

# Cello Chorale Preamplifier:

Technical Analysis by Fulvio Chiappetta for Fidelta del Suono



## THE SOUND

**From the start, I have to clearly state that my initial impression leaves no doubt that these are masterful audio components, well beyond the ordinary, and capable of astounding performance. I must hasten to add that there should be no misunderstanding: these are expensive pieces of equipment. Even though the manufacturer and distributor have managed to make the products available in Italy at the same retail price that they are available in the US (and everywhere else in the world; this being something unique in audio that we must acknowledge and praise) we are still considering equipment that very few people on this earth can even consider purchasing.**

**There's no question that, from a preamplifier costing 13,000 euros, one should expect nothing less than superior performance. However, in our fascinating world of high end audio, where sometimes the only certainty is that nothing is for certain, we occasionally get to even go beyond the extraordinary and glimpse nirvana. When dealing with products universally praised by the international press with superlatives, we can yet appreciate different approaches from different brands, and sonic results that are occasionally completely different from another. Nevertheless, truly high end systems, unique unto themselves are typically correct with respect to frequency response, speed and dynamics. Even so, it is possible to discriminate even between those components that are amongst the best. I am thinking that even when we judge a system to be transparent, coherent, and pleasant, we must yet determine how much it diverts from the only real rule to be targeted when designing a high end audio system: achieving absolute neutrality with respect to the signal to be amplified.**

**This single rule holds true for every piece of equipment, including source components and loudspeakers, but it's in the electronics, which amplify the signal by a factor of dozens, where there exists the greatest risk to "color" the sound. I preferred a sound that is reflective of the sound of music performed naturally, as opposed to sound that appears even more beautiful than the real thing. No gratuitous euphony for me, of course. And while I am an enthusiastic lover of realism in timber and soundstage, I also love that comforting sense of the "warm glow of a sunset", to use a visual analogy for the ideal sound to be composed by my system. Up until this moment, the amplifier nearest to my conception of coherent and lovely sound reproduction has been the recently reviewed Lamm 1.2. It has, coincidentally, a similar kind of sound to that produced in the past by the Mark Levinson and Cello amplifiers, as well as the sound produced by the Violas, themselves designed by staff previously involved at MLAS and Cello, Ltd.**



**Internal of the Cello Master power supply. On the left the big board includes the regulation, on the right are the filtering and stabilizing sections of AC input current. The components used are of the highest quality. On the right you may notice, apart from the huge toroidal transformer, a custom RF filter realized with discrete components, just to underline, if still necessary, all the attention the manufacturer paid to all the details, including the suppression of spurious signals, always present on the AC electric network.**

**This extended introduction is intended to make completely clear that I never, ever listened, until today, to a preamplifier capable of handling audio signals with neutrality, control, speed, and such a sense of absolute transparency and such an organic state of readiness to let the signal flow through it without any suppression, modification or apparent distortion. At first, I have to admit I was actually surprised because the sound seemed different from what I was expecting. As the days passed the initial surprise turned into enchantment, and then on to absolute love, and finally into a sonic addiction, really difficult to put down. Every other piece of electronics sounded, in comparison, "fat", "slow", and somehow "dirty". As difficult as it is to return to the rest of the real world, I can do it only with the consideration that I have had the pleasure to evaluate components whose sound is as close as is possible to the original sound as I have heard. I take some solace knowing**

that if they sounded like my reference electronics (even though these are quite good sounding) then there would be no reason for these Cello products to exist.

In my listening room at home, with the Kharma speakers, the conclusion of my evaluation can be expressed in the three areas which define the unique character of these components:

- The highest, absolute, most infinite sense of transparency
- Breath taking speed (both rise and fall)
- Total control of every transient, with every last bit and micro detail of information in the bass range clearly audible as never before.

From these capabilities flow dynamics so natural, and immediately recognizable to those experienced with live music, that any further comment would risk tainting such a basic and essential concept as naturalness (everyone recognizes the naturalness of timber, speed and sound, even when it is not even musical, as when something falls and breaks on the floor). From such a great transparency comes a reconstruction detailed and focused, able to depict with outstanding skill and precision any location of the instruments relative to each others location and with respect the entirety of the soundspace around them. The great control over the entirety of the frequency range, and it's important to emphasize "*the entirety of the frequency range*", allows upper harmonics the potential to be heard and to clearly distinguish one timber from the other, to clearly distinguish a fundamental from its harmonics. And, through this same ability at the other frequency extreme, in the bass, new life is given to records you've listened to throughout your life, simply by revealing every little nuance, many never previously heard.

While all of this is wonderful, the Cello user is obliged to carefully consider the matching with speakers and the particular listening environment. In the end the only thing I missed was a bit more of involvement sometimes provided by other electronics through increased energy in the bass frequency range. The problem is that while those other electronics appear to provide more bass frequencies, the truth is now clear that their sound is an artifact. When you face speed and control, as from the Cello under review, that do not diminish any harmonics or details, you can be sure you have found not only great audio components but also a milestone by which to measure the extent to which all others diminish or add to reproduction. With their coherence and speed, the subtle pleasures of a naturally proportioned bass is achieved and, in the final analysis, treats the listener to the way music can and should sound.

Cello components are designed to be the State of the Art in high quality musical reproduction. In my opinion, with the Chorale preamp with its Master power supply, the target is absolutely achieved. This definitive couple, although only available to the very few, most wealthy among us, provide a guarantee that the listener will be hearing everything on the record, and only what is actually on the record. Components like these establish a benchmark.

*Long live music!*

