



# All for one

**David Price** takes Musical Fidelity's versatile new M6x Vinyl phono stage for a spin

**T**his phono stage recognises that some users have multiple turntables, and/or turntables with more than one tonearm, and/or tonearms with balanced outputs. Most integrated amplifiers come with a phono input, but I can't help feeling it's often tokenism. Their gain and switching options are usually poor and you rarely see two inputs being offered or a balanced option. I personally run a Marantz Tt-1000, Technics SL-15 and Michell GyroDec on a more or less daily basis, and yearn for one single 'go-to' solution – precisely what this Musical Fidelity is.

It's a full-size product with three separate, independently selectable cartridge inputs. The beauty of these is they're under microprocessor control, so you can toggle between them and the system will remember your choice of load and gain settings for each one. You can choose between moving magnet (47kohm, 50-400pF) or moving coil (25-1.2kohm, 470pF), with +6dB gain on or off. You get two unbalanced RCA inputs and one balanced XLR, so the M6x Vinyl can be an integrated connection hub for a trio of different turntables.

The company has opted for a discrete transistor gain stage rather than entrusting the amplification of your cartridge's low-level signals to op-amps. This is more expensive and complex to implement, but there's a school of thought that says discrete

transistors sound better much than op-amps in this application.

## Sound quality

With a range of cartridges spanning an Audio-Technica VM-95 moving magnet to a Lyra Dorian moving coil, I find the M6x Vinyl an impressive performer – and a clear step up from my Rega Aria Mk3 reference (*HFC* 469). The latter has bettered many designs well above its £900 price, so I'm surprised the Musical Fidelity is so clearly ahead. It has a crisp, clean and spacious tone that's less euphonic than some might wish, but fun to listen to.

Tonally it's very neutral, if perhaps just a fraction on the dry and clean side. There's no sense of plumpness in the bass and nor does it have an especially silky treble. It's more matter of fact than that, but don't confuse this for forwardness or sterility; that's simply not accurate. Play a rich Seventies recording such as Kate Bush's *Wow* and you get a clean, detailed and direct rendition of the track without a load of extra, add-on analogue baggage. It doesn't sugar the pill so to speak, but nor does it make it bitterer than it really is. The result is a lovely, smooth, expansive sound, with lots of production effects making their way to the fore where lesser phono stages might obscure them.

Bass is taut and powerful, but not fat or overblown. Beatmasters' *Who's In The House?* is great fun; its Eighties synth bassline is a joy to hear as it

## DETAILS

**PRODUCT**  
Musical Fidelity  
M6x Vinyl

**ORIGIN**  
UK

**TYPE**  
MM/MC  
phono stage

**WEIGHT**  
5.5kg

**DIMENSIONS**  
(WxHxD)  
440 x 100 x 385mm

**FEATURES**  
• Outputs:  
unbalanced RCAs;  
balanced XLRs  
• Three selectable  
cartridge inputs

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steamrollers my room with low frequencies. At the same time, the low-frequency theatrics don't detract from the oodles of detail in the midband and a really expressive handling of dynamics. The way the crescendos build up is visceral, causing me to marvel at the sound of a record made 32 years ago that still feels fresh.

There is a slight edge to percussive detail; drum machine rim shots have real bite, which adds to the sense of drama but the female vocal line isn't unduly hard. This shows me it's a pretty natural-sounding design, a fact that really shines through with Donald Byrd's *Street Lady*. The acoustic instruments on this Blue Note recording are a pleasure to hear and I love the urgent rhythmic gait. The music consequently sashays along in a wonderfully uplifting way.

## Conclusion

This multi-talented design offers a combination of excellent connectivity, versatile loading and gain options, a great user interface and excellent sound. I don't know of other products anywhere near its price that do so much so well. It's not the best phono stage that money can buy of course, but it sure is cracking value ●

## Hi-Fi Choice

### OUR VERDICT

**SOUND QUALITY**



**LIKE:** Connectivity; user interface; sound

**VALUE FOR MONEY**



**DISLIKE:** Nothing at the price

**BUILD QUALITY**



**WE SAY:** The M6x Vinyl is a fine-sounding, versatile vinyl hub

**FEATURES**



**OVERALL**

