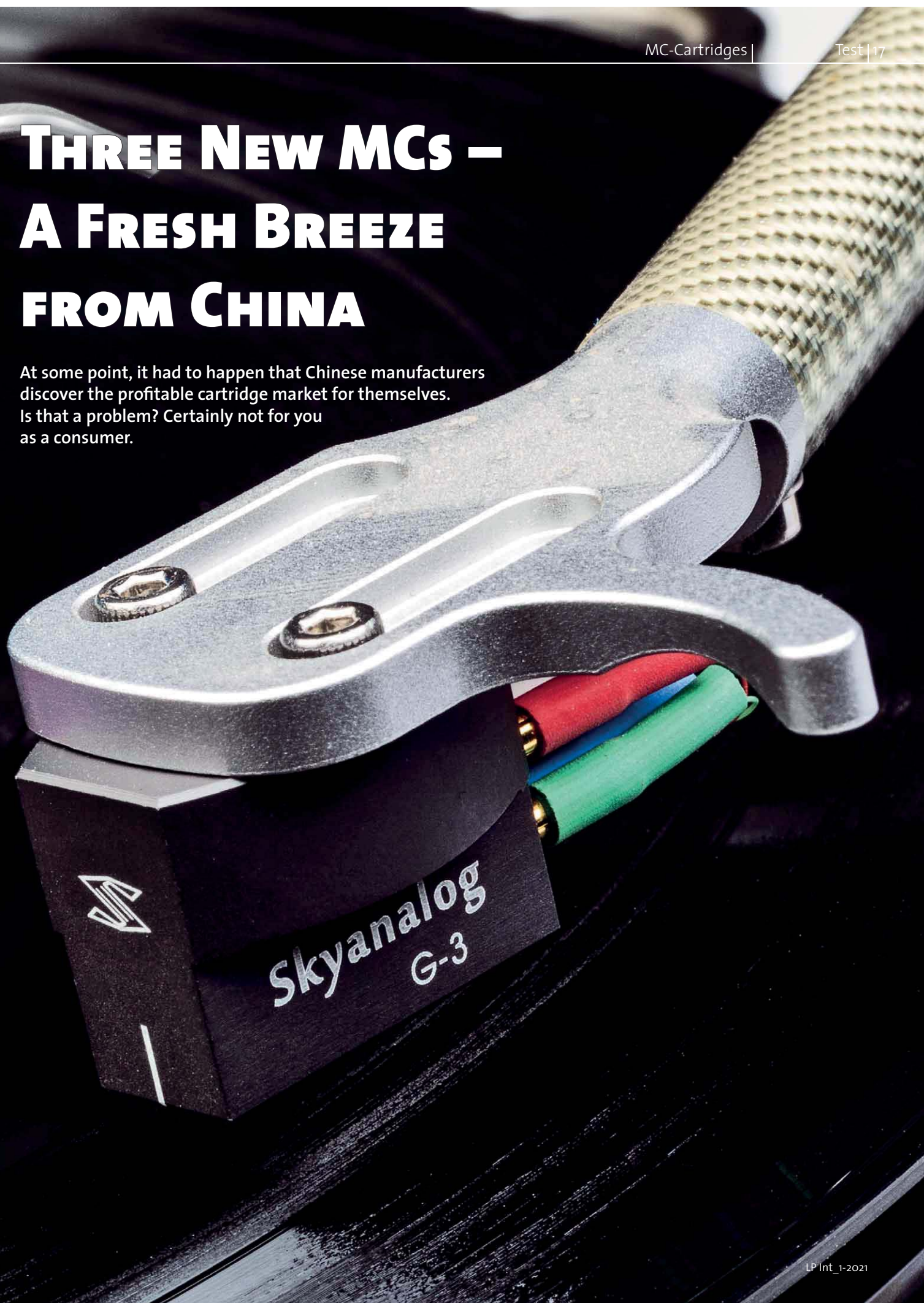
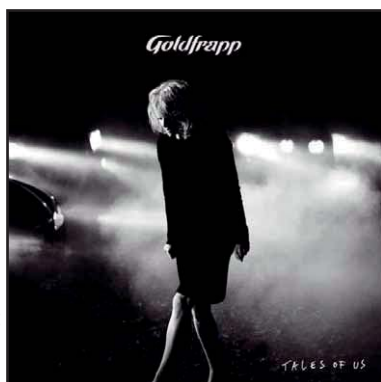




THREE NEW MCs – A FRESH BREEZE FROM CHINA

At some point, it had to happen that Chinese manufacturers discover the profitable cartridge market for themselves. Is that a problem? Certainly not for you as a consumer.





