

TEST del disco stabilizzatore e miglioratore di riflettività **MARIGO 3-D SIGNATURE v2**

The discs under test come from Marigo Labs, Ringmat Developments and SID. SID (Sound Improvement Disc) supplied their model 14 and model 15 discs, both selling for £18.95, but with subtle differences to the diameter of the centre hole to suit different transports. Ringmat Developments were represented by their Statmat MKII CDi (£14.50) and Ringmat CDi Blue (£32.50). The CDi Blue uses two Statmats bonded together at 90° to make a more rigid, better performing mat. Marigo's designs are far more high end, with their cheapest solution at £59, the Stealth 3D CD Mat and their flagship Signature mat at a snip under £120! Both mats have been designed to work on all CDs as well as on DVD and an optimized coating on each side of the mat allows for this.

Use and Handling

CD Mats, unlike some other accessories are handled each time they are used, so their durability is also a critical factor. In this respect I was most concerned with the Statmat MkII and Ringmat CDi Blue models as aligning this became problematic. This was in my mind totally down to their wafer thin polythene construction which made handling a bit of a challenge. The SID disc by contrast was easy to use, though a little care was needed to ensure that it was precisely aligned and the right way round. As long as the gloss side of the mat faces upwards, you're ready to go. When it came to the Marigo it started to become clear why these commanded a higher price tag. These mats are precision engineered, to the point where they are self-aligning, and as long as you have them the right way up, they work brilliantly.

MARIGO 3-D SIGNATURE v2, 165 € + IVA al pubblico

www.plasmapan.it / 3351448229

Getting yourself in a spin !

Following on from the last issue where David Allcock looked at CD tweaking in general, in this issue he checks out the best CD mats on the market and takes them for a spin!

SID

With the SID installed the first thing that struck me were vocals, these were noticeably improved, with far greater depth and solidity, making the sound far more analogue and liquid. The edginess that you sometimes hear from CDs was considerably reduced, likewise the sound staging increased in both width and depth. The stage seemed to reach much further back, driving instruments consistently through the back wall. There were also improvements in solidity and space between musicians. This not only made individual images more palpable, but also gave a more believable space around each. There was a slight improvement in sound decay; acoustic instruments such as guitar and piano really benefited which suggested to me that the noise floor had been lowered.

Ringmat Developments Statmat MK II CDi

Initially I felt that vocals were again improved, however, I found this inconsistent between different recordings. The largest difference was in the area of soundstage, this seemed a little wider, but there was only a very subtle improvement in stage depth. This gave more of an elliptical shape instead of a regular rectangular which I would expect. The bass had a very slight improvement in definition and texture, with the start and stop of percussion a little easier to distinguish. The overall effect seemed to be a general improvement in timing. There also seemed to be a very slight emphasis of higher frequencies. While this was not necessarily a problem on my system, brighter sounding CD players would do well to avoid this mat.

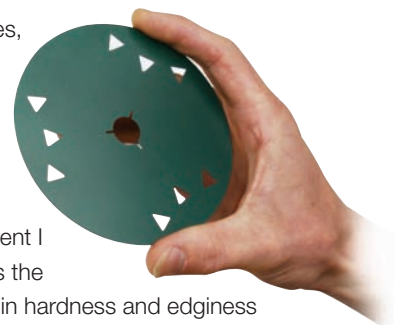
Ringmat Developments Ringmat CDi Blue

Like its smaller sibling, the CDi Blue only brings about a small improvement in the vocals; however, with this disc they are far more consistent and less fleeting. The largest change is in the area of sound staging, this is noticeably wider and deeper, far more extended. The overall proportions of the stage sounded far more natural. The slight emphasis of the high frequencies noted with the Statmat MKII CDi are abated with this mat. If anything, they sounded smoother, yet still detailed with greater resolution. I have to say I was not expecting the improvements to be so great between the CDi Blue and Statmat, given that their basic construction shares so many common elements. However, credit where credit is due!

Marigo Labs Stealth 3D

Despite its higher price, the level of improvements brought about by the Marigo Labs mat moved playback up to another level. Not only were vocals brought forward into the room but they were also far more natural and realistic. This mat moved recordings towards an analogue presentation, exhibiting greater fluidity and subtlety. The soundstage was also a shocker, it simply walked straight through my side walls, with instruments accurately focused beyond the outer edges of the room, populated with solid, believable images. The spaces between instruments was also clearly defined which had the effect of heightening the believability of the overall recording. The bass also seemed extended, all be it in a subtle way compared to the other improvements already noted. To my surprise tempo seemed to remain the same, yet there seemed to be more time between notes, allowing far more

information to be presented. It was now possible to appreciate instruments and the techniques of musicians. With regard to the higher frequencies, there was very little change. The biggest improvement I found was the reduction in hardness and edginess to the notes. This was similar to the improvements found in the SID mat without diminishing the resolving capability of the player.



