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Cello Chorale from Matthew James

By Dirk Sommer



From a technical point of view, the Chorale is clearly a descendant of the legendary Encore Preamplifier, one of the most commercially successful of all Cello products. The Chorale comes with four single ended inputs with the unusually high impedance of oneMegaOhm. This makes life easy for attached sources because, due to the high impedance, the source's output stage experiences almost no load. The balanced input has an impedance of 10k Ohm for each side of the circuit, but can be switched to oneMegaOhm if a single ended source (RCA to XLR connection) is connected. Gain can also be increased with a switch inside the chassis, to bring an unbalanced source to studio level (and similarly there are internal switches for different gain and load impedance settings for the phono stage).

The test program was delivered by the Studer A80, the Alesis hard drive (with my own recordings) and a Lyra Titan i. Regardless of any other considerations, the Matthew James' Chorale charms you with its musical nature and an exquisitely realistic soundstage presentation. There is no desire to switch back to the previous reference. Together, with the Chorale, the reference amps sounded just a little more – usually I try to avoid this term in this context, but here it is absolutely appropriate – more natural than with the reference preamp. It seems that recording studios have become even more voluminous, and music flows into the room almost free of technical artifacts. The elegantly charming Chorale is an unpretentious servant to

the music. In a few moments the equipment is completely forgotten, as well as the task of describing the differences between them and other electronics. One simply becomes lost in the music.

Following these first, really positive impressions, I listened exclusively to the Cellos for several weeks and I was very content and felt no need for any kind of tuning measures. I can justify my contented passivity because the Matthew James chasses are mounted on feet with integrated ball bearings, decoupling them from ground vibrations and thus turning experiments in different locations simply obsolete.



Of course I also played with the phono stage of the Chorale which has plenty of headroom. In contrast to common belief, the termination of a low resistive MC with a high impedance load does not generate extra noise in this instance. Sound characteristics are airy, spatial representation is widespread, and transients come with the desired speed. As expected the Chorale makes the EMT reveal all its outstanding and well-known abilities: it's unshakable, solid low and fundamental frequencies, its well controlled dynamics and its exact timing. While other, more expensive, cartridge / phono equalizer solutions are able to expose a few more details, a little more space and one or the other additional tone color, it is hard to surpass the EMT combined with the Chorale phono board in enthusiasm, emotional involvement and pure musical thrills.



Before testing the phono stage with the lower output Lyra Titan i, I changed gain from 47 to 60 dB of gain. This setting also harmonizes perfectly with the EMT and,

despite its relatively large output voltage, it never reaches the overload threshold of the phono stage.

Teaming up with the Accuphase CD player, the Cello system provides a great listening experience with a pleasantly diverse range of musical types, absolutely glowing with bright and luscious tone colors, while drawing the listener into the music with natural dynamic contrasts. Even with a test CDs I have already listened to a thousand times, there is a new appreciation for the quality of the recording.