What we played

Goldfrapp
Tales Of Us

Lambchop
Damaged

Avishai Cohen
Into The Silence

VA

Audiophile Analog Collection Vol. 1



The connector pins are marked with the usual color-coded rings



Straight front and side edges facilitate the adjustment of the pickups

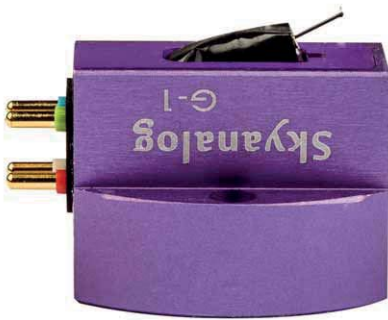
The issue is far older than you might think. And I have no idea how many manufacturers produce cartridges in China after all. I once had the pleasure to do a little research at AliExpress and was met with relatively few results: The Audio Technica MC classics AT91 and AT95 are available there. However, I dare not say to what extent they have anything to do with the (now discontinued) originals. In any case, I could not find any high-quality MCs.

Now „Skyanalog“ is pushing onto the international market to change that. The company has existed since 1999 and began, like many companies in this business, as a fairly general-purpose manufacturer of consumer electronics components. Initially, it was tube amplifiers that made up

the most significant part of the portfolio. Some of you may remember the early products from China, which, to put it politely, did not always meet European expectations and safety standards and could only be obtained from specialized mail order companies. Official distribution was not an option. At that time, Skyanalog founder Jack Leung had long since outgrown his early DIY years, in which he built audio components from scrap components and thus acquired his electronics know-how. As a hi-fi insider, he recognized early that the analog market was experiencing something of a rebirth and reacted accordingly: he began developing cartridges and admits in no uncertain terms that this was a much more difficult job than he had assumed at the outset. In the meantime, he has been operating as a renowned supplier for a whole range of well-known cartridge manufacturers from the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Japan, and other countries. And we would probably all be stunned if we knew which of our MC gems are ultimately made in Jiangmen, a city of four million people in the Guangdong province. Now Jack Leung has decided to face the international competition under his own label and presents three MC cartridges, which, I can already tell you, do not have to hide from any competitor, no matter how renowned. However, they are not as cheap as some might have hoped: The G-1 model can be purchased here for 1,000 Euros, the G-2 for 1,500, and the top model G-3 for 2,000 Euros. The information situation regarding technical details is a bit difficult, but we do know a few things. All three models are built on a solid aluminum body, which only differs in the anodized color: Purple for the G-1, blue-turquoise for the G-2, and an unspectacular dark gray for



They are proud of what they do and are not afraid to inscribe the country of origin in large letters on the cartridges



The external part of the generator is wrapped in shrink tubing



The manufacturing quality is excellent; the stylus cantilever sits perfectly straight

the top model. All three models weigh just under ten grams and are of course equipped with the classic half-inch mount. The M 2.5 threads are cut directly into the body of the stylus and are almost eight millimeters deep.

The straight front edge of the bodies makes the correct adjustment of the offset quite easy. Especially since – and this is a crucial point – the stylus cantilever has been mounted in an exemplary straight position on all three models. I dare to say that the actual generator armature is very similar on all three models and the differences are essentially limited to what peeks out at the „business end“, i.e., stylus cantilever and pick-up diamond. The only thing to say about the generator is that soft iron is used as magnet material and the coils are arranged crosswise. In this way, all three models generate an output voltage of 0.35 mV at a speed of 3.54 cm/s, which should amount to just under 0.5 mV at the more common specification of 5.5 cm/s. No problem, therefore, for practically all possible MC phono preamplifiers. Even the cheapest model is equipped with a boron stylus cantilever. The G-2 is fitted with a ruby needle carrier, and the big G-3 uses sapphire. A very narrow line-contact diamond comes into play in all three, ensuring maximum contact surface to the groove. The recommended contact force is between 16 and 20 mN; only the G-3 should stop at 19 mN. The manufacturer recommends termination impedances between 200 and 470 ohms, and needle compliance is in the range of 10 to 12 $\mu\text{m}/\text{mN}$, suggesting the use of medium-heavy arms. For this purpose, I screwed three test subjects under the 9" variant of the Clearaudio Universal, which proved to be a decidedly suitable choice.

We'll start the roundup with the least expensive model, the G-1. Wait a minute. This is a 1000 Euro MC, right? I mean, that's not little money for a wear part – and that's what an MC cartridge is, after all – but this one plays well above that class. The G-1 has an exceedingly powerful and colorful pace, it rumbles, clangs, and jubilates, it dances and trills, and seems like a young hunting dog let off the leash. Even though it has not yet had the 30 hours of play-in time recommended by the manufacturer.

