



The History Man

by Richard S. Foster

Readers of this magazine know my fondness for my Thorens 124. Mine is from 1957 or '58 and I love it dearly. While I've always had this set for mono playback utilizing the 1950's French moving coil cartridge manufactured by Pierre Clement, mounted to the excellent Ikeda 407t, I've recently enjoyed some fine stereo playback using a couple of vintage Ortofon SPU cartridges. There is nothing like listening to vintage recordings with vintage playback gear.

Anyone who owns the original 124 (1957-66) is well aware of the short coming inherent in the design: the cast-iron platter. Although one of the great physical strengths of this table, this cast iron design has had an unfortunate effect in limiting the breadth of cartridges one could use. Phono cartridges with exceptionally strong magnets were heretofore a definite no-no. You put the cartridge on the arm, place the arm on the lead in grooves and watch in horror as the magnets in the cartridge would cause the stylus assembly to bottom out on the record. Also, trying to adjust proper tracking force was a major problem - readings taken with gauges like the Shure were almost always wrong. Just so you understand, there is an aluminum 'shell platter' that sits over the cast iron platter. Affixed to the aluminum shell are a rubber mat and a 'hidden' spring loaded 45RPM adapter. A slight push and turn of this adapter and voila, you could now play your favorite 45's with no hassle.

There were distinct advantages to the consumer when Thorens released the MKII version of the table in mid-1966. Not only were there major mechanical updates, perhaps the most important change of all was in their selection of materials for the new platter. It was aluminum and zinc. While this opened the door on an infinite choice of cartridges, I personally couldn't help feeling that some of the magic was lost with the aluminum product.

While the short comings of the 124 have never really bothered me, I'd always wondered what the overall performance of the table would be like with either a NOS

Ortofon SPU or, more to the point: a modern pickup like the Lyra Titan. How would this table perform compared to my VPI TNT/JMW combination? Unfortunately, this was never going to happen based upon the limitations of the cast-iron platter.

Well this has now all changed thanks to my friend Juerg Schopper of Winterthur, Switzerland.

Schopper, together with several Swiss metallurgists have solved the cast iron sub platter problem. They've developed a replacement that is so far superior to the original product, it's almost laughable. The project to bring this to market took more than two years and was not, in a word, easy. The right combination of materials took extensive research and an awful lot of trial and error. A technology known as 'grey cast' was put to use in the manufacture of this new platter. It has something to do with the development of an alloy (cast iron with graphite flakes) used by the U.S. Marines for the production of drive components for Minesweepers during World War II.

The new platter weighs in at approximately 5 kilograms, very close to the original cast-iron platter weight of approximately 4.32 kilos. Let me first describe the procedure for changing platters and then we'll get to the sound. First you remove the aluminum 'shell platter' and put this in a safe place. You will immediately see three flat head screws which lock the cast iron platter to the bearing. You can pull either this entire assembly out (which may not be a bad idea especially if you have used any of your Thorens bearing oil on the bearing shaft in the last six months), or you may just unscrew the three screws. Whichever way you decide to handle the procedure it really is just removing the cast-iron platter with these three screws. Pull the platter off and place it in a container for storage... you will not need it again.

When you remove the old platter, you will probably notice the painted strobe patterns, for the first time. Schopper has done an excellent job in repainting these patterns on the new platter. Place the new unit on top of the bearing assembly ►



▶ and replace and tighten the three screws. Place your aluminum 'shell platter' on top and turn the table on. Whether you have or haven't lubricated the bearing, let the table run for approximately 20 minutes before you adjust the speed. Please remember, whenever you adjust the speed of a table, you want the oil in the bearing to be 'warm'. You also want a record on the platter with the arm and cartridge in place.

Whether you adjust the speed using the built in strobe of the 124 or decide to use the wonderful KAB speedstrobe, <http://www.kabusa.com/strobe.htm>, or via Moth Marketing 01234-741152)

this will take you just a few seconds. I've always been amazed at how there is no drift with this table. Perhaps I'm just very lucky that when it was rebuilt, it was done properly. I've had this table approximately three years and take care of it like a newborn baby. As I've previously mentioned, I'm fully aware of the 'flavour' this combination (mostly from the cartridge) imparts on the playback chain, but it's a wonderful euphonic player that suits the music so well.

Now for the sound. It's simply outrageous! This new platter is a major upgrade. Anyone who's heard the before and after with the table has been shocked. The dynamic swing is quite simply incredible. The table is much faster, offering a lower noise floor and much greater impact and both the low and high frequencies. I wasn't really ready for this.

I've now had the opportunity to use my Thorens in stereo mode with a variety of cartridges and find the experience to be exceptionally satisfying. The sound of this Swiss table has really been transformed and it continues to prove to me how important the right platter material is in turntables.

The Schopper platter for the 124 is an absolute must have for anyone who is really serious about maximizing the performance of their Thorens. And please... contact Schopper to see if this platter will work with your Mark II.

Information is available at:

http://www.schopper.ch/static/services/z_top_audio/Neutrik/TD124_Mainplatter_english.html

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PO. Box 185
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Price, FOB Winterthur, is \$850USD

More Stillness...

And now back to one of my favorite subjects... vibrations, isolation, resonance dissipation and those wonderful people at Stillpoints.

