



Sumiko Songbird Low £900

The most affordable cartridge in the group is more than capable of keeping expensive rivals honest

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Sumiko
Songbird Low

ORIGIN
USA/Japan

TYPE
High-output
moving-coil
cartridge

WEIGHT
8.5g

FEATURES

- Elliptical stylus
- Aluminium alloy cantilever
- Aluminium top plate with exposed generator

DISTRIBUTOR
Henley Audio Ltd.

As the first new Sumiko moving-coil in a number of years the Songbird can be ordered in both high and low-output versions (we tested the high-output option in *HFC 465*). Both are moving-coil designs, but where the high-output version musters 2.5mV and will work into a moving-magnet input, the low produces 0.5mV, which makes it a reasonably benign partner for most moving-coil phono stages.

The Songbird uses the same elliptical stylus as employed in other Sumiko models, mounted in an aluminium cantilever. This is attached to the generator via a newly developed synthetic rubber suspension system. Where the Songbird differs from any other cartridge in the group is that the generator assembly is completely exposed; something the company has done with other designs in the past.

The generator is attached to a relatively thick section of aluminium that gives the cartridge its rigidity and mass; although at 8.5g it's still one of the lighter offerings here.

The nude design of the Sumiko doesn't actually have any negative effects on fitment. The company supplies an excellent guard that completely encases the vulnerable section and makes it fairly stress free to get up and running. Where you will need to be careful is day-to-day use. The Songbird is naturally more vulnerable than enclosed designs, so this will need to be taken into account in a house with pets and children. If you don't feel this will be an issue, the dimensions and weight of the Songbird make it a good match for a variety of different tonearms. It's finished to a very high standard and, while this is of course a subjective opinion, I think this is the best-looking model in the test.

Sound quality

A word that appears frequently in the Sumiko's listening notes is 'balance'. From the top to the bottom of *Talk Talk*, it feels extremely even handed. The company's promotional material states the Songbird: "excels at delivering rich vocals" and Hollis is indeed in fine voice here. What's notable, however, is that they never feel over emphasised or disembodied from the rest of the performance. Something else worthy of note is the bass response. The Songbird delivers

an impressively deep and controlled low end that never loses the speed and urgency of the track itself.

This weight and refinement ensures that its take on *Berlin Sunrise* is very compelling. This is not the most detailed performance here, but the Royal Concertgebouw orchestra sounds weighty and real with a wonderful tonal richness. Meanwhile, Fink feels like an organic part of the presentation and the Songbird does a fine job of making sense of the track as a whole. There are some limits to the overall amount of perceived space, but it never sounds congested in any way.

This more intimate presentation ensures that *Human Hands* sounds absolutely fabulous. The relationship

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between Bill Fay and his piano is utterly self-explanatory and the Sumiko captures the emotion of the piece beautifully. The fractionally hard edge that this record can present is dealt with effectively too.

The Sumiko continues to deliver its emotional content with Emily King's *Forgiveness*, despite the considerable change in musical style. The low electronic notes are deep and controlled, felt as much as heard and beautifully integrated into the wider performance. The track flows with a compelling energy and drive, drawing the listener into the music and ensuring you listen to that rather than the hardware. King herself sounds sublime and the Songbird does a fine job of handling the building scale of the track, making sense of the supporting vocals and keeping everything sounding tremendously engaging from start to finish ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY ★★★★★	LIKE: Even-handed but engaging sound; flexible mounting and output
VALUE FOR MONEY ★★★★★	DISLIKE: Vulnerable generator; slight lack of fine detail
BUILD QUALITY ★★★★★	WE SAY: An extremely accomplished cart at a relatively affordable price that will work in a wide variety of systems
FEATURES ★★★★★	

OVERALL

