

# Dynavector DV-20X2 Low-Output Moving-Coil Cartridge

## Very Groovy

By Lawrence Devoe

**D**ynavector has been a household name in the phono-cartridge business since the mid-1970s. I have fond (albeit slightly faded) memories of an early generation Dynavector moving-coil cartridge that set me back a couple of C-notes (big bucks for that era). That cartridge's ability to extract inner detail and provide sheer musicality from my treasured LPs opened up new vistas for my then-youthful ears and made me a moving-coil fanatic for life. In the following three-plus decades, I have had dozens of MC cartridges in my sound systems, but the DV-20X2 represents my first return trip to the Dynavector domain.

### Getting the Lowdown on Low Output

An increasing number of MC cartridges are being offered in high- and low-output versions. The DV20X2 cartridge comes in both high-output (2.8 mV) and low-output (0.3 mV) versions; the latter is discussed here. This well-made cartridge features a 6-mm aluminum pipe cantilever with a Micro Ridge nude diamond stylus and neodymium magnets. Weighing in at 9 grams, it will be compatible with most available tonearms.

Whether phono inputs are already included in a preamplifier or come installed on freestanding phonostages, they are often optimized for either moving-magnet or moving-coil cartridges. Meeting the specifications of these inputs is critical for optimum performance. High-output MC cartridges are usually intended for inputs capable of handling a much higher signal without overloading (a feature typical of MM inputs). Low-output MC cartridges are designed for phonostages that have step-up capability for their much lower signal amplitude.

Over the years, there has been much discussion about the comparative virtues of high-output versus low-output MC cartridges. While these two types of cartridges differ in the number of coil windings and often in their weight, die-hard vinyl fans tend to prefer low-output versions, citing their alleged greater purity of sound. However, before going with a low-output MC option, particularly one with the output level of the DV-20X2, it is vital to know if your phono preamp has sufficient gain, so you can avoid a significant noise penalty. *(continued)*





### Get Moving

For this review, I used a modified VPI Aries turntable with outboard flywheel, a Nordost-wired VPI 10.5i tonearm and a Pass Labs XP-15 phono stage. Having considerable experience with other low-output MCs, I set the XP-15 at its highest gain (76 dB); and after some preliminary listening, I settled on an impedance of 100 ohms (within the range recommended by Dynavector) and tracking force of 2 grams. Installation was non-fussy, and with my linestage gain turned up to normal listening levels in the absence of a source, there was, blessed be, no noise.

For the past two years, I have become obsessed with a

cut from Esperanza Spalding's Grammy-winning *Chamber Music Society* (Heads Up). On the snappy Brazilian tune "Inútil Paisagem," Spalding exchanges lines in English and Portuguese with noted jazz singer Gretchen Parlato. This song not only tests a cartridge's resolving ability to distinguish between the two female voices singing in the same range, it also tests how well the cartridge keeps the background acoustic bass notes in focus. No problems here, as the two women (and Spalding's bass) get right into my room with great pace and pitch.

Whether or not you are a Patricia Barber fan, her albums are consistently blessed with