Dido: *No Angel*

[Arista 74321-80268-2]

Kraftwerk: *Tour De France*

[EMI 591 708 2]

Diana Krall: *Girl in the Other Room*

[Verve 0602498620465]

Brenda Russell: *Paris Rain*

[Hidden Beach Recordings EK 62138]

Getting yourself in a spin !

Continued . . .

Marigo Labs Signature

To my surprise the Signature mat out performed the Stealth in every way! Vocals positively flowed into the room from the speakers. They were far more solidly rendered on the soundstage than in any of the other mats, even beating the Stealth 3D, with a real palpability and body to the vocal performance. The bass opened up significantly more than with any other product here in this test. This resulted in allowing me to hear right into the mix, it became easy to discriminate between the sonic contributors to the overall recording, and like the other mats, the noise floor level was lowered, but in this case significantly. It was now possible to hear subtle decay details otherwise buried in the noise floor. The soundstage was slightly larger, but it was in the silence between the musicians that the greatest change could be heard, giving a sense of being able to walk amongst the musicians.

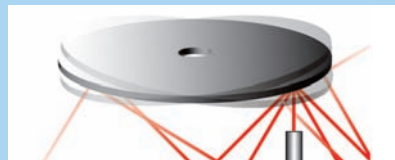


The Science of Tweaking

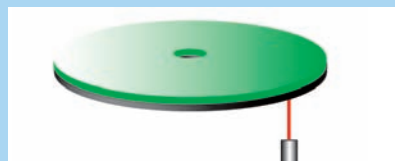
In the case of each manufacturer (with the exception of one), they believe a different problem has a greater effect and therefore needs rectifying more. Ringmat Developments feel that static build up caused by the high-speed rotation of the disc is the major cause of the sonic problems associated with CD replay. To solve this, their mats use a polypropylene film, which has special electrically conductive ink applied to its surface in a specific pattern. In the case of the CDi Blue, there are two parts of polypropylene film again featuring the specific geometric pattern sandwiched together at 90° angles. In the case of the SID mats, both models concentrate on damping the disc and ensuring constant reflectivity. CD's, and any 5-inch disc for that matter are not always pressed perfectly concentrically or perfectly flat. Whilst these variations are miniscule, once the disc is spinning at high speed this can cause the disc to wobble. The SID disc is manufactured from a damping material designed to prevent these vibrations occurring, resulting in reduced workload for the laser focus assembly and less usage of the error correction system. The SID disc also endeavors to ensure consistent reflectivity, as the printing on the top face of CDs causes the discs reflectivity to vary, again

CD Wobble is Avoidable

CDs are never pressed 'dead centre' so wobble is inevitable, and information loss is unavoidable.



However a CD Mat stabilises the disc and a truer signal is achieved



increasing error rate as well as potential stray laser light to fly around the disc drawer causing further errors. The green colour of the SID disc has also been designed to absorb stray red laser light, giving a constant level of reflectivity. Unlike the other manufacturers here, Marigo Labs believe that all these factors, static, CD wobble, laser light scatter cause problems with CD replay. To achieve such startling results the company use a combination of techniques, a special proprietary damping material for the main disc substrate, a special coating to absorb stray laser light, and finally an embedded wire matrix to dissipate static build up as the disc spins at high speed.

CONCLUSION

This group test produced some surprising results, which I was not expecting. The Ringmat products, whilst having an unparalleled reputation in analogue, just did not seem to offer the improvements commensurate with their price, the basic Statmat MK II CDi in my mind fell short of the performance of the similarly priced SID disc. The more expensive Ringmat CDi Blue, at twice the price of the SID, only just out performed the cheaper version. I felt both the Ringmat products offered somewhat poorer performance for their price; this coupled with their durability makes a cast iron recommendation impossible.

The SID disc offers astonishing value for money to my mind, and I would recommend this to anyone with a CD, DVD or SACD player. For its price, it is an audiophile bargain, and if used with a static inhibitor like, for example Statban or ECO3 the results can be truly breathtaking.

So, now finally to the high end Marigo twins, the Stealth 3D and Signature. The Stealth 3D is £20 more than any other product here, yet I would suggest this offers the best value of any disc present, pushing my digital replay standard to a far higher standard than I've had in my room so far. Whilst the Signature took everything the Stealth had done and

elevated it to even greater heights. These mats' relevance to even high-end players was a surprise, as you would expect more expensive player to have a more heavily damped transport negating the effectiveness of any mat. However, in my experience, these players use the same or similar transports to cheaper models, with more expensive electronics being utilised to improve transparency and performance. I would unhesitatingly recommend both the Marigo mats to anyone interested in extracting the very best from their digital sources. Both to my mind offer tremendous value for money. How highly do I rate these products? It is enough to own a Marigo Signature, and to use it regularly!

