

# AUDIO FILE

MM/MC phono preamp with balanced outputs  
 Made by: Bel Canto Design Ltd, Minneapolis, USA  
 Supplied by: Padood Ltd, Cambridge, UK  
 Telephone: 01223 653199  
 Web: www.belcantodesign.com; www.padood.com  
 Price: £1250



## Bel Canto e.One Phono

What Bel Canto says it offers with its e.One Phono is a way for perfectionists to enjoy a high degree of adjustability at a sane price. Part of a series of units in the same mid-sized enclosure, the £1250 e.One has two banks of DIP switches to adjust both gain and loading. These are accessible via the rear of the unit and thus not first requiring the removal of any lid.

Both channels have their own mirrored sets of DIPs as this is effectively a dual-mono design. The jam-packed back panel thus contains RCA phono sockets for L/R

**'Incessant percussion drove the listener along to an almost martial beat'**

inputs with a choice of balanced XLR or single-ended RCA outputs. Then, flanking the phono inputs, are one set each of DIPs containing two switches for gain, with the default suitable for high-output MCs and all MM cartridges, and another per side with four switches for loading.

Another bank of DIPs offers ten impedance settings: 31, 45, 50, 77, 83, 91, 100, 331, 495 and 980ohm. With all four in the 'up' position, the value is 47kohm. Bel Canto describes its circuit as having an 'optimised two-stage

architecture', with a low-noise 40dB input stage, a high-precision dual-mono RIAA network and a fully-regulated, multi-stage power supply. The custom output stage comprises discrete components and features an idealised PCB layout with due attention paid to earthing. Suffice it to say, the unit was quiet, with exceptional dynamics.

### **A REAL BLAST**

What a beauty! Nothing can disguise the sheer musicality of this gem. And if 'fun' is an acceptable term to use in a context that some consider to be a life-or-death issue, then the e.Phono is akin to a real blast.

The beauty of the e.One is that its possible gain/impedance combinations allow the user to find something

close to ideal for most real-world cartridges – though we couldn't set it up at 68kohm for our London/Decca. And in a high-end context the Bel Canto e.One Phono certainly acted like it belonged.

We had to hand a fine copy of the 1960s *Living Presence Stereo* [Fontana SFXL52], which includes Ray Davies & The Button-Down Brass, The Coffee Set and The Band Of The Scots Guards delivering sonic spectaculars noted for their finesse. From track to track, all possessed that gorgeous sheen that has vinyl

**ABOVE:** With the e.One Phono, the action is all around the back, with banks of DIP switches. The front consists solely of a heavy, sculpted metal frame around a black glass panel with green LED power-on indicator

collectors, audiophiles and hi-fi pensioners alike waxing glorious about specific labels from a half-century ago. The brass had the kind of punch that sends chills down the spine. This unit is seriously quick.

We saved our ultimate test for last – female vocals courtesy of Linda Ronstadt. The recent reissue from *Heart Like A Wheel* [Mobile Fidelity] came from the era when studios demonstrated a heavy hand, but this exhibits transparency that belies any studio tampering. We are not about to suggest that 1970s Left Coast rock is a patch on the best Capitol albums circa 1957, but this was magical.

Airy acoustic guitar on 'It Doesn't Matter Any More' distracted us from listening to her voice, so open was the sound. Ms Ronstadt's distinctive, rich delivery was palpably present, and just breathy enough. Detail was plentiful, the bottom end on 'When Will I Be Loved' substantial and full, with the incessant percussion driving the listener along to an almost martial beat.

For 99% of the time, this is a step-up of truly ghostly silences. Narrowed down to its best-case scenarios, we'd say this performs at its best with moving-magnets – with a Shure V15 V we found it fast, clean and even a touch sweet.

### **VERDICT**

If you trust your ears rather than worry over the settings, this is one of the most confident-sounding, myriad-cartridge-accommodating phono amps around. The build is excellent, balanced outputs allow you to follow an upgrade path not restricted to pick-ups and the sound is just what you want from vinyl in that it's truly involving. ☺

### HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Input loading (MM/MC)	47kohm / 31-980ohm
Input sensitivity (re. 0dBV balanced out)	12.8mV/3.2mV/1.37mV/1.03mV
Input overload (re. 1% THD)	89mV / 23mV/11mV/8mV
Max. output (re. 1% THD) / Impedance	6.9V / 96ohm (balanced)
A-wtd S/N ratio (re. 0dBV balanced out)	93.0dB/ 76.2dB/76.4dB/76.7dB
Frequency resp. (20Hz-20kHz/100kHz)	-0.15dB to +0.45dB / +6.4dB
Distortion (20Hz-20kHz, re. 0dBV)	0.00014-0.0025%
Power consumption	4W
Dimensions (WHD) / Weight	216x75x318mm / 4.5kg