

SUMIKO BLACKBIRD

PRICE: \$749



Like the Blue Point EVO III, Sumiko's new Blackbird is a high-output moving coil with an exposed-motor design, but with a distinctive drive mechanism that features a very-low-mass elliptical stylus and a Boron cantilever rod terminated in a small resonance-controlling inertia block. Building on the EVO III's core strengths, the Blackbird aims to raise the performance bar higher still, yet without becoming finicky (think, "Ferrari for the Common Man," and you've got the idea).

What sonic enhancements did the Blackbird provide? First, it offered superior resolution and focus from the midbass on up, capturing textural details with greater clarity than the EVO III. Second, the Blackbird's

midrange had improved openness, three-dimensionality, and dynamic sensitivity. On the “My Funny Valentine” track from The Paul Desmond Quartet’s *Live* album [A&M/Horizon], for instance, the Blackbird revealed extraordinarily delicate shifts in phrasing from Desmond’s alto sax, as well as the intimate acoustics of a jazz club (complete with the murmur of patrons’ table conversations and the occasional “clink” of glassware in the background). Third, the Blackbird produced taut and articulate bass and midbass—with clearer textures (but a lighter balance) than the EVO III’s. Finally, the Blackbird tracked complex passages more gracefully than the EVO III (though when the Blackbird’s higher tracking limits were reached, the resulting loss of focus sometimes *seemed* more noticeable because of its midrange purity).

The Blackbird offered a host of musically significant improvements relative to the already good EVO III, with more resolution, better focus, and greater three-dimensionality—all while retaining crucial treble smoothness. Though the Blackbird’s balance at first seemed lighter in the midbass and ever-so-slightly more forward in the midrange than the EVO III’s, that balance could be “tuned” for more weight and warmth through careful VTA adjustment (and, Sumiko suggested, through use of mid-to-high-mass tonerms said to enhance bass solidity). The Blackbird supplied a full measure of the openness and resolution that music lovers crave, without the excess brightness that makes some moving coils sound too edgy for their own good.

**PHONOSTAGE SETTINGS: 50KOHMS, 200PF,
40DB GAIN.**