

SPIN DOCTOR BY MICHAEL TREI

THIS ISSUE: The Spin Doctor checks out a sweet phono preamp from Sweden, and the latest entry-level optical phono cartridge from DS Audio.

Crossing the river in moonlight

I spent the second three-and-a-half years of my life living with my family in Sweden. Our home was on an island just outside of Stockholm called Lidingö, which locals tell me today is like the Beverly Hills of Stockholm, a fancy place where the rich and famous live. Fifty-nine years ago, it wasn't quite so fancy; it just seemed like a cool place for a little kid from New York City to grow up.

I can't honestly say I remember many details about my life between the ages of three and a half and six, yet apparently some of that Swedish way of thinking ended up influencing my life view, specifically, how Swedes approach consumer goods and purchasing decisions.

At the risk of stereotyping, Swedes are obsessed with the quality of the goods they buy and will happily pay a premium to get very good quality. Then once they've bought it (whatever "it" is), they hang onto it for the long haul, rejecting the disposable approach that's typical for us Americans, constantly trading and upgrading to get the latest widget (another stereotype, but hey, it's true). A Swede would rather pay \$200 for a top-quality tailored shirt and wear it for a decade than wear out a pile of \$30 shirts in a couple of years.

I'm especially Swedish when it comes to hi-fi. Despite having worked in high-end audio for most of my adult life, with access to gear at "industry accommodation" prices, my core system has evolved very slowly. For more than a quarter century, I've owned and used a Vendetta Research SCP-2B phono preamp, an Audio Note P2 SE Signature power amplifier, and of course my Quad ESL-57 electrostatic loudspeakers. When I find something I really like, I hang onto it.

Still, sometimes change is necessary. I have been reviewing audio gear for nearly 30 years, starting in 1995 at *Listener*, my dear friend Art Dudley's magazine. My reviewing work influences the equipment I use. For 15 years or so before I joined *Stereophile*, most of my reviewing was focused on multichannel home-theater gear, for sister magazine *Sound & Vision*. I'm lucky enough to have an entirely separate room and system for home theater and surround, so my dedicated stereo rig became pretty locked in, with those Quad speakers augmented by two separate subwoofer systems.

Now that I have returned to reviewing mostly two-channel gear, I have slowly been making changes to my stereo rig, to make it more versatile and review-friendly. To that end, I recently added a pair of Joseph Audio Perspective2 Graphene loudspeakers and a Pass Labs INT-150 integrated amplifier to drive them.

But back to Sweden. Their neighbors Denmark and Norway are known for bigger brands—Bang & Olufsen, Ortofon, Jamo, DALI, Dynaudio, Hegel, Electrocompaniet—while Sweden's audio industry is

made up of smaller, specialist manufacturers that aim (often in idiosyncratic ways) for cutting-edge performance: Lejonklou, Engstrom, Bladelius, and of course Swedish Analog Technologies (SAT). Add Moonriver Audio to that list.

MOONRIVER AUDIO 505 HYBRID STEREO PHONO EQ STAGE

*Moon river, wider than a mile
I'm crossing you in style some day
Oh, dream maker, you heart breaker
Wherever you're going I'm going your way*

Normally I might think it trite to make such an obvious connection between an audio company's name and a song—I don't start singing a song by The Police every time I put on the red light to power up my Roksan turntable—but Moonriver Audio's founder has acknowledged that his company is named for the 1961 song, written by Henry Mancini and Johnny Mercer for the movie *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, which starred Audrey Hepburn, who originally sung it. But did the inspiration for Moonriver Audio's name come from the Hepburn original or the version Andy Williams

recorded a year later, which soon became his signature song?

On the front panel of every Moonriver component just below the central logo is the Swedish word *Fågelsång*. Somewhat mysteriously, it translates as "birdsong." That makes me think that the inspiration came from Hepburn's version, because her light and airy singing voice had birdlike qualities.

Founded in Malmö, Sweden, in 2015 by Greek-born George Polychronidis, Moonriver Audio didn't launch its first product, the Model 404 integrated amplifier, until 2019.¹ It took Moonriver another five years to launch their second distinct product,² the Model 505, the first Moonriver phono preamp. The 404 and 505 are built into the same full-sized chassis, so the 505 is hefty as phono preamps go. With its black brushed-aluminum faceplate, walnut end cheeks, gold lettering, and subtle yellow indicator lights, the 505 has a warm, inviting appearance, a welcome change from the cool silver and bright blue LEDs that most contemporary audio equipment use. The front-panel layout, with its four metal knobs framed by several small silver toggle switches, manages to look both modern and retro. Word is, Polychronidis took design cues from Japanese components of the early '70s, specifically Sansui components like the AU-222 integrated amplifier, but these have obviously been updated.

As suggested by all those knobs and switches, the 505 is endowed with a host of features, including connections for up to four tonearms and gain and adjustable

¹ See the review by Jason Victor Serinus at [stereophile.com/content/moonriver-404-reference-integrated-amplifier](https://www.stereophile.com/content/moonriver-404-reference-integrated-amplifier).

² Meanwhile, they introduced a Reference version of the 404.

