

MARANTZ CD6003/PM6003

Marantz stereo pairing makes a persuasive budget buy

At just £300 apiece, this player and amplifier offer excellent performance, says Andrew Everard

MARANTZ HAS reinvented itself over the years, changing from a purely stereo company back in its early days to one able to offer both consumer and professional equipment, multichannel players and amplification as well as two-channel, plus projectors and – in some markets – TVs, too. However, its focus on purist two-channel audio has been maintained, as is clear from its long-running slogan “Because music matters”. From high-end stereo SACD players and matching amplifiers right down to the kind of products bought by those starting out on a journey in hi-fi, the company always manages to offer something special for the money.

That’s certainly the case at what many describe as the “entry-level”: drawing on its experience of fine-tuning affordable components to create its Special Edition, Original Special Edition and KI-Signature products of the past, the company seems able to imbue even the humblest of products with a touch of sonic magic so often missing from the price-competition.

Take, as an example, its latest arrivals in the mainstream audio sector, the CD6003 CD player and PM6003 amplifier, now available for just £300 apiece. True, these aren’t the company’s absolute entry-level models, the CD5003/PM5003 sitting below them and tackling the market around £200 per component, but the new arrivals are right in the heartland of the company’s traditional market, costing about the same as some classic models of the past.

And let’s get that in context for a moment: many years ago, the Marantz CD-63 and PM-66 would have cost you about the same as these new

models, showing once again how hi-fi equipment continues to offer the kind of bargains you don’t see in other sectors of consumer electronics.

The CD6003 may eschew the SACD playback found further up the company’s range, but it still has the odd trick up its sleeve, notably the provision of a USB input able to accept music stored on iPod, memory keys and other devices, and play it through the onboard CS4398 24-bit/192kHz digital-to-analogue conversion from Cirrus Logic. The USB input section is derived from the company’s SA8003 SACD player, and the CD6003 also uses Marantz HDAM-SA2 amplifier modules in its analogue stage and a heavyweight construction with an extra metal plate in the base to damp out vibration. Optical and electrical digital outputs are provided alongside the stereo analogue sockets, and there’s also a headphone socket, complete with its own volume control.

The PM6003 amplifier, meanwhile, is a 2x45W design using a current feedback power

amplifier design, and new output transistors designed for better speaker control. There’s also a heavily shielded toroidal transformer, and a heatsink layout designed to reduce resonances within the amplifier.

There are three line inputs, two tape loops and a moving magnet phono stage, two sets of speaker outputs with A/B switching, a headphone socket and bypassable tone controls. Like the CD player the amp is compatible with both infrared and Marantz system remote control, and there’s also a loudness button on its front panel. Having tried it, lets pretend it doesn’t exist for the rest of this review...

PERFORMANCE

Unbox and set-up the two Marantz units, and the first thing to mention is that they don’t look, or feel, in any way inexpensive. The company’s policy of extending its styling from the top-end models down to this level pays off in styling and a smoothness of finish and operation that’s class-



They may be budget products, but the Marantz duo looks – and sounds – more expensive

P.J

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MARANTZ CD6003

Type CD player
Price £300
Disc/formats played CD, CD-R/RW, MP3, WMA
Input USB
Outputs Stereo analogue, optical/electrical digital, headphones
Other connections Marantz D-Bus remote control
Dimensions (WxHxD) 44x11x34cm

MARANTZ PM6003

Type Stereo amplifier
Price £300
Power output 2x45W
Inputs 5 line, moving magnet phono
Outputs 2 line, two pairs of speakers, headphones
Other connections Marantz D-Bus remote control
Tone controls Yes, bypassable
Accessories supplied Remote control
Dimensions (WxHxD) 44x11x37cm
Made by Marantz, Japan
Distributed by Marantz UK Ltd, Kingsbridge House, Padbury Oaks, West Drayton UB7 0EH
Tel +44 (0)1753 680868
www.marantz.com

leading in this sector of the market. Buttons and knobs have a precise feel, the player's loader operates slickly, and even the weight of the components is reassuring.

