

Tuning record matte + record tuning clamp

HARMONIX
TU-800M TRIBUTE + TU-812MX
„Million” Maestro Series

Manufacturer: **COMBAK CORPORATION**

Price (in Poland):

4990 PLN – TU-800M Tribute

12 490 PLN – TU-812MX

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MADE IN JAPAN

Provided for test by **MOJE AUDIO**



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Harmonix

Review

The matte and the clamp, the elements that stay in direct contact with the vinyl records while it's being played, form an important part of a mechanical system of a turntable. A matte is sort of interface between a record and a platter, making sure that these two elements connect mechanically with each other. Although the stylus movements are small, the energy that is released at its rapid movement that is transferred to the record and then back to the stylus is large enough to affect the work of the cartridge, modifying the signal. So the matte is supposed to suppress these vibrations.



In turn the record clamp is part of the mechanical system called: the main bearing. Its role seemingly is to press the vinyl record against whatever it is placed on (e.g. matte) a platter and thus better integrate the two elements mechanically. In reality, however, clamp plays a much more important role – placed over the main axle it dampens the vibrations from the main

Sound

Recordings used for the test (a selection)

- Archie Shepp, *On Green Dolphin Street*, Denon YX-7524-ND, „Denon PCM | Jazz in New York” LP (1978)
- Billie Holiday, *Songs For Distingue Lovers*, Verve/Classic Records AS AVRJ 6021, “Special 45 Edition, One-sided”, 2 x 200 g LP (1957/2012)
- Brendan Perry, *Ark*, Cooking Vinyl/Vinyl 180 VIN180LP040, 2 x 180 g (2011)
- Budka Suflera, *Cień wielkiej góry*, Live 2011 + studio 1975 (box), Polskie Nagrania „Muza”/Budka Suflera Productions BSP 05-2011, 2 x 180 g LP + 2 x CD (1975/2011);
- Depeche Mode, *Spirit*, Columbia | Sony Music 5420022, 2 x 180 g LP (2017)
- Polish Jazz Quartet, *Polish Jazz Quartet*, Polskie Nagrania „Muza” XL 0246, „Polish Jazz | vol. 3”, Mono LP (1965)
- SBB, *Hofors 1975*, GAD Records GAD LP 008, „Limited Edition Clear Wax”, 180 g LP (2016)
- Skaldowie, *The 70s Progressive German Recordings*, Kameleon Records KAMPLP 3, „Limited Edition”, 180 g LP (2013)
- The All Star Percussion Ensemble, *The All Star Percussion Ensemble*, arr. Harold Farberman, Golden Strings/First Impression

bearing, which otherwise are transferred to the record and then to the stylus.

The mattes are known ever since a turntable has been invented. Initially made of fabric, such as velvet, then of rubber, for the iconic turntables of the 1970s, such as Linn Sondek LP12, it was made from a black felt. Today it is still one of the basic ways of damping the vibration, but not the only one. We also find mattes made of cork or cork and rubber and other materials. For some turntables designers decided not to use any mat, or rather to integrate them with a platter (see - [Transrotor](#), [Avid HiFi](#) and [Pro-Ject](#)) or to eliminate them completely (see - [Talk Electronics](#); Polish).

The record clamp on the other hand is a relatively new idea, although it has been used for several years too. There are two main types: ones that are screwed on the axle (see - [Avid HiFi](#), [Kronos](#)) and ones that are placed over (see - [Transrotor](#), [Pro-Ject](#)). The former ones are usually quite light, because they only have to press the record to the platter, which is achieved by screwing them on the threaded axle. There is a variant of this type of clamps that is not screwed on but rather clamped on the axis, using a clever mechanism. The representatives of the other type are usually heavier because they press record against platter only with their weight, and also because they act as an extra mass in which the vibrations from the main bearing are suppressed.

The turntable manufacturers, who have the most experience with their own products, usually deliver mattes and clamps together with their turntables (and included in its price). But it is not always the case – it often happens that one has to pay extra for the clamp. Some companies offer higher quality mattes and better clamps as optional upgrades. And that's where some specialized manufacturers come in offering their own mattes and clamps. Apart from the well-known to the "High Fidelity" readers [Berlin-based Pathe Wings](#) brand, also some other ones offer products of this kind. Some of the best but also most expensive mattes and clamps are offered by the Japanese company Harmonix.

TU-800M Tribute

The manufacturer uses for the TU-800M „Tribute” Maestro a revealing name: “Tuning Record Mat”. This name gives away a hint on the design assumptions for this product. Vibration reduction can be achieved by two main methods: by dampening them using materials, usually by a heavy weight of the element, or by minimizing them by appropriate "tuning" of the elements. Both methods are popular and used by many manufacturers in their products.

