

# Kiss me and I'll make Music

*Original text by Walter Fuchs  
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(Translation from German)*

Doesn't this title sound somewhat familiar? Of course you know it!

Doesn't this hot frog appear in each better fairy tale book promising to change into a prince after having been heartily canoodled with? Regarding my looks I am not the right substitute for a princess and the frog also didn't speak with me — there's no surprise there, but Van den Hul's new phono cartridge just is named "The Frog", and this beginning is just as good as any other. And this phono cartridge does have a colour — only don't mount it on a black tonearm. What colour? Well what does a frog look like in this country? **Correct, poison-green!** But that green, which is anodised on the housing at Van den Hul, at the most can yet stand the combination with a violet tonearm. **Every frog that would wear such an outfit would be thrown out of the country** — and rightly! But there are situations

where one simply has to go on. So I got the little green jumper from its box and screwed it under the headshell with contempt for death. There it now hung, still exactly looking as terrible as when in the box. In such cases one rather makes the adjustments with closed eyes. Letting the thing run for a while with an old record on the table is an obligation — one knows that Van den Hul's systems always need a long run-in time. There however stood some interesting records from the flea market, so my hand did nevertheless find its way to the volume control with the intention to let some moderate enjoyment reach my ears. What a surprise: No trace of running-in, the little jumper makes music. No comparison to the Grasshopper or the Black Beauty which require a miserable long time of soft kneading the rubber. Before, at my place only the Ortofon Rohmann played like this. No warming up or running-in, music directly from the first moment on.

That was not the only surprise. However in sequence: It concerns a poison-green!!!! anodised housing which encloses the generator of the Grasshopper III equipped with a relatively short cantilever. There are various versions of the coil construction: copper, silver or gold coils, and those alternatively in low or high output. I had the gold coil low output version available. The system furthermore classifies as a normal signal level MC cartridge, also directly corresponding with the specifications in the technical data which for a matter of fact are all available on the van den Hul website.

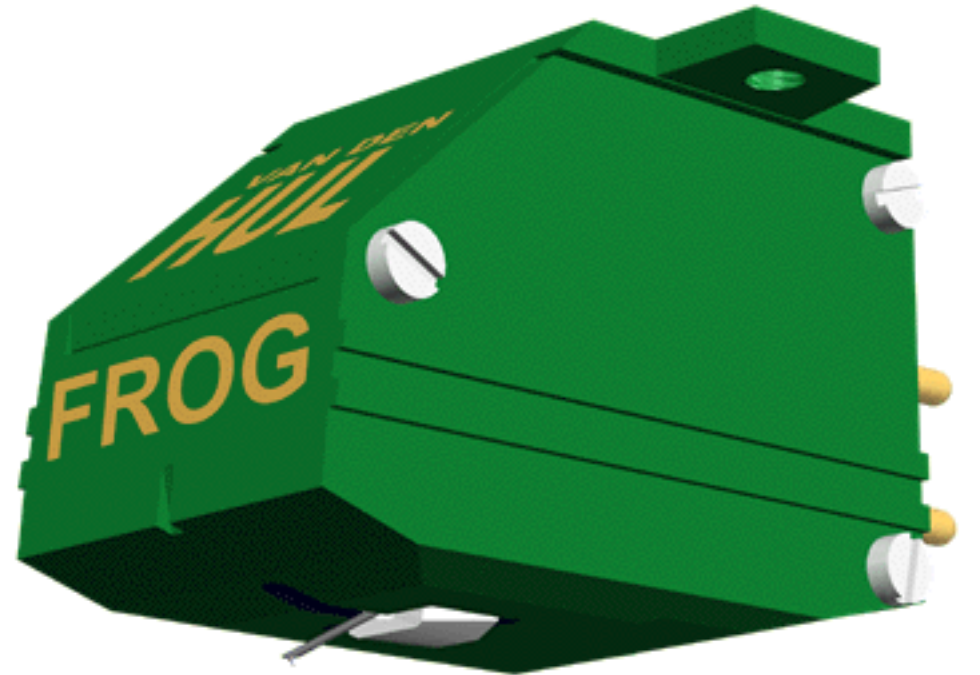
As usually is the case for me and as also recommended by Van den Hul, "The Frog" was operated with a quite high load impedance (2.7 kOhm). The quite sharp stylus shape (2x85 micron) presupposes an accurate adjustment: If the rear side of the arm is a little too high the sound becomes sharp and tiresome, an absolutely horizontal setting is called for. Then this phono cartridge rewards one with a sound that reaches up dangerously close to the "Black Beauty".

