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## Integrated Amps/Receivers

### Marantz PM5003 integrated amplifier

By Robert J. Reina • January, 2010



We crotchety middle-aged (and older) audiophiles frequently sit around and whine about the apparently rising median age of enthusiasts of two-channel audio. "We need to do something to attract the *youts* to our cause!" one of us will say. (*Youts?* See Joe Pesci in *My Cousin Vinny*.)



Well, that's not giving the younger generation enough credit. There is a growing number of young audiophiles, many of them hooked on vinyl. In fact, one of them commissioned this review. When *Stereophile's* own [Stephen Mejias](#) found out that Marantz was producing an attractive integrated amplifier *with* phono stage for only \$449.99, he immediately lassoed John Atkinson to request one for review. Shortly thereafter, a sample of the Marantz PM5003 arrived on my doorstep.

How young is Stephen? Well, let's just say that when Mikey Fremer was his age, Stephen hadn't been born.

#### What do you get for \$450?

A hell of a lot. The Marantz PM5003, which puts out 40Wpc into 8 ohms

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(or 55Wpc into 4 ohms), doesn't look like something that costs under \$1000, let alone under \$500. It's rugged and hefty, and its elegant looks remind me of a cross between Audio Research gear and the most expensive Creek electronics. The PM5003 was designed in Japan and is made in China (as are most Marantz products), and includes technology trickled down from two of Marantz's flagship models: the SC-7S2 preamplifier (\$8000) and the MA-9S2 monoblock amplifier (\$16,000/pair).

The PM5003 and its moving-magnet phono stage feature current-feedback circuits intended to exhibit faster rise and fall times and higher slew rates than voltage-feedback designs. According to Marantz, a current-feedback amplifier is better able to track music's rapid changes, and should sound more natural. The PM5003 is constructed with discrete components, and includes input buffer circuitry to optimize the signal/noise ratio and channel separation.

The PM5003 is awash with features: five line-level inputs, two record outputs, two pairs of transparent screw-type speaker terminals, a balance control, and a headphone amplifier. There are also controls for treble, bass, and loudness—and, for audio purists, a Source Direct switch to bypass them, just as in my old [Audio Research SP11](#) preamp. Those interested in custom installations will find triple command-code sets as well as an IR flasher input. All of the preamp section's functions are accessible via the rugged and well-laid-out remote control, which also controls Marantz's CD and DVD players, tuner, and tape deck.

#### But how does it sound?

Quite remarkable, actually.

The first phase of my listening involved only CDs, to test the line-stage and power-amp sections. The Marantz PM5003's transparent, uncolored midrange made it a pleasure to listen to well-recorded classical woodwinds, such as Anthony Michaelson's clarinet on [his recording](#). of Mozart's Clarinet Concerto, with Robert Bailey leading the Michaelangelo Chamber Orchestra (CD, Musical Fidelity MF 018). Throughout all three movements, Michaelson's instrument was woody, airy, and vibrant. Jazz piano also shone through the PM5003—the rich, warm, sonorous midrange of Marilyn Crispell's instrument floated naturally into my listening room on her rather minimalist phrasing in the title track of her *Amaryllis* (CD, ECM 1742).

Normally, I wouldn't expect to hear extended, natural highs from such an inexpensive component, but Tiger Okoshi's revealing trumpet on "On Green Dolphin Street," from his *Two Sides to Every Story* (CD, JVC JVCXR-0004-2), was rendered without bite, harshness, or any top-octave rolloff. The burnished metallic bite of his horn sounded dynamic and as involving as I've heard through far more costly gear. Solo violin is the acid test of high-frequency realism, and Mariko Senju's performance of Paganini's 24 Caprices for Solo Violin (CD, JVC JVCC-6504-2) was searing

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yet pristine, with no trace of discordant electronic artifacts. Throughout John Zorn's "Orphee," from his *Mysterium* (CD, Tzadik TZ8018), percussionist David Shimminer plays a variety of closely miked high-frequency percussion instruments. Through the Marantz they took on a shimmering, bell-like quality, with natural decay and transients that were quick but not too sharp. The Marantz's articulation of transients also did an impressive job in unraveling the midrange textures in pianist Vijay Iyer's angular, rapid-fire solo on "Revolutions," from his *Reimagining* (CD, Savoy Jazz SVY 17475).

With either the [Epos](#) or [Monitor Audio](#) speakers, the PM5003's reproduction of bass was natural, deep, dynamic, and fast, with no noticeable overhang. I analyzed Ray Brown's double-bass solo in another cover of "On Green Dolphin Street," this one, from *The Poll Winners* (CD, JVC JVCXR-0019-2), with Barney Kessel and Shelly Manne. The sound of the instrument's strings and wood shone through, with a good sense of pacing and no trace of coloration or loss of dynamics, even in the lower-register passages. Similarly, the opening plucked bass on "River of Orchids," from XTC's *Apple Venus, Vol. 1* (CD, TVT TVT3250-2), almost startled me—the notes seemed to jump out of thin air with realistic bottom-end weight and effortless dynamics.

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