

# Manley Chinook phono preamp

---

 [remusic.it/EN/Manley-Chinook-phono-preamp-3fba7500](https://remusic.it/EN/Manley-Chinook-phono-preamp-3fba7500)



---

## Preamble

This is not the first time that we speak of **Manley Labs**, American company from Chino, California. We have already reviewed some of their amplifiers. I think, I hope, to talk much longer of the brand, since their products are so convincing!

I will start by saying that a minor trend among the audiophiles does not consider of capital importance the role of the phono preamp in the general quality of the audio chain. Obviously, the electrical and mechanical characteristics of cartridge, tonearm and turntable have a major influence and the calibration has even more influence. In the end, however, that 'feeble' signal has to be well hosted, equalized and amplified if you want to get satisfaction from your dear vinyl records.

The test of the **Manley Chinook** tube phono preamp has strengthen my firm believes about the correct setting of the electrical parameters. Furthermore, the tone qualities and the versatility of the device have made me progress towards a classy playback.

## Description of the product

The manufacture is solid, accurate, sober and professional. That means a lot of substance. The blue-green metallic front side has on the right the on/off button that lights up when pressed, and above it the backlit logo.

Depending on the cartridge in use - MM gain = 45 dB - MC gain = 60 dB – you have to change the gain setting via the internal *DIP switches*. Therefore, you have to remove the top grid. It is a simple operation although I think that, for the users that change cartridge 'at every change in weather', it would be better operating via external switches.

The back panel contains, starting from the right: the IEC socket for the mains cable, the RCA outputs to be connected to a line level input of your amplifier, a small recapitulatory table for the setting of the DIP switches according to the different loading the cartridge needs. Besides, the DIP switches for adjusting the input MC resistive and MM capacitive loading values, the earth plug socket to connect your turntable to the Chinook chassis and, lastly, the RCA inputs.

### **Manufacture and technique**

Inside, the preamp is very trim, with the part containing the power supply separated and shielded from the part of the real preamplifier. The components are of top quality. Many capacitors – electrolytic, polypropylene and other – are custom-made for Manley.

The four tubes that you can see in the pics are **Electro Harmonix 6922EH** double triodes. Each channel employs two tubes for handling the gain and the other two for the driver, while in the middle are the RIAA networks. Manley indicates in the specs some possible substitutes/equivalents: 6DJ8, 7308, ECC88. If I were you, I would not change them: their performances are amazing. I am not a fanatic of the *tube rolling* but, as my predeceased dear friend Maurizio (unforgettable manufacturer of tube apparatus) used to say: "what is important is how you make the tubes work and not if they have been made during the full moon nights and then preserved in old barrels of oak of Slavonia!".

Close to the DIP switches, I have noticed two TL082BCP operational amps by Texas Instruments, one for channel. Got curios, we have asked their function directly to Mrs. Eveanna Manley who explained: "Those opamps are performing as a DC voltage servo in order to bias the FET operational point. Those opamps are not in the signal path. They just stabilize a DC voltage needed to set the operational point of the FETs".

From a technical point of view, I have found remarkable: firstly, the low output impedance, 91 ohm, which can allow the driving of the most difficult line stages and, secondly, the maximum acceptance in tension with 45 dB of gain equal to 250mV RMS = +34.5: really great.

Back to the complex and complete network designed to change impedance and adjust the loading data of your cartridge. If you think that the thirty-two different adjusting combinations are too many, well you are wrong. Thanks to the selection possibilities, you can indulge in purchasing MM or MC cartridges. Read carefully what the manufacturer suggests as loading data, in particular Resistance for MC and Capacity for MM, and apply it by selecting with accuracy the DIP switches of the Chinook. The differences are easy to detect. I remind you that you have to consider for the MM also the capacity of the connecting cable from the turntable to the phono preamp.

A piece of advice: the Manley Chinook dissipates easily the heat, but find an airy place for it.

**A relished comment by Francesco Taddei, ReMusic's colleague reviewer**

Although I am a music lover, I have never used a lot the turntable. Maybe because my generation grew up with the CDs or for incompetence and laziness.

In any case, I have always recognized the goodness of the analogue playback and its superiority in some parameters like the bandwidth, the harmonic richness and the tone accuracy.

What I do not like very much is the ground noise and the fact that the dynamics is not very extended.

Said that, one afternoon Mauro called me and told: "If you have some time, come to listen to the Manley Chinook, then you will tell!"

Intrigued by his words, I checked on Internet and the first thing I saw was its cost: 2,250.00 USD.

Honestly pricey if compared to Mauro's setup.

When the tubes became warmed up...I would like to cancel what I said before about the poor dynamics and the ground noise.

I have listened many times to Mauro's **Thorens TD 124**, but never before the listening session has been so involving.

