

## CD PLAYERS

### BEST UP TO £500

#### Marantz CD6003 £300

**Marantz has had something of a stranglehold on the budget CD player market over the past few years.** And nothing we've heard this past 12 months has changed that. This is the second time the CD6003 has picked up our budget Award, and it remains as dominant as ever.

What makes it good? It's built beautifully, for starters. Everything from the smooth-sliding drawer mechanism to the curved front panel and easy-to-use remote handset add to the feeling of quality. Marantz could easily charge a couple of hundred pounds more and the build would still impress.

The CD6003 is well specified, too. It has a headphone output (with dedicated volume control) and a front panel USB input for iPod

connectivity. Nice as these things are, it's the player's way with CDs that impresses us most. There are certain sonic qualities Marantz values above all else. These are a uniformity of speed across the frequency range, nicely layered stereo imaging and a refined, slightly rich tonality.

#### Just aggressive enough

Marantz designs its products to err towards pleasantness, even with wayward recordings. With some products, the company goes too far and music's innate aggression can get diluted. Let's face it, music from the likes of Eminem or Metallica just wouldn't sound right if sanitised in this way. However, with the CD6003, Marantz has got things just right. Yes, there is a hint of excess smoothness about the player's sound, but it remains just that, a hint. Play Eminem's *Not Afraid* and the player doesn't shy away from

spitting out the rapper's rapid-fire delivery nor from revealing the recording's hard edge.

However, move to Dvorak's *New World Symphony* and the Marantz is more than capable of floating a wide and expansive sound stage and displaying the kind of natural tonal warmth that more analytical sounding rivals such as Cambridge's 650C can manage.

A word of warning though. The CD6003 sounds optimal in terms of detail, refinement and timing only if you switch off its display and digital output. It's a shame this isn't the default setting, as most owners are unlikely to read the manual long enough to realise it can be done. Switching those things off is the difference between the CD6003 being a good player and it being an Award-winner.

If you can't stretch to the Audiolab 8200CD, this is the player to go for.

