



# Cyrus Phono Signature

**P**roducing a decent phono stage is a tricky business — especially if it has to be able to cope with both moving magnet (MM) and moving coil (MC) cartridges. Low-output MC cartridges often deliver such a low output signal level (0.4 mV or less) that the signal path has to be absolutely clean and devoid of any form of noise if the source signal is to be preserved.

But reliably amplifying a very low-level signal is only part of what a phono stage is meant to do. It also applies the RIAA equalisation curve vital to restoring the recorded signal to its original status. And it ensures compatibility with a variety of phono cartridges, typically through offering various adjustable parameters: load, gain and even capacitance in some instances.

The latter ‘tweaking’ of the phono stage to ensure the optimum performance of the cartridge is a key aspect of making the most of the cartridge’s potential. But with many phono stages, adjustments to gain, load and capacitance can only be made on the unit itself via jumpers, dip switches or,

if you’re lucky, buttons on the fascia. And the scope of adjustment is often limited.

The result is a tedious and often lengthy process of adjusting and listening, adjusting and listening, until the best results have been achieved.

Of all the new Cyrus Phono Signature’s considerable talents, the ability to adjust those parameters via remote control, thus allowing almost instant comparison between different settings, is easily the most useful. Homing in on the best-sounding settings for a particular cartridge has never been easier!

The phono stage follows the same elongated form factor as the rest of the brand’s product range. The bevelled front fascia is dominated by a clearly legible LCD display, flanked by a rotary selector on the right, and a power button on the left.

Below the display, a row of rectangular buttons provides access to the various functions: source selection, MM/MC selection, gain adjustment, resistive load setting, and capacitive load adjustment.

To change a setting, you select the

parameter — resistance, for instance — and then use the rotary controller to scroll to the required setting. The same principle applies when making the changes using the remote control handset.

The Cyrus offers a wide range of adjustments, allowing it to be fine-tuned for almost any cartridge imaginable. The gain can be set between 40 and 70 dB in 10 dB increments, while there are 10 resistive load options, ranging from 11 ohms to 47 kohms. Capacitive loads of 220 pF, 1 nF, 2 nF and 3 nF can be selected.

In addition, the Cyrus offers a so-called warp filter, which eliminates subsonic frequencies to prevent unnecessary speaker cone excursion.

The LCD display provides a comprehensive overview of the phono pre-amp’s status, including the input number selected, the cartridge type, the resistive and capacitive loads chosen, and the gain selected, as well as whether the warp filter is engaged or not.

The rear panel’s inputs and outputs are tidily arranged, despite the limited real estate. Four sets of inputs cater for the



simultaneous connection of up to four tonearms, and each can be independently configured for gain, resistance, capacitance, cartridge type and warp filter status. Once determined, these settings are retained until altered and confirmed again.

There's a choice of balanced XLR or single-ended RCA outputs, while a DIN socket allows the addition of a Cyrus PSX-R outboard power supply, which is said to enhance performance even further. An EC 'kettle'-type power socket completes the picture.

I ran the Phono Signature with both my Linn LP12/Ittok/Ortofon Cadenza Black, and my Avid Diva II SP/SME 309/Van Den Hul The Frog record decks. The two set-ups are very different, with the Cadenza enjoying a low resistive loading of between 25 and 50 ohms, while The Frog is happiest with around 300 to 400 ohms.

Thanks to the Phono Signature's remote adjustment capability, I was able to directly compare different settings in real time from my listening chair, which allowed me to quickly and unequivocally settle on 33 ohms for the Cadenza Black, and 333 ohms for the Frog.

Accompanying equipment included my hard-working Vivid Audio V1.5 speakers, driven by an Ayre AX-5 integrated amplifier via TelluriumQ Black speaker cables. A Valve Audio Whisper and a Sutherland 20/20 both served as phono stage references.

I took an instant liking to the Cyrus. It sounds zesty, incisive, and confident, with a real penchant for pace and impetus. It allows the music's own rhythm and timing to dictate proceedings, and never intrudes with a signature of its own. Instead, it prefers to create an unencumbered gateway for the cartridge, and that cartridge's sonic wares.

Thus, listening to the Tedeschi Trucks Band's latest release, *Let Me Get By*, on the LP12/Cadenza Black deck, the Cyrus allowed the turntable to deliver a bountiful harvest of detail, gloriously presented on an expansive soundstage, yet never allowing that space and air to rob the band of its cohesion. Derek Truck's slide guitar sounded intense and expressive, while

Tedeschi's vocals were portrayed with a spine-tingling authenticity.

Don't get me wrong — the sound was very much that of the Linn. But the transparency of the Cyrus, its ability to operate against an utterly silent backdrop, brought the full impact of the LP12 to the fore.

The same LP played via the Avid/SME/VdH Frog combo accurately demonstrated that turntable's strengths: a tauter, more muscular bottom end, a greater sense of pace and impetus, a slightly richer, smoother midrange, and trebles that rung clear and smooth.

The Avid offered more incisive control, especially in the nether tonal regions, but lacked some of the fluidity of the Linn. The VdH Frog cartridge contributed a beguiling musicality — not overly rich, never attenuated, but always filled to the brim with sonic and emotive content — that made for riveting, engaging listening.

In my opinion, the approach of the Cyrus is closer to the Sutherland's than it is to the Valve Audio Whisper. The latter seems to add something organic, something almost tactile to the music that arguably compromises outright accuracy, but introduces a glorious sheen.

The Sutherland's strength is its silence — an inky, ocean-deep backdrop that remains an impenetrable barrier to any form of interference, while ensuring that the full scope of the music is presented unencumbered. However, there is nothing analytical about that precision — it simply presents a full and detailed image that honestly replicates what the cartridge delivers.

That the Phono Signature stands up well to such comparisons is already a feather in its cap. It's certainly musically credible, capturing the wholesome essence of the

music with an almost infectious enthusiasm, while never shirking its responsibility to preserve detail and maintain pace.

Add to that the stage's exceptional configurability and the convenience of remote control, and the Cyrus Phono Signature deserves a place on the shortlist of any serious vinyl fan.

Deon Schoeman



## VITAL STATS

MM/MC .....	Both
Selectable loading .....	Yes
Gain .....	Up to 70 dB
Inputs .....	4x stereo RCA
Outputs...	1x stereo RCA, 1x stereo XLR
S/N ratio.....	-87 dBA (MM), -79 dBA (MC @ 60 dB gain)
Dimensions (WxHxD)	.....215 x 75 x 365 mm
Weight .....	4,1 kg

### Verdict

Musicality and authenticity combine to create a compelling listening experience. Utterly revealing, yet steers clear of cold analysis, preferring to keep the essence of any performance thrillingly intact.

Price ..... R32 999

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OUR RATING: 83/100

