

MONO STEREO

REVIEWING THE WORLD'S FINEST AUDIO PRODUCTS

Grandinote Celio phono preamplifier review



Phono preamplifiers in 21st century? Making sense, having their spot under the sun? You betcha!

Vinyl revival was forecasted by many as merely a trend. It should fade, loose the peak very quickly. Past few years proved this wrong. Completely wrong...

There were never so much turntables on the market and associated products, what to talk about the vinyl releases. Old vinyl factories are re-opening their closed factories and many companies invested into their own printing plants. Acoustic Sounds QRP speaks for it self with the quality and magnitude of printed releases and many are following with grand pace.

Revival brought back the needed attention and demand for high quality phono preamplifiers. For sure there is abundance, yet not really that many satisfying and musical potent phono preamplifiers igniting many of the analog enthusiasts and music lovers real interest.

Phono preamplifier approach can be quite simplified in general. There are many working concepts being exploited in one or another way in achieving what's being cold high-end audio phono preamplifier performance. As a rule most of audio designers are fighting with the low noise floor and dynamic impact as main focuses. Getting tiny signal to the proper level takes immense involvement and in depth know how.

Getting into the and providing sort of credible player for the game might be simple. Stepping up on the analog ladder reproduction demands much, much more mileage and R & D. Tightly connected to such ventures is the biggest "mistake" associated with phono preamplifiers manufacturing. In general most of phono preamps are lacking almost as mandatory lacks the flow and empowered musicality.



Noise floor battle can be won at first developing stages to a great extend. Period. Taking things further and not killing the sound, stripping it of the musical potency and ensuring the needed flow opens up complex electronic takes and mind twisting elaboration. Creating a stand out runner is no slouch.

MEET THE CELIO

Celio name was chosen by Grandinote owner/designer Max Magri to honor his grandfather. Its a tribute to his personality and the loving memories. Max wanted to create something different, worthy of attention and more importantly a phono preamplifier that will stand in time with its given vinyl reproduction abilities.



Celia is indeed positive player, naturally dark warmish as real thang, melodic, natural sounding and of transparent nature.