That's what I've come to expect from the brand, and there's an equally simple way to sum up the sound of this pairing: it's very Marantz. That's no bad thing at all: there is a definite Marantz sound, and in broad terms it's about a well developed bass, explicit midband and treble, and fine stereo imaging and sound-staging. All are attractive qualities and together they just happen to bring music alive in a way that makes many rival products sound rather dull and pedestrian, or seemingly trying too hard.

It's still possible to hear the expertise of Marantz Brand Ambassador and tuning supremo Ken Ishiwata, even in this highly affordable equipment. As anyone who has ever experienced one of Ishiwata's demonstrations will know, the man has more than catholic musical tastes: one minute he may be playing Shostakovich, the next a vintage recording by singer Julie London or some Korean pop music. In fact, you're likely to

experience whatever music he happens to have encountered on his extensive travels.

The result is not just a sound that's immediately attention-grabbing with well recorded discs: it also manages to flatter edgy recordings, and is at home with a wide range of music. Marantz doesn't make components good with one kind of music but less appealing with another; instead even these bargain-price products have real all-round ability.

Instrumental and vocal timbres are a particular strength here, aided by that tight, well extended bass and free-breathing upper frequencies, but it's the focus and three-dimensionality of the sound that will come as no surprise to Marantz aficionados while still unusual from components at this kind of price. You would have to pay a lot more to improve on the CD6003 and PM6003.

You should partner them with some good speakers. They'll work well with models in the £200-£300 arena but I wouldn't rule out spending as much again as the combined cost of player and amplifier, or maybe even a bit more.

Certainly the listening I did with the little PMC DB1 standmount speakers – currently selling for around £780 a pair – showed that the Marantz amplifier was more than able to control the speakers and drive them extremely well, and that the levels of detail available from the CD player justify some serious consideration being given to speaker choice.

That's not to say that the Marantz duo won't be happy with some less expensive speakers, should the budget be tight: the fine Wharfedale Diamond 10.1s, reviewed in these pages a couple of months back, would be a fine choice. But it's good to know that the electronics have quality and power in reserve as and when funds allow an upgrade to some more accomplished speakers, let alone having the pleasure of owning components able to punch well above their weight.

Used individually, both the player and amplifier also impress, but so well do they work together that I see little point in suggesting much mixing and matching be undertaken. This is a superb combination with a totally involving sound, more than justifying the extremely modest price-tags on its components. **C**

SUPER AUDIO CORNER

Andrew Everard's verdict on some recent high-definition recordings

TCHAIKOVSKY 1812 Overture, etc

Mariinsky Chorus & Orchestra / Gergiev
 Mariinsky © 99. MAR0503



Presented in a choice of 5.1-channel and stereo, this dramatic package of Tchaikovsky's occasional pieces is sold through LSO Live in the UK. That's

appropriate: the recording – engineered by John Newton and Dirk Sobotka and produced by James Mallinson – has the kind of vibrant, vivid sound we expect from the LSO's house-label. Here, however, it's a recording made in St Petersburg, showing both excellent detail and impressive dynamics, especially when there are cannon coming at you from all directions! A real demonstration-quality disc.

HAYDN Complete works for solo keyboard

Tom Beghin
 Naxos © 4 NBD0001/4



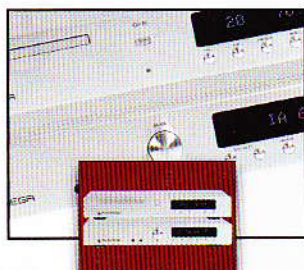
This four-disc Blu-ray set, called "The Virtual Haydn", sees Beghin playing seven historical keyboards while surrounded by a semi-sphere of 24 speakers recreating rooms

in which Haydn would have played. Created by producer Martha de Francisco and engineer Wieslaw Wosczyk, the Virtual Acoustics system works well, creating a realistic sense of ambience.

The music comes on three excellent-sounding audio-only Blu-ray discs, in DTS-HD Master Audio 5.0 or PCM stereo, while a fourth disc contains a "making of" documentary and a little game in which one can place the various instruments in each of the different acoustics. It's an intriguing set, and fortunately nