



Marantz M-CR603

£500 ★★★★★

Remember last year Marantz launched a stylish little one-box CD receiver, the M-CR502? Well, this year it's really got the bit between its teeth, with a three-strong line-up of systems under the Melody banner.

There's a revised version of the original, the M-CR503 Melody Music; the Blu-ray-playing multichannel M-ER803 Melody Movie; and the system we have here, the network-capable M-CR603, or Melody Media.

Networking capability

Now apart from giving us vague *Captain Scarlet* flashbacks - it would've been even more fun if the systems had been called Melody, Harmony and Destiny - there's plenty to appreciate in this compact Marantz. Not only does it have the usual CD playback, DAB/DAB+/FM/AM tuner, and a 2x60W output from its onboard amp, it also allows digital hook-up and control of an iPod via the front-panel USB socket.

Oh, and it has the small matter of network capability via an ethernet port on the rear. Plugged into your home

network, it will stream thousands of internet radio stations, allow you to access streaming services such as Napster, or even access music stored on your home computer or network.

Enough, already? Not quite: with a £40 upgrade, not quite ready at the time of writing this review but expected by the time you read it, the Marantz will also act as an AirPlay client for iPods, iPhones, iPads and PCs running Apple's iTunes 10. At a click and a flick, you can stream music from your device.

This is one slick, fully loaded little system, and it has the performance, not to mention the build quality, to back up all that cleverness

Not into Apple? You can add an optional Bluetooth audio receiver to the rear-panel, which allows you to stream music from more devices.

This is one slick, fully loaded little system, and it has the performance, not to mention the build quality and finish, to back up all that cleverness. The wraparound casework gives it a look of real solidity, and we like the way the gloss top-panel overhangs the rear connections, tidying up the looks.

TOP TIP

The system is more than capable of running top-notch speakers. Monitor Audio's Bronze BX2s are a decent place to start your search

We tried it with everything from CDs to tracks streamed from iPods and a NAS drive, and it demonstrated speed, power and substance. It's dynamic, exciting and yet always in control, even when we threw some tracks with really seismic bass at it, and while the Arcam Solo Mini has it beat on sheer refinement and separates-worrying resolution, there's no denying that the Marantz is an exciting listen.

The networked alternative

The M-CR603 has the power to rock out with some serious speakers, too, and all in all offers a tempting alternative, fitting between the great-value Denon and the more expensive, but more accomplished, Arcam. If that network capability appeals, you shouldn't hesitate to give the Marantz an audition.

Rating ★★★★★

FOR A range of facilities way beyond anything else here; slick design and build

AGAINST Needs decent speakers to make the most of its capabilities

VERDICT The Marantz is packing, and its facilities make almost everything else in this group look a bit old-fashioned