There have been a few changes since I wrote about the virtues of using Stillpoints in your audio system. It seems that some of their German clients weren't happy with 'hearing' the ceramic bearings inside their Stillpoints when handling them,

so the company decided to minimize this by changing from five to six 'balls' inside the inner shell. I've auditioned the new Stillpoints and really didn't hear much in the way of a change. Sometimes it's hard to take an almost perfect product and make it 'more perfect'. They've also been busy creating a fantastic cryogenically treated

component stand that I can't stop raving about. It's a very clever design consisting of three legs (more can be ordered), an upper and lower hub (to lock the legs into place) and three mini inverse risers with nylon tipped set-screws for the component to rest upon. Each leg also rests on a 'set screw', which in turn, is screwed into a small but highly effective device-attached to the underside of the leg-which incorporates Stillpoint technology. In other words, each leg contains full Stillpoint technology (The Component Stand is the first product, outside of the Stillpoints themselves, to incorporate Stillpoint technology in its design) Simple. Brilliant. Unbelievably effective.

Each leg has been machined so there is an elbow that fits inside the hub (the elbows are on the top and the bottom, [think of a 'thick' "T" at right angles]. These legs fit into grooves in the hub, so that they can be angled to suit whatever piece of equipment is to be supported. The top of the hub is held in place by a large allen bolt. The legs need to be angled so that the mini inverse risers which slide along their top edges can be ideally positioned, depending on the shape of the base

plate and the weight distribution of the supported unit. When you've got everything nailed you tighten down the locking screw and then back-off a half turn. So, what you're looking at might be as simple as an equilateral pedestal or perhaps you want to create more of a "Y" effect (as I did when ▶



▶ using under my Manley amps which are only 7 1/2 inches wide but approximately 22 inches long. It's a really versatile package that should accommodate almost all eventualities. The stand weighs in, with three legs at 3.5 pounds (1.6 kg). The assembled height, is 3.75 inches. Oh, and by the way... each stand will hold 300 pounds! (136kg)

Now... I was totally knocked out with how well the previous system (utilizing four Stillpoints with risers and inverse risers) performed under my amps, so I was kind of skeptical that this stand could do as good a job. Well, trust me - it does. Perhaps even better! It offers outstanding rigidity for the amplifiers and there is less contact area (inverse risers are gone) on my carpeted floor area. The same ability to remove unwanted resonances from any mechanical feedback is being offered in a new, sleek package. Where this really became evident was in my experimentation with a four-legged stand underneath the dCS Elgar Plus/Verdi LaScala SACD/CD playback system.

David Steven of dCS was kind enough to lend me this setup for my RCA/Mercury SACD reviews and I've really garnered great respect for this equipment. One of the qualities this system offers is uncanny resolution and information from digital media. Without a doubt the dCS equipment has opened my ears for the first time to the qualities that great digital has to offer. What it also did, was allow me to really screen carefully what I was hearing with the component stand.

RG advised me in advance that his experience has shown that this equipment needs two major allowances: a rock solid foundation and the ability to remove unnecessary vibration. I know just the product! Well, thanks to Paul and Mike at Stillpoints, they've come through again. In carefully putting the component stand together, I asked for four legs and opted to replace the four screw 'toes' underneath the legs, with Stillpoints and inverse



risers. I tried this setup first without the Stillpoints/riser additions and then with. No doubt about it. I was deriving a definite increase in resolution, stability of the image and ability to hear into the sound-field when the Stillpoints and inverse risers were added. I also placed sheets of ERS between the Elgar Plus and the Verdi LaScala as well as a couple of sheets resting on top of the Verdi.

For those who are going to ask, the answer is yes, I did try Stillpoints, risers and inverse risers between the Elgar and the Verdi but felt the sound was superior when the mass of these units was together and not

separated. If someone had the room or inclination, perhaps another component stand might be the answer, but based upon where I have the equipment positioned, it works best for me in the above configuration. I tried several combinations of the stand and Stillpoints with the dCS components and feel that four legs with the risers and Stillpoints maximizes my resonance control, isolation and rock solid support.

Let me make this very simple for you. These component stands are not optional. They are 'must have' units. Something is going on here and I'm not sure just what it is, but what I am hearing is a clarity and lucid detail I've never obtained before, whether used under the Manleys or the dCS.

In the meantime, I've also placed a set of Stillpoints/risers /inverse risers under the Audio Physic Luna 2 sub-woofer that's recently arrived and I'm finally getting that lower octave I missed so much. Here also, the Stillpoints system worked wonders over the manufacturer supplied pointed feet... but that is a topic for another day.

Available in North America from:

Stillpoints LLC
 Tel. +1 715 254 0707
 Toll Free. 1 877 410 2567
 Fax. + 1 715 254 0653
 E-mail. info@stillpoints.us
 Net. www.stillpoints.us
 Price: \$799 per three-legged stand
 \$199 for each additional leg

Europe:

ACTIVE Audio Vertrieb GmbH, Germany
 Tel. + 49 (0) 911 880 330
 Fax. + 49 (0) 911 888 8530
 email: harald.hofmann@active-audio.net
 Retail Price: €995 three legged stand (Understand this includes 21% duties and sales tax as well as transportation incoming and to the dealers)

Mass matters...

I'd always felt that a lot of what I liked from my early VPI 'tables was down to the mass of the platter. For years I kept my original lead filled acrylic platter, passing on several incarnations: the delrin platter, the aluminum and delrin platter and it wasn't until the stainless steel and delrin version of the Mark 4 (I believe) became available that I switched. I switched again of course because of the benefit of the peripheral ring and weight for the TNT6, but again, we're taking mass here. There is something about this mass that equates to the dynamics, speed and noise floor I find lacking in acrylic only platters. Something which RG too seems to have discovered in his time with 'tables like the Spj Alba and Blue Pearl. Mass might be a pain to deal with, but when it comes to record platters I'm afraid there really is no substitute.