Great accuracy and velocity on attacks and releases, a 'true' sound, lots of harmonics and great tone precision. What is remarkable is the pleasure in listening and the fact of being able to playback all kind of music, from hard rock to vocal, at the same level of volume.

After this short listening experience, I'm not still convinced that 2,250.00 USD are an inconsiderate price for a system like Mauro's that can be considered well assembled but minimalist. I have also to add that the desire of turntable is stronger in me now.

## The Sound

Sometimes, to understand that a component of an audio chain is going to surprise us, we just need to switch it on. It is not a secret that the phono inputs are normally noisier than the line inputs. It is also easy to notice that, with the volume at twelve/one hour, there is some 'blow' and sometimes, when there are some problems with the mass and the electromagnetic induction made by the transformers or by 'risky' passages of the cables, also the typical *hum*. Well, the first thing that strikes us of the Chinook is the silence.

In particular, the ground noise is very low with the gain set for the MC cartridges. Maybe it is useless to say it, but in any case: take care in placing and connecting your phono preamp. Put a certain distance from anything with a transformer inside. Use good and short cables. The cable to connect the turntable, if possible, must be of low capacity. The big choice of loading data of the Chinook can bail you out in almost all the configurations. However, since you have to reason with the cable capacity in the MM cartridges, and with the capacity of the cartridge, it is appropriate that its value in pF is the lowest possible. Otherwise, some noisy *pops* that are typical of the electrostatic charges, especially when you operate on the tonearm, can arise together with the old good hum. Take these indications as 'general'. At Manley, they did their best to make their device noiseless and not critical in the positioning.

How should a phono preamp play? Simple, like the Manley Chinook!

This is in synthesis my thought. With its low ground noise, you can enjoy the *pianissimo*. The frequency response is extended and linear, so nothing is taken out from the original signal. Initially, I have noticed a small attenuation of the high range. I realized quite immediately though, that the Chinook was eliminating the noise that the sibilants and some open-weaves create on the high frequencies. Voices are natural and perfectly drawn in the space. The bass is deep, controlled, pleasantly sculptured. The detail of the instruments is at best of what the take can offer.

Although extremely analytic, it makes pleasant the listening of 'not great' recordings, valorizing them.

The behavior is always good with all kind of music. There is always a listening pleasure.

## Conclusions

Few contradictions, many merits. The Chinook casts a spell on me. I suggest to read the scheme summary below. I have though a lot before giving the Spark in the Dark, since Manley has already received the award for other models and will receive many others, but I cannot resist, sorry, to hold my Spark in the Dark.

## Selection of played music

Pink Floyd: *The Wall*, 1979, EMI, 2 LP

Talk Talk: *The Colour of Spring*, 1986, EMI, LP

Dire Straits: *Brothers in Arms*, 1985, Warner Bros. Records, LP

Talking Heads: *Remain in Light*, 1980, Sire/RCA, LP

Stevie Wonder: *Songs in the Key of Life*, 1976, Motown, 2LP + 8"

Jeff Buckley: *Grace, Simply*, Vinyl LP, Limited Edition, 180 Gram, UK

Suzanne Vega: *Solitude Standing*, 1987, A&M Records

Joe Jackson: *Joe Jackson's Jumpin' Jive*, 1981, *Night and Day*, 1982, A&M Records

Nine Inch Nails: *Hesitation Marks*, 2013, Null Corporation/Columbia, 2LP

## SCHEME SUMMARY

*top score \*\*\*\*\* ReMusic Sparks*

**Timbric:** \*\*\*\*\* | Together with the detail, Chinook's strong point. I would say perfect.

**Dynamics:** \*\*\*\*\*1/2 | Difficult to do best, mainly for the MC cartridges.

**Detail:** \*\*\*\*\* | Nothing to say. Over-all!

**Clearness:** \*\*\*\*\*1/2 | Just a bit of exuberance on the high frequencies is lost in favour of an enjoyable listening session.

**Image:** \*\*\*\*\*1/2 | Wide in all dimensions.

**Rate:** \*\*\*\*\* | It depends on the take and on the quality and setting of the turntable. Also here the Chinook goes with a bang.

**Manufacture:** \*\*\*\* | Solid, without frippery. Not very user-friendly the choice of putting the switches of the gain inside the chassis. But, in the end...they are just eight screws.

**Price/quality ratio:** \*\*\*\*1/2 | The selling price could appear 'important', but the quality justifies it.

**Official technical specifications:**

Vacuum Tube Complement: 6922 x 2 (gain stage) plus 6922 x2 (output stage). Any 6DJ8, 7308, ECC88 types may be used.