Mr. Kiuchi, same as many other Japanese manufacturers, definitely chooses the latter method. His new mat was being developed for four years during countless hours of listening sessions spent by the owner of Harmonix to find the ultimate solution. The starting point was a special, thin material, resembling graphite, but soft. The mat is only 0.5 mm thick, and on its top one finds longitudinal metal strips going from the center of the mat towards its perimeter plus there are some "dots" of a diameter corresponding to the elements of the mountain crystal fixed by Mr. Kiuchi to the various elements of the system to reduce vibration.

The record does not contact the mat with its entire surface. Usually the idea is to provide as big contact area as possible, that was also the case with Mr. Kiuchi's previous model, TU-800EX, which I have been using for four years. Since the center of the record, the round area with label, is recessed against the surface of the record, one should not use heavy clamps with this mat. The mat weighs just 47 grams and has a diameter of 298

Music GS LP 001-LE, „First 1000 Pressings”, 200 g LP (1982/2011)

Japanese issues available at



A mat and clamp are the final touches that allow user to achieve an ultimate performance from his rig. It's really a dot on 'i', and I would not want you to think that these are basic elements of a turntable setup. These two should be added at the very end when everything else in the system is well-thought-out, selected so that the system already meets our expectations, gives us a lot of satisfaction when listening to the music. I'd say that both a mat and a clamp add up to 5% to the performance.

This is good news because in a way it removes from our shoulders a burden of having to buy more items for the system. But it is only a momentary “relief”. Once we start to compare few different clamps, mattes and their combinations, preferably using numerous turntables of different type/design, we inevitably come to a moment when it turns out that these 5% can actually complete a given sound, that without them the sound is actually not as good, not as satisfactory. Even if before such trials we were absolutely satisfied with it.

Because that's what audio is about: our main job is to compare, and if a comparison proves a superiority of a particular element over another, we gain a new experience, we know more, our point of view changes. That's the worse part of the news, because eventually we will get to the moment when we will *have to* deal with it. Regardless of the price of the turntable we own – whether this is a 1500 PLN Pro-Ject or a deck for 10 000, 50 000 or even more.

I was aware of that when I sat down to listen to new Harmonix products, and once again, both parts of the equation I wrote above were confirmed. But I also again heard that the changes that a mat and a clamp are able to introduce to the sound in some, incomprehensible (for me) way, are clearly audible no matter what turntable I use. After all, I listened to the clamp and mat costing a staggering 19,000 PLN combined on a turntable, that costs about 45,000 PLN (deck, tonearm and cartridge)!

Mata TU-800M TRIBUTE

„Million” Maestro Series

The Harmonix mat belongs to the "fine-tuning" elements, not just damping vibration. It is very light and the contact between it and the record is limited only to the selected spots chosen purposely by the manufacturer. Its impact on the sound is greater than that of both mattes it was compared with. Interestingly, sound-wise the Acoustic Signature leather mat was closer to the older Harmonix one, than the two Japanese were to each other.

The most important changes that the TU-800M Tribute introduces to the sound about tone and resolution. Both mattes to which it was compared, lowered the tonal balance, added some weight to the bass and slightly “pumped up” phantom images. It was cool, it might have been pleasing, but it seems that it was achieved at the expense of selectivity and differentiation. Harmonix slightly shifted the tonal balance up, mainly

mm. Its surface is rugged and it easily catches dust, which is difficult to remove later. So whenever one does not listen to music it is worth to use something to protect surface of the matte against dust.



The matte is very expensive. Its price has been influenced primarily by the time that gentlemen in Combak Corporation devoted to her project. But it's not the only factor here. Mr. Kiuchi treats his products as works of art - ultimately "tuning" is a personal choice of a designer. To emphasize this status, we receive the matte with an unusual wooden red relief, which you can hang on the wall as a work of art, that it actually is. It is made by one of the Japanese companies that's been in this industry for several hundred years. Unfortunately, its name remains unknown. The matte is placed inside the relief and I know that the latter is used in different ways - wife of one of matte's owners uses it as a box for her scarfs.

TU-812MX

Manufacturer uses term "Record Tuning Clamp" for the Harmonix TU-812MX "Million" Maestro. Same as in the case of the matte, this clamp was created using trial and error method using painstaking process of combing through different materials and shapes. It can be used with any matte, but its true partner is the TU-800M "Tribute" Maestro matte. As the company materials reads:

In its time-honored tradition, COMBAK has developed the TU-812MX to deal amazingly effective with all resonances of analog records and turntable by tuning the record its self and record platter assembly at a frequency outside the audio band. The results are astonishing fantastic—musical clarity is greatly increased, and the separation of musical instruments releases unprecedented depth of sound. An infinitely improved sense of reality and palpability make for the kind of sound you have never ever experienced before with analog record sources. New TU-812MX record clamp lends solidity to much expanded soundstage, making it not only an extremely worthwhile contribution of the potential of analog record, but a necessity, to the art of faithful and exquisite analog music reproduction. Try new TU-812MX. You will be completely astounded!

