

## Deux premières mondiales Gryphon Diablo 333 et Jadis JA170

Les bars audiophiles : Music & Wines

L'interview exclusive : Renaud Capuçon

L'envers du décor : les systèmes de nos rédacteurs

La rencontre : Frédéric Vedel raconte Audio Synthèse

Les coulisses d'un mythe : Dark Side of the Moon a 50 ans

Les tests : Audioquest Powerquest 707 - Aurorasound HFAS-01 - B Audio

Alpha One - B&W 603 S3 - Børresen X3 - Diptyque Audio DP-140 MkII

Esprit Lumina - GGNTKT Model M1 - Hana Umami Blue - iFi Audio iDSD

Neo 2 - Isol-8 MiniSub Axis & SubStation Integra - Luxman PD-191 A

Musical Fidelity LS3/5a - Neodio TMA - Solidsteel VL3 - SPEC RSA-BW7EX

Stromtank S1000 - Taga Harmony HTR-1500CD - Triangle Magellan

Cello 40<sup>th</sup> - Viablue UFO Dome, Rocket & Rocket XL - YBA Heritage A200S



# HIROSHI ISHIHARA

Vincent Guillemain

Hiroshi Ishihara, President of Youtek Limited and Hana brand producer, answered our questions to define the principles behind the moving-coil cartridge brand and explain the development of its models, including the recent Umami Blue.



**Hiroshi Ishihara, you and Masao Okada are the driving force behind the Hana brand of cartridges. Can you explain why?**

*Okada-San founded Excel Sound Corporation in 1970. After a long involvement in the development and creation of phono cartridges, in 2015 he decided with me as senior consultant to set up our own brand more specifically: Hana.*

*Together with Masao Okada-san, we created the brand with the idea in mind that we wanted to give priority to exclusively moving-coil (MC) cartridges, positioning ourselves on very competitive prices. With over 50*

*years' experience, Okada-san has been able to take an interest in all ranges, sometimes finding solutions to keep costs down, and sometimes finding the best elements to make the best possible products. Today, its overriding principle is to develop the best products at the best prices. We therefore started with the EL/EH, priced at less than € 500 / \$ 500 and the SL/SH, more efficient but priced under € 700 / \$ 800.*

**Why did you choose to produce only MC cartridges?**

*Okada-san had produced many moving-magnet (MM) cartridges in his lifetime, and this is still a demand from*



*many distributors around the world, but Hana's philosophy is to make only MC cartridges. The brand implies MC, and resources are focused only on this technology.*

*With this in mind, after starting with two entry-level MC cartridges, we were able to turn our attention to moving upmarket. And so, in 2018, the ML/MH cartridges appeared, this time slightly above € 1 000 / \$ 1 000, but with a real qualitative contribution to sound. Given the very positive response from the market and customers, we have maintained this strategy of moving upmarket to introduce the Umami Red, with no concessions, but at a much higher price of around € 3 700 / \$ 3 950. More recently, based on this Umami range, we decided to take a step backwards with the launch in 2023 of the Umami Blue.*

**How do you see the placement of the Umami Blue, between ML and Umami Red?**

*The Umami Blue is a real synergy between the Red and the ML. For some of our dealers and distributors, the Umami Red can be compared to cartridges five or ten times more expensive. But at the same time, it still costs almost € 4 000 / \$ 4 000, which is a too high price for many music lovers. With the Umami Blue, we have taken the structure of the Red, but with many specifications and materials closer to the ML.*

*In the Umami Red, we began using a boron cantilever, in addition to an integral NudeMicroLine diamond stylus. These elements are retained on the Umami Blue, which in contrast features the Alnico magnets of the ML range. It is a happy middle between the two cartridges, found in the median price and in the listening experience, finer than that of an ML, but less ultimate than that of an Umami Red.*

**Which is currently the best-selling Hana cartridge?**

*Clearly the SL, which combines particularly good value for money compared to competitors and remains*

*an affordable MC cartridge. Then there is the ML, which has dethroned the EL to take the second place in many markets. I should also add that despite producing these E, S and M series in high-impedance versions, we mainly sell low-level MC cartridges, preferred by customers who, as long as they want this type of moving-coil technology, in most cases have a suitable phono preamp to choose a low-level cartridge.*

**What are your biggest markets, and can you tell us about your specialization with Japan?**

*Our biggest market is the USA, followed by Germany, the UK and Canada. France is a close second. But we're very special: we don't sell Hana cartridges in Japan. In order to keep our margins low and prevent any export problems, and to keep our prices very competitive, since we want to offer the best value for money to the consumer, we have decided not to sell to Japan, even though all our cartridges are produced by hand in the country.*

**In addition to Hana, you are also involved in other brands, including one launched since 2013: Sorane?**

*With Sorane tonearms, made by IT Industry, which also works for the famous Ikeda brand, I have tried to participate in the creation of another very promising brand, this time in turntable arms, with a much younger directors, very promising to the company for the future.*

**Thank you Hiroshi Ishihara. ■**