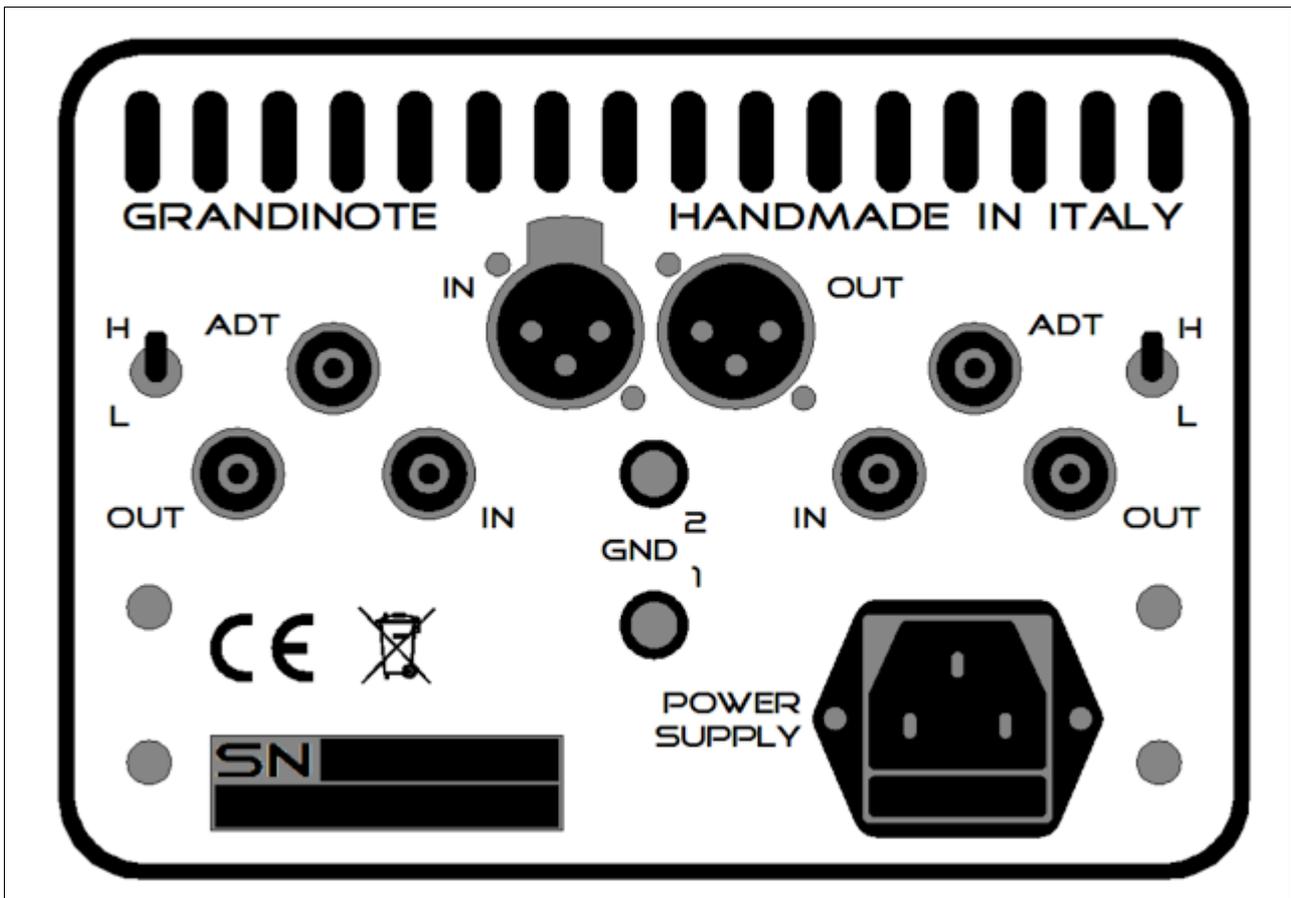


Someone with prolonged, hands on practical experiences with more demanding phono preamplifiers will appreciate this creation in very short time. It takes only few well known tracks to ensure Celio's positioning and proper appreciation.

Grandnote Celio is a labour of love and dedication to escalate what's hidden inside of the black grooves.

OPERATIONAL

Max Magri of Grandinote certainly clearly wanted to create something special, stand out with Celio phone preamplifier. It operates in Class A, with no feedback, uses no capacitors in signal line and its designed as a full dual mono phone preamplifier. At any time owner can upgrade Celio with addition of second unit and explore the XLR fully balanced dual mono setup. In this way Celio offers a clear upgrade path and makes it much more interesting from the start for the owner.



Both input RCA stereo signal or XLR mono signal are subordinate to loading adjustment. Upon order one can specify needed cartridge loading and Grandinote will prepare the calibrated external RCA ADT connectors to match the spot on impedance loading.



Additional gain switch with L and G lock gives more option and translates to low and high gain adjustments, helping to match the optimal gain loading to the line preamplifier. Nearby additional two ground connectors GND 1 and GND 2 are serving for device “body” and signal ground, opening up the doors for experimentation with the proper noise level.



Celio is two steps, gain adjustable phono preamplifier with both MM and MC input. As said it operates fully in Class A, with no feedback, with direct coupling stages and in absence of capacitors between stages. From ground up Max envisioned the purity of signal transfer, relating closely to emotional and tuneful reproduction.

MUSIC

Whenever I find some special vinyl related product I'm more than glad to pull out my "secret" stash of vinyl. For me, unlike quite some others out there, the value of vinyl resolves in their replay time and not resale value. My utmost respect goes to music lovers/vinyl collectors that actually play their treasured vinyl library rather than watching its value online, Wall Street like. Finding these rare gems should be for the sake of music enjoying. If else, O.K., but no need to proudly wave with the music loving flag, maximizing the ego boost.



My journey with Grandinote Celio from the start en-routed towards the musical epicenter. Once recognized for particular attributes my focus is clear and on different plane.

One thing, repeatedly coming on top of my listening notes was harmonic overlay capability. Its not always easy to lay down the sonic experience and translate it into the parable narration, easy to understand by broader audience. Still, transcribing is needed to the best of ones capability. Celio managed to ensure luminous audio experience, never sounding austere or being presented with embellishment. A stable purity forefront without masking curating.

For any phono stage or high-end audio component in this regard, constitutional role is belleverie and realistic reconstruction of the music. Celia presented benign sounding notes with clarity and of illustrational nature, never to step into the muddiness, passing the listening evaluation aplomb.

These days, the highest order of my criteria is pure musical interactive potency. Sublime, with involving factor of additional remuneration. Pompous, overblown fakery sounding gear finds no lasting, widening scoping place or attention lock. Core simplicity and interactive reproduction of music, transcending time and space makes much more sense. Not striving for ultimate portions of although illusory ultimate satisfaction gives a tiniest credibility, little or no point of wanted interaction. Celio pursue utopian quest stringently. Max Magri's brainchild never stepped into Liszt quintessential romantic vibe, fluently operating with clarity defined, of impressive stress free dynamics and tuneful colors, never rudimentary.

This phono preamplifier will meld audiophile, scientific minds alleviate and engulfing nature, cutting directly within musical realistic core, focusing ardently into composition and music message rather than analyzing it. Real musical mainstream, not supposing senseless musical act.

Too often life is sucked out of the music across too many phono preamplifiers, instantly evident at 6,000 Hz and above. Here, cymbals radiates with natural amplitude brightness of needed snapping, relating to attack rise time operating in the realms of volume amplitude never to unleash the harshness. If not of proper voicing, phono preamplifier will bleed your ears at this frequency range, additional accompanied by completely muffled, foggy cloudiness. Celio inert nature nor mask sonic soundscape nor exaggerate it. Quite a staggering blend of careful tuning.

