



# ★ DIGITAL WINNER: MARANTZ SA-KI PEARL CD

**T**here are two ways of doing CD players. The traditional Japanese way was to take a standard silver disc player, festoon it with bullet-pointed technological features (x times oversampling, y times upsampling, silver wired this, special digital filtered that) and then plaster them all over the fascia in the hope it would walk off the shelves of your local Laskys. The other way was of course to make a well engineered machine and apply careful fettling to critical parts of the digital and analogue stages, then listen to the results, and then come back and do it again until everything sounds just as it should.

The former approach proved successful in the short term, but many of those Japanese multinationals have now left the specialist hi-fi market altogether, such as the long

term robustness of their approach. Marantz on the other hand, have had enduring success with expertly voiced machines, one after the other, year in, year out. The £2,500 SA-KI Pearl SACD player embodies this credo; it's a well engineered machine with no stone left unturned in the pursuit of serious sound. It succeeds not because of any specific techno trickery, but because it's a beautifully rounded design, voiced by some of the best ears in the business. This big (440x419x127mm, 14.5kg) machine sports a nicely aligned disc loader with a damped Xyron disc tray, the large aluminium feet confer a sense of solidity, as does the heavy copper plated chassis inside. An SACDM-10 mech drives a Cirrus Logic CS 4398 DAC chip, with a variable position digital filter and Marantz's HDAM-SA and SA2 op-amp modules.

In action, the SA-KI Pearl not

only sounds sublime, with such an easy, lyrical gait, but it's also beautifully built and finished. Oh, and it even plays SACD exceptionally well; as any Super Audio Compact Disc fan knows, the format is capable of stratospheric sonic results, but not all SACD players are capable of unlocking them. The KI Pearl most definitely is – and veritably soars with this special silver disc, producing a massively musical and expansive sound, getting close to the best of digital at any price. The KI Pearl was created to commemorate Ken Ishiwata's thirtieth year at Marantz; if you were ever in any doubt about the contribution he's made to the company's house sound, then hear this.

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