

Spiral Groove Centroid tonearm

By **Brian Damkroger** • Posted: Jun 16, 2010

Spiral Groove's new Centroid tonearm (\$6000) arrived just a few days before press time, so it would be risky to say anything definitive about it. But I will take that risk: using the system described in **my review** of the SG2 turntable, this may be the best tonearm I've heard. Its sound is different in ways that will open people's ears, and I predict that it will affect the design of every tonearm from now on. The Centroid's design deserves and will await full coverage in its own review, but here are the basics: It's a fluid-damped unipivot design unlike any other that gives the user fine adjustment of all relevant parameters.

My first impression was that the Centroid sounded . . . different. It sounded good, to be sure, but startlingly different from any other arm. So different, in fact, that I rechecked everything in my setup, even that I'd grabbed the right LP. I was grasping at straws—the record didn't sound like a different pressing, but a completely different mix.

As I listened more, the characteristics that made the Centroid sound so different became obvious. First and foremost, it had no noise floor—not a dramatically reduced noise floor, but no noise floor. I'm loath to cite examples, because they don't capture just *how* different the Centroid sounded, but on Ben Webster and Harry "Sweets" Edison's *Ben and Sweets* (LP, Columbia/Classic CS 8691), rather than my simply hearing the details of Webster's breathing, the Centroid captured it in a way that was both obvious, and integral to the player's technique.

Conversely, on studio recordings like "Private Investigation," from Dire Straits' *Love Over Gold* (Warner Bros. 23728-1), individual components of the collage became more distinct—a fruit salad that had been only just assembled, rather than one prepared a few hours before. I felt I was hearing back into the recording chain, past the final mix, through the effects superimposed on the individual tracks, to the original tracks themselves. And with no noise floor, the synthesizers sounded spectacular, with a stunning clarity. They didn't just wind down, they wound down, and down, and down†.†.†.

A second distinct and obvious characteristic of the Centroid's performance, and one new to me, was how accurately it reproduced the tonal and dynamic elements of deep bass notes. Compared to anything I'd heard before, the Centroid made a bass drum sound like a bass drum, rather than just a low-pitched sound that evoked a vague image of a bass drum. This effect wasn't subtle—not even close—but a new and different standard for what reproduced music can do.

Bold statements are always risky, and doubly so when made on the basis of so brief an exposure. But since I'm already out on a limb, I'll inch out a bit farther: I'll bet that the more I get to know the Centroid, the more certain I'll be of my first conclusion: The Centroid tonearm this may be the best tonearm I've heard. It is not leaving my listening room.