As phono preamplifiers utmost role lays in the unrestrained "see through" nature let me pin point another important frequency range of instant critical judge points. Within 200 to 400 Hz shape, body and magnitude of acoustic instruments is formed, tones formulate and creates a palpable realism. Any mistakes or wrong design direction will undertone slowness and suck out the life of the music completely. Moving up further on the frequency ladder, 2,000 Hz stand for a solid core of definition, a ground place of guitar intricacies subtleness coming to life. Celio unrestrained character once more dominated. Exemplary and refreshingly, sublime nature of Celio emotional interaction capability encompassed all the needed attributes in the most needed direction.

Being critical is a mandatory step forward. Being predictable, of typical remarks stands fine, feels nice even right, yet of very little on zero refereeing via down to earth sober judging. In establishing the needed critical mass, bold move is needed to elevate beyond overused audiophile remarks, lovely floating in the safe waters. Only real completeness of high-end audio reproduction should as must aligned with the real world attributes. Especially with anything wanted to be kitten with anything near high-end audio labeling. Period!

Classical music represents my love and profound medium for testing and referencing all of the phono preamplifiers, by serving as grand playground for the microscopic gain demands, complete frequency spectrum galore ranging and enticing, realistic ambient reconstruction. Complexity and perplexed notation demands uber refinement with the fusible musical flow. Here, a contender must leapfrog the barriers of its class for such in depth observing. Celio was green lighting from the start!

Indulgences with added profundity from real world and real people of music and heritage certainly adds a needed spike.

I'm sure Stravinsky Rite Of Spring is no stranger to most. Along with Beethoven's 9th Symphony and Mahler's 2nd Symphony this masterpiece adds to my there most beloved symphonies.

Stravinsky's implementations of fragmental, intuitive rhythm patterns evokes peculiar sense of positively oriented drama. Parts and particles of this compositional masterpiece encompass uber mighty essential rhythm structure stepping up to completely alerting plane.

Walt Disney phenomenal Fantasia inspired by Stravinsky's Rite Of Spring

Stravinsky pattern recognition eludes one into too fast conclusiveness. Often, hypnotically repeated notes create lush ostinato intriguingly hiding low level of notes. Making it palpable is not even remotely easy task and Celio ubiquitously rendered even more dense, cadence phrasing. Interplay of slow and sudden shifts again sit remarkably well with Grandinote little, yet never superfluous mighty phono stage.

Grandinote perform upright with all of the material. Classical music material as Stravinsky Rite Of The Spring just put the final profound conclusion.

CONCLUSION

Grandinote Celio is very different and unique sounding phono preamplifier. Although there are vast array of phono preamplifiers in the price range, below and above, you'll have a hard time to find as musically involving and organic sounding phono preamplifier as Celio is. Core DNA of Max Magri sound tuning is lush, emotional and involving factor, extending across all the musical genres. By no means Celio falls into any of the old school phono preamplifiers. It relates much more to the sound orientation of competitive offering of Tom Evans and Alnico Audio.



Usually share speed, fast attacks, enriched musicality, upfront three dimensional spatiality and highly involving factors sits more comfortably in the domain of much higher priced phono preamplifiers. Celio intriguingly draw one into the music with ease and show its potency in absence of stacking, degrading layering. Sonic revelation is instant and interactive.

Celio musical drive is instant hit in the vein and locks firmly into the black grooves. I've put Celio through my personal of MM and MC cartridges and listening notes revealed same red line across both camps. Its down to a personal choice of pickup, still my heart and inner clocking is more aligned to MC.



I've had my prolonged matings with numerous phono stages. Like with other components it comes down of system orientation and matching. Still, Grandinote Celio resolves with a very different pace. Warm, not over-lush sound in enriched by the transparency and non often shown timbral correctness.

I've been to often asked about the negative side of gear under the test. Magnitude of products coming at my den is a non stop operation of warehouse import and export duties. I'm focusing on the products that matter and offer something fresh, worthy of attention and most importantly addressing my preferred sonic attributes.

Max Magri's Celio strikes with fruit-driven force. In the abundance of evanescent sound products Celio emotional empowered DNA still lingers with me. Bon vivant, a class of its own.

Text: Matej Isak

Price: 5400 EUR

TECHNICAL

Celio MKIII

MC gain = 66dB (67dB, MKII version)

MM gain = 45dB (53dB, MKII version)

XLR for MONO-BALANCED

Adjustable load impedances

Class "A"

No feedback

Direct coupling stages: no capacitor used

Full dual mono

Power consumption: 8W (7W, MKII version)

Weight: 12kg

Dimensions: W=178 x H=148 x L=408 [mm]

Warranty: 5 years

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