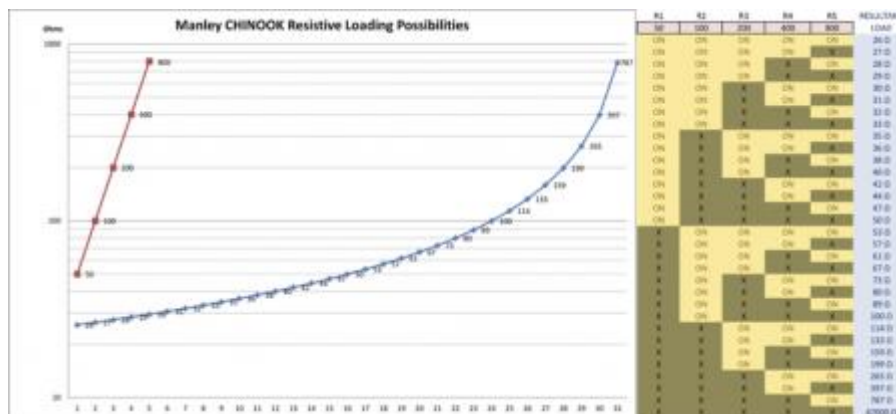
Unbalanced Input and Output connections via Manley Teflon® & Gold plated RCA jacks

Automatic Mute Timer: On initial power up output jacks are muted for approximately 45 seconds. Automatic mute circuit allows tubes to warm up and circuitry to settle. At power down, output jacks are immediately muted.

Input Termination Capacitance (MM/MC): 3-position user-selectable capacitor values of 50pF, 100pF, and 200pF yield resultant combinations of: 50, 100, 150, 200, 250, 300, and 350pF

Moving Magnet Input Impedance: 47k ohms, fixed

Moving Coil (MC) Input Impedance: 5-position user-selectable resistor values of 50, 100, 200, 400, and 800 ohms. There are 32 possible loading possibilities. See chart:



Gain: Internal DIP switches select 45dB or 60dB

Deviation from RIAA curve: Less than ± 0.5 dB from 20Hz to 20kHz at any gain setting.

Typically less than ±1dB from 10Hz to 100kHz.

Distortion (THD+N) (47k ohm Input Termination, 45dB gain, 1kHz sine, 0dBu output): Typical 0.010% THD+N, into 100k ohm load, BW = 100Hz-22kHz

Distortion (THD+N) (47k ohm Input Termination, 45dB gain, 1kHz sine, 0dBu output): Typical 0.030% THD+N, into 600 ohm load, BW = 100Hz-22kHz

Dynamic Range (MM input, Gain set to 45db, 200 ohm source): 91dB at 1kHz, 0.1% THD+N, BW = 22Hz-22kHz

Dynamic Range (MM input, Gain set to 45db, 200 ohm source): 107dB at 1kHz, 1.0% THD+N, BW = 22Hz-22kHz

Noise Floor at 45dB gain setting with shorted input: -84 dBu, A-weighted

Noise Floor at 60dB gain setting with shorted input: -75 dBu, A-weighted

Maximum Input at 45dB gain setting with 20 ohm Source Z at 1kHz into 10 kohm load: 250mV RMS = +34.5 dBu at 1% THD+N BW=22Hz-22kHz

Maximum Input at 60dB gain setting with 20 ohm Source Z at 1kHz into 10 kohm load: 40mV RMS = +34.2 dBu at 1% THD+N BW=22Hz-22kHz

Maximum Output: +37dBu at 1kHz, 1.5% THD+N into 100 kohm load

Output Impedance: 91 ohms

Minimum Recommended Load: 2500 ohms

Internal Power Supply: Fully regulated linear B+, Heater, and control voltage rails.

Operating Mains Voltage: Units are built for original destination country's mains voltage: 100V,

120V, or 220-240VAC as indicated on the serial number badge.  
Power Consumption in Standby mode: 1 Watt (8.0mA at 120VAC)  
Power Consumption: 42 Watts (345mA at 120VAC)  
Mains Voltage Frequency: 50~60Hz  
Power Transformer: Toroid construction for low radiation.  
Mains Fuse for 100V operation:  
800mA SLO-BLO Glass Littlefuse Series 239 size 5mm x 20mm  
Mains Fuse for 117V-120V operation:  
800mA SLO-BLO Glass Littlefuse Series 239 size 5mm x 20mm  
Mains Fuse for 220V-240V operation:  
400mA SLO-BLO Glass Littlefuse Series 239 size 5mm x 20mm  
Standby Transformer Fuse for all voltage operation 100V-240V: 10mA, SLO-BLO, MDL type  
size 1/4" x 1 1/4"  
Badge Lamp: LED illumination  
Dimensions: W=19", L=11", H=3 1/2"  
Shipping Weight: 15 Lbs.

For more info: [download here the original Manley Chinook manual](#)

**Official Italian dealer:** to Il Tempio Esoterico website

**Associated equipment:** to Mauro Cittadini's system

---

---

---