into its body due to the unique design. You do not need to use screws of an exact required length. You must, however, make sure that since the screws first enter the relatively soft threaded composite material before they enter the brass, that they are threaded correctly. They should not bind, or cross thread. If you encounter difficulty inserting the screws while turning, stop immediately and make sure the screws are the proper 2.5mm metric thread, and that you have not started them in at an improper angle.

Supplied with your Mezzo are our EZ-Mount screws made of both nylon and metal, as well as other non magnetic screws of varying lengths. The nylon washers are LOCKING type, and must be threaded onto any screw you use. If you wish to shorten any screw, it is advisable to first install a supplied nut, and after shortening the screws, remove the nut to repair the threads.

Electrical Loading

The Mezzo is designed to be used with a Moving Coil Preamp OR a moving magnet preamp with between 48-52 dB of gain. Some have very successfully used the Mezzo with a Moving Magnet preamp, assuming that there is sufficient gain in both the MM preamp stage and following it.

The new Mezzo requires a MINIMUM RESISTIVE LOAD of 1500 Ohms, with best loading determined by your system and your listening preferences. Usually, this is between 1500 and 2500 Ohms. There is no harm in using a 47K typical MM load, but you may experience a slightly peaked high end. Capacitive loading may reduce that effect somewhat to a satisfactory degree. Again, loading requirements will be determined by your system, and your personal listening preferences. PLEASE NOTE that loading well below 1000 Ohms will result in loss of high frequencies.

Please also note that some designs of "current amplifier" preamp circuits will not allow

loading in the range required, causing the Mezzo to sound very dull – again, caused by improper loading, resulting in loss of high frequencies.

Unlike other cartridges, the Mezzo is a six sided fully shielded cartridge, and being such, is one of the world most hum-free and RF free cartridges. When properly used with shielded cable from your tone-arm, there should be no hum whatsoever.

Tracking Force

The Mezzo is designed to operate between 1.6 grams and 2.2 grams. Optimal force is usually 1.7 – 1.9 grams, but may be marked on each cartridge box. Higher VTF may be used, but will result in the cartridge eventually “bottoming” on the record. The cartridge is designed such that no damage will occur to the record or cartridge when that happens.

Hookup

Normal color codes are used for hookup: as viewed from the rear of the cartridge in the normal position, RED is top right, White is top left. Grounds are below them, green on the right, blue on the left.

Questions, questions, questions....

How long will my Mezzo last?

All diamond styli last approximately 1000 hours when aligned and used correctly. Soundsmith can re-tip your Mezzo for a fee of \$650 at this time, restoring the diamond to new condition. If the Ruby cantilever is snapped, we can still rebuild the cartridge. **Unlike many other manufacturers of fine cartridges, you will find that The Soundsmith is very interested in protecting your investment over the long term.**

Adjustments

We have included a few pages on cartridge alignment with your Mezzo, which you are strongly encouraged to read and follow. Although the Mezzo will perform satisfactorily without critical alignment, we strongly advise you do attempt to do so, just as you would balance the tires on your car before expecting the best performance from them. It is strongly advisable therefore, to perform cartridge alignments to the best of your ability. One must therefore align an advanced stylus design carefully and correctly to enjoy its benefits. While some expensive cartridge designs employ lower cost, less aggressive styli shapes and therefore enjoy the benefit of ease of alignment, they can also suffer at times from less than optimal performance. We made the decision to use one of the best stylus shapes available, to allow those who demand the best performance possible to realize such if careful alignment and record care are employed.

Azimuth

An approximate azimuth setting can be viewed by looking at the front of the cartridge, while it is playing mid-point on a record. By looking at the gap between the metal bottom of the cartridge and the record surface, one should attempt to make this gap even. Back-lighting this can help to visualize this gap. Best azimuth is obtained by obtaining equal channel separation via a test record.

Stylus Rake Angle – (or VTA)

Normal SRA is achieved when the cartridge, as viewed from the side, should have the top FLAT of the body (headshell) parallel with the surface of the record. Adjustment up or down from that point will affect the high frequency performance.

Some thoughts about the Mezzo

What happens to the energy that is “Stored”?? The energy that goes up the cantilever moves the generating element. If that can be made small enough, good things happen. But what happens to the energy that goes into the cartridge body?? The Mezzo employs a very unique “Energy Distribution System” to insure that the energy gets into the cartridge body properly, and into the waiting tone arm to be damped. It is one of the features of the Mezzo, and one of the major contributing design efforts towards perfection.

Moving mass

Magnetic cartridges have three elements necessary to generate a voltage; a magnet, coil assemblies, and an “iron” or ferrous component of some shape. The performance of any magnetic cartridge is largely dependent on how little “moving mass” it has; this is both the mass of the stylus at the end of the cantilever, as well as the total mass of the voltage generating parts that the stylus must move. While there are some advantages to specific designs, both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges are at a distinct disadvantage in regard to moving mass as they are required to move either a relatively large magnet, or a “coil assembly”. The coil assembly is in reality is a series of wire windings often on a metal core, more properly labeled as an “armature”.

In a moving iron design, one has the potential to reduce the moving mass to a very small value by virtue of the having the required two relatively massive elements (coils and magnet) held in fixed position.

It is important to understand that while it is true that all designs have trade-offs, a designer must arrange the order of trade-offs carefully. Reducing moving mass is at the top of the list for Soundsmith; less inertia in the generating elements means faster starts and faster stops. It also means a much easier job of damping the unwanted “ringing” of the moving system, a system that must make sudden, accurate and controlled directional changes to

follow the grooves of a record.

In order to obtain accurate vinyl reproduction, the stylus must remain in near constant contact with the groove walls. The larger the moving mass, the greater the jittering of the stylus, meaning that it is in reality taking “samples” of the groove walls from moment to moment, and averaging or guessing at what is taking place in between those samples. A “digital” sort of rendering, if you will. Lower mass? Less jitter. Less jitter means more time in contact with the groove, which means detail and micro detail. If a cartridge can’t stay in contact with the groove walls, you can’t hear everything that is on the record. In a very real sense, it’s that simple.

The obvious question, “Why doesn’t everyone make cartridges this way, if reducing the moving mass is an absolute requirement for accuracy?” The answer to that is simple as well. It’s very hard to do so. A properly designed Moving Iron cartridge requires an ultra-high level of precision in manufacturing, and potentially lower product yield. It is not the best path for profitability, only sonic ability. The other issue is that other companies have been making MC designs for many years and are heavily invested in that very old technology. How could they radically re-tool what they do, change designs and begin to justify their engineering decisions of the past that they have now abandoned?

Fortunately, Soundsmith does not have to weigh such considerations. We chose the right technologies for the right reasons. And we will always do so, even abandoning the past if necessary.

Another advantage of our MI design is the inherent high level of channel separation. Unlike MC cartridges, a slight rotation of the generating element in The Mezzo (moving iron) due to manufacturing tolerances or aging does not affect the separation at all. Furthermore, unlike moving coil cartridges, our generating element in our Moving Iron designs CANNOT rotate out of position, thusly maintaining the critical azimuth position for the life of the cartridge.

It is our hope that your carefully crafted, hand-made Soundsmith Mezzo cartridge will bring you many years of listening pleasure. The simple fact is, when we sit at a microscope for hours making each one, that is primary in our thoughts.....we hope that each one will bring some joy to the listener.

Peter Ledermann
President