That becomes quickly clear to one when listening to the Horowitz in Moscow recording (DG 419 499): The piano is located so perfectly and naturally in the room, and the keystrokes come light as a feather and so naturally, that any assumption that this music could also be played in a different manner simply seems foolish. The spider fingers dart along the keys with unequalled sovereignty and conjure Horowitz' typical dynamic jumps from the loudspeakers. Anyway: The other components should be of high quality in order to be able to keep up with this system, this mainly concerning dynamics. What "The Frog" delivers there is already a class by itself.

Listen to the guitar duo from Frankfurt playing pieces of Manuel de Falla, Ibert, Duarte and Heitor Villa-Lobos (Solist-Musikverlag th.messer Stereo 1175). There the guitar body sounds like wood when it is struck and it does not seem as indefinable knocking. Often downright deep into the tonal cellar goes Ottorino Respighi in the Tre Preludi per Organo (Bongiovanni GB 5502). A fantastic recording that shows that this man, apart from the birds and the wells of Rome, also has described and written other things that are very worth listening to. This record is a jewel of tonality.

But what about tone colour? Is a phono cartridge with such dynamics also able to reproduce tonal subtleties or is it just a volume banger? Here I have to show off my last flea market acquisition which more than astonished me: Pavarotti Premiers (CBS Masterworks 74037). About 18 years ago Pavarotti was not yet as heavy as today and also not only a third tenor. What he recorded there with Abbado and the orchestra of the Scala deserves highest praise, in particular the Cavatine from "I due Foscari". That is exemplary Italian tenor singing as hardly can be more typical and better. Here the Frog proves that also tonal colours belong to its domain: soft quivering breathed passages are just as natural as bursting parts from the less often played works of Verdi.

And another test for tonal harshness: Kiri te Kanawa with the Ave Maria recording (Philips 412 629). No, not the one of



Frank, but of Schubert. And furthermore lots of music of Gounod, Mozart, Bach, Purcell and Händel. Of course you can now say that this woman is a typical fine singer, and you are completely right. But exactly this makes her to be a heavy test for all components, and the phono cartridge that shows even the slightest harshness here can be confidently thrown in the bin. The Van den Hul does not belong into the special waste bin. Surprisingly this dynamic banger in such situations shows how carefully it can deal with voices.

Likewise belonging to the category of fine tonality is the Sinfonia Drammatica of Respighi (Marco Polo HK 6.220418), a production of Hong Kong Records by the way. Well, the Chinese are slowly on their way up, here nevertheless with the Slovakian Philharmonic Orchestra. The music reminds of Mahler, Richard Strauss and — naturally Respighi. The finest nuances are layered one above the other and can only be separated in a clean manner by a really first class phono cartridge.

And furthermore now the well-known instrumental sensation which comes in dozens of versions: The “Bilder einer Ausstellung”. This time however of George Szell (CBS 61845) who with the Cleveland Orchestra delivers a strong sounding and almost free floating version like one not often gets to hear. Here the work is not used as a popularising self-presentation, but rather is played as Mussorgsky had noted it (and Ravel instrumented it), although the wind instrument section has a sharpness and insistence that, particularly due to its seamless transition into the following parts, puts a strong emphasis on the intro of the piece.

I can only say: A fantastic frog — if it only didn't have this colour! To be built in and fine-tuned without trouble, getting along with almost every tonearm and delivering sufficient output voltage. One doesn't need more from a phono cartridge — or not? Doubting, I again put my Black Beauty into operation and heaved a sigh of relief: It nevertheless still worked a little better in all disciplines, so I didn't write nonsense in my description of that exceptional phono cartridge.

Who however is willing to spend approx. DM 3000,- for a system, gets with “The Frog” a truly fantastic phono cartridge, which besides also may be considered as the most unproblematic one of Van den Hul. The following versions exist: With copper coils, silver coils, gold coils and as High Output with copper coils. To all 1.6 g applies as the tracking force limit, which one however also should utilise. The phono input should be very low-noise in order to use the full dynamics. And don't forget to set the tone arm completely horizontal!

Listened to with:

Record players:	Girati Grande with Portamo tonearm and CEC
Phono cartridges:	The Frog, Black Beauty, Grasshopper IV GLA, ART 1 and others
Record cleaning machine:	VPI 17
Preamplifier:	SAC Alpha with additional battery power unit
Output stages:	SAC “II Piccolo”
Loudspeakers:	SAC “Piccolo”
Cables:	Connex: Power Cleaner, Numero Due and Rasta 3

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