

dimanche 25 septembre 2016

Grandinote Celio (latest version).

This is the latest version of the musically beautiful phono stage from Grandinote. Yes I was very, very interested in listening to it since its former version was the only phono stage I have heard that I could have lived with after my Lamm even though it had some weak point, not musically though but in its application. So I really was extremely interested to discover if it was improved in its conception and execution.

First thing I will start from a building point: inside things are much better than the previous one and the layout is well organized and tidy enough. Not the NASA style construction or the clearly hand made with visible cables nicely organized that I like but nice and beyond reproach. Nothing to be in love with or to be repelled from. The outside changed a little. The faceplate has a slightly different design. I found the faceplate of the previous design a little more elegant, this one a little more understated as the global size of the unit that is less deep and definitely easier to fit in a shelf.

In the back of the unit things are almost the same except the loading selectors that take place of the RCA connector to which you had to connect resistive plugs to get the desired setting for your cartridge.





So I connected the new unit to my system. After half an hour of playing I sat to have a listen. Even though the unit was brand new I could easily hear some improvements and differences. The improvements in comparison from the previous version were strange enough to be put in words in an analytical way but they were clear nevertheless. If I have to put it simple I would say the sound is somehow more solid and there is less of a kind of oxygenation and light behind the interpreter that was typical of the previous unit but that could give a feeling of a certain fragility.

This light within the sound is still there but in a lesser degree. I found this thing to be a good choice since the Celio sound this way was more consistent and predictable.

The beautiful layer of shading in the high frequencies is still there, the natural timing is there as was in the previous version. Its tonal colour is very slightly darker. And the separation of instruments is slightly better.

Let's go to the weak point of the first version. loading. In the previous version I have noted that loading the Celio was slowing its sound and especially making it losing its magic characteristics. Loading the Celio was transforming it in almost another phono stage and losing its magic. This latest version is more constant. You can load with the selector switches at its back and it will keep its personality much more than the previous version. Still I prefer it at 47kOhm but with certain cartridges if I need I can load it at 1000 and even at 500 or 300 and being happy. Still with less than 300 load the Celio changes character and becomes an excellent phono preamp but loses its particular magic. This is also a strong improvement over the previous version since with the previous version I was feeling almost mandatory the use of open loading at 47kOhm.

The Grandinote Celio is the only pre phono that I have tried that could replace without any regret my Lamm LP2. I put them on the very same level. I cannot really say which one is better.

It has a very low noise floor, it has all the hifi characteristics you are after with a special liquidity and light.

I would like to say more of this light from within the instruments: it is not a real thing. It means it is not that real instruments generally have it, only few instruments have it. It is something that has to do with the reproduction of the medium high frequencies. VDH products, at least the top range tends to go after this effect, with more or less success. Few good 300B amplifiers have it too. It is something extremely difficult to achieve and I feel it is something that when you ear properly esecuted is fast addicting. I love this effect. We loose so much during the recording that it is easy to feel you need something more. What I mean is: I did few years of recordings, not in a professional way, but for myself and for friends musicians. Even in the monitoring after you have recorded for example a Bosendorfer you don't get it right. I have to say that you don't get it right even earing it in the recording room since the recording room generally is not a nice room for the instument to perform. So when it is perfect recorded you have the sound of an instrument playing in a dead room, the sound is not what you are used to ear. I don't like it. So for this reason some magic tricks that only hifi masters can achieve with experience or with luck let you enjoy the music much more then if you were earing it in a studio. At least for me since there are some people that say that is in the studio with the master recording where you ear the best reproduction. Sometimes these hifi masters are capable of putting some lost life in the reproduction of the instruments. Of course I think this added life is a kind of distortion. The big problem is that we have a lot of distorsions that will add in the hifi chain so the outcome is impossible to forecast for this reason it is a question of matching the right gears togheter. The new Celio version still has this light, as I previously said, but it is less evident. It is not of a golden colour, it is not the light of a sunset but of a dawn.

Since this caracterisitc is less pronounced in this latest version it makes the Celio more costant in its performance. You tend to have its characteristics with a far larger load choice.

With the previous version charging the Celio (thing that makes the sound darker in any setting and with any phono preamp) was making you immediately loose that kind of glowing lighth that you had a t 47Khom so the Celio was immediately changing the way it was presenting the music at you. In the new version since this "glowing" is less evident at open load and balanced with the other characteristics of the music reproduction, when you charge it down you don't have that kind of loosing a good thing you had with the previous unit.

The Celio is a wonderful product. It is more then an excellent hifi product: it is an excellent music instrument. It is capable of giving life to the reproduction of music.

Very few hifi products of any price are capable or were capable of doing it.

PS: peculiar thing in the Celio use: after you power it give it at least five minutes before listening to some music if not strange sound will come out of it and one channel will fade away and you will think something is wrong. For its design its transitors need to polarise and get stable. The fist version was muted in the first 5-10 minutes, so no sound was coming out of it, but in this last version sound comes out even after 2 minutes but it will sound wrong and like something broke down. So don't listen to it after turning it on for at least 5 minutes. You can leave the unit on all the time. It uses very, very low electricity.