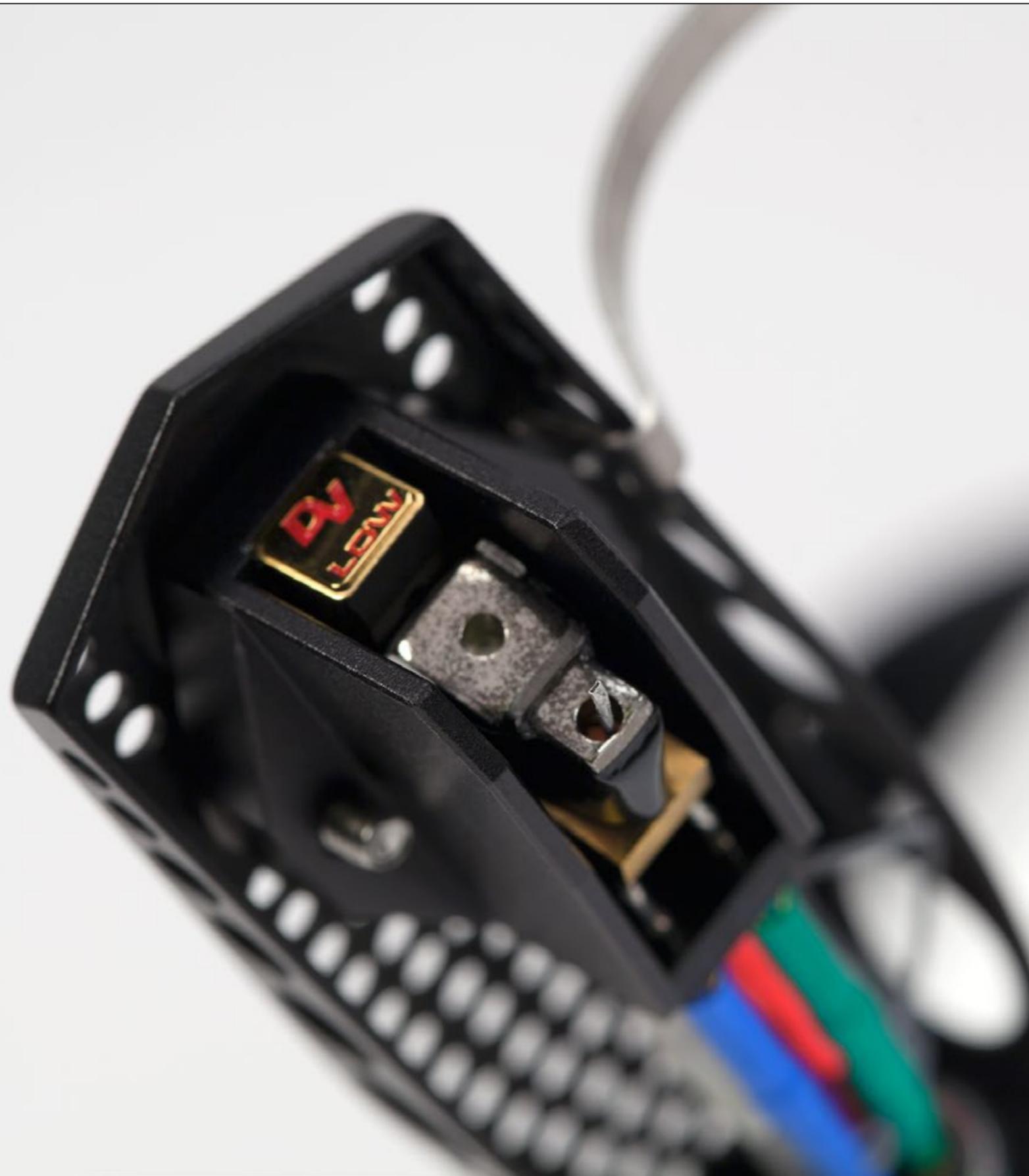
great sound. For its full panoply of vocals, lively percussion, throbbing baseline and intermittent trumpet riffs, the track "Constantinople" on *Modern Cool* (Premonition Records, OOP) is tough to beat. A cartridge is sorely taxed to keep up with these proceedings, letting us hear all of the interweaving lines, and here the Dynavector definitely keeps its cool.

I have always been a sucker for live recordings that eschew the artifice inherent in most sound studios. There is a delightful little holiday record (sadly no longer in print) called *The Christmas Revels* (Revels, Inc). This LP features a talented community music group in live performance of traditional music of the season. *(continued)*

## FEATURE

The stage action is constantly shifting as the musicians move around, there is the expected assortment of background noises and listeners get a real sense of an organic performance. I feel that DV-20X2 gives me most of what I expect when compared to the previous representations from my other (and far more expensive) cartridges.

A supreme test for any cartridge is the closing scene from Wagner's *Das Rheingold*, in which a huge storm gathers (in the orchestra) and the god Donner delivers a lightning bolt with the strike on an anvil. The only recording that I have ever heard that does this piece justice is the 1958 Decca LP (recently reissued as "The Golden Ring" Highlights disc, a part of a deluxe Decca vinyl box set). The Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, under the baton of Sir Georg Solti, delivers the music, and an actual anvil was used for the onstage sound effect. A huge wall of sound just blows out of the speakers and this cut tests a cartridge's ability to resolve complex instrumental voices and its ability to stay in the grooves when the music goes fortissimo. I'm happy to report that the Dynavector never flinches on this one; had Wagner been in my listening room, I'm certain that he would have smiled.

**A Dynavector to Die For?**

One sign of a great cartridge is its ability to draw listeners in and, in so doing, compel them to play entire LP sides rather than stopping after a single cut. And the DV-20X2 cartridge is just that kind of analog transducer. At its \$850 asking price, it's not nearly as steep as the top of the Dynavector price line—or, for that matter, any of my current reference cartridges, the least expensive being the \$1,995 Lyra Helikon (also a low-output star). What the Dynavector does well is convey a palpable soundstage, retrieving much of the detail that resides in the groove (without being overly analytic). It also easily handles complex sound signals without getting swamped.

If not the ultimate word in any of these categories, this MC cartridge will still provide substantial listening enjoyment with terrific musicality. Provided your phono preamp is up to handling low-output MC cartridges, this is an easy one to recommend to serious vinyl lovers. ●

**Dynavector DV-20X2**  
**Low-Output MC Cartridge**  
**MSRP: \$850**  
[www.dynavector.com](http://www.dynavector.com)