Extracts unparalleled Sound quality of Analog

Records, combak.net [accessed on: March, 21st 2017]

because it opened the midrange. The clarity of all sub-ranges has increased significantly too. The sound was clearer and more energetic.

It was achieved without resulting in adding any brightness or harshness to the sound. I would say that it was exactly the opposite, that with the matte the sound was calmer, i.e. everything in the presentation was better arranged, more orderly. It was only in comparison with the new Harmonix that it became obvious that the previous model offered a bit more monotonous sound. This is of course a subjective impression, because the leather matte goes much further in this direction, but a direct comparison of both Harmonix products proved a much better differentiation provided by the new version.



But still, the most important feature of Harmonix matte's sound, in my opinion, was the band's extension. To assess that I listened to Archie Shepp's *On Green Dolphin Street* (particularly to assess treble extension) and Brendan Perry's *Ark* (for bass). These recordings proved to me that using the TU-800M Tribute resulted in a significantly more resolving performance. I used the term "significantly" on purpose here, because the change was, no doubt, positive and easily noticeable. The bass went lower and it was more articulate, and the treble sounded sweeter and was better differentiated. Both band's extremes sounded more natural and less mechanical. The change was not as significant as, for example, with replacing one cable with with another, of higher quality, but ultimately, after a few days of listening, it turned out to be just as important in achieving an "ultimate" performance. With the matte on, changing the cable I'm talking about, had more meaning than without it.

Docisk TU-812MX

„Million” Maestro Series

Harmonix clamp used in combination with the new matte of this manufacturer deepens all the positive qualities I already described. Since I did not find in the changes the matte introduced to the sound anything negative, I can say that the clamp *strengthens* all its qualities. As it turned out, it actually works best with this matte. The other three I compared the TU-800M Tribute with, allowed me to understand better what's so special about this "gadget", but none of them worked with it as good as Harmonix matte.

With the clamp to the sound that I described, a new level of refinement was added. The impression of a positive impact on the sound was even stronger, as I heard it first listening to the album that should not have benefited from the tested elements, i.e. with the latest Depeche Mode's album. *Spirit*. As I wrote in the April's editorial, this is not the best quality



With its 360g the TU-812MX is rather lightweight contender. It is made of chrome-plated metal (brass?) and wood. Its shape reminded me of a blooming flower that we lift by the "stem". Its diameter is 85 mm and the height is 43 mm. It's the most expensive gramophone record I've ever encountered.

- Testing Methodology

During my tests I use two different turntable mattes: Harmonix TU-800EX and one of Pathe Wings', the one that combines rubber and cork. I also use two different clamps, also by Pathe Wings - weighing 250 g, made of stainless steel and 450 g one made specifically for the "High Fidelity" from an alloy that remains company's secret.

During the Harmonix mattes and clamp's test, I used all of the above, as well as the leather matte made by the Acoustic Signature. Test was performed with a relatively inexpensive Storm MkII turntable, with the TA-1000 tonearm and **Soundsmith Zephyr MIMC** cartridge. The changes that these components bring to the sound are perfectly audible and easy to characterize and then evaluate. So I expect that with more expensive turntables their impact on the performance will be even more clear.

recording, mainly because of a high compression of the material. The matte and, above all, the clamp calmed down the slight chaos present on this record and balanced the treble. It was less energetic but better differentiated.

With the clamp sound seemed a bit deeper, more "serious". If there was something in the treble that was slightly "off" before - maybe even to a small extent, but still – with the clamp it became more refined, better balanced. The sound was deeper, more resolving, and richer. In short, music sounded more like music, and not like recording playback.

Summary

The ultra-expensive audio products stir a lot of emotion among audiophiles and it will most likely never change. That is the way it is and nothing will change that. All the more, when it comes to a clamp that costs more than 12 000 PLN and a matte for another almost 5000 PLN. For this money one can buy a fantastic cartridge, excellent cables and even a turntable. That's why one can assume that these are the components for the people who already have it all, i.e. a fantastic turntable, a amazing cartridge, excellent cables and a sophisticated phonostage.

Unless all these components are the right ones, one should not bother to purchase either clamp or the matte as these do not *improve* performance. Harmonix products release music from restrictions. If it is poorly recorded, produced or released, these element will not help. But the clamp and the matte will do something that other products of this type can not: from almost every record they will extract some "primal" element, that will allow user to better understand music **DESPITE** recording's/system's limitation. If this is not what the magic of this type of products is about, then I do not know what other it could be...