Teammates

Turntables:

- TechDAS Air Force III / Reed 3p
- Levar Ultimate /Ultimate Carbon Oil
- Clearaudio Master Innovation / Universal 9"

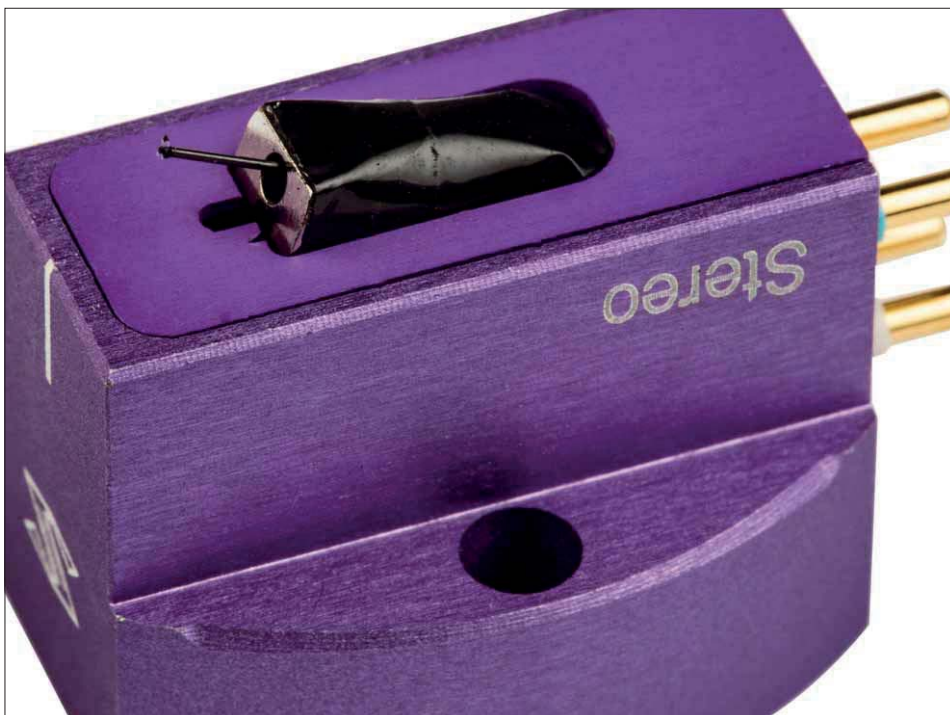
Competitors

Cartridges:

- Benz Micro ACE-L
- DS Audio DS E1

The packaging of the cartridges is a rather plain wooden box





The dark stylus cantilever of the G-1 is a rod made from boron



The top model G-3 has a needle carrier made of sapphire

Maybe it's because I ultimately undercut the manufacturer's recommendation in terms of terminating impedance and end up with 100 ohms – so it just generates even more low-end steam and seems a little smoother in vocal ranges. Very nice to verify, for example, with Allison Goldfrapp and her 2013 album „Tales Of Us“. The G-1 delivers a rich and full-bodied sound, placing the voice nicely in front of the musical background.

There is an immediate feeling that this sounds „right“, without having to define it further. However, one may still notice a lot of mellowness in the voice with „Annabel“. Actually, I would now be done with the topic. The G-1 hugs my taste buds so skillfully that my need for cartridge quality is satisfied. It is true, however, that there is still room for improvement, as the G-3 shows quite impressively: It sounds tidier, more transparent, and refined. I elicit its richness of detail optimally with a terminating impedance of 470 ohms. Avishai Cohen and his band perform extremely relaxed, the brooms are dancing on the drum heads in a super delicate way, piano strokes are infinitely lingering in the room. Not as impetuous as the G-1, more elegant, more professional. The G3 is more of a cartridge for jazz listeners than rockers. Lambchop singer Kurt Wagner sounds more disciplined, more focused with the G-3. Articulation of the throaty organ, finely placed among the multitude of instruments. With all of the Skyanalog pickups, I tend to the upper value of the recommended tracking force. In the end, I also allow the G-3 twenty millinewtons and thus somewhat more than the manufacturer recommends. But it simply sounds more coherent that way. The surprise comes when changing to the G-2: It is very similar in sound to the 500 Euro more expensive big brother. It seems to me to be a bit quieter but has practically the same accuracy and resolution. It plays minimally darker timbres than the G-3, which one can quite like. All three Skyanalog models enrich the cartridge assortment and make life quite difficult for many established models.

Holger Barske

Skyanalog G-1, G-2, G-3



- Prices
- Sales
- Phone
- Internet
- Warranty
- Weight

ca. 1.000, 1.500, 2.000 Euro
 TCG GmbH, Nordhorn
 +49 5921 7884927
 tcg-gmbh.de
 2 years
 ca. 10 g (each model)



The G-1 model, in particular, is likely to cause quite a stir in the stylus market

lp

Skyanalog
G-1, G-2, G-3

International 1/21

» Skyanalog's entry into the MC market is a real bang for the buck: The extremely enthusiastic G-1 and the delicate and refined G-2 and G-3 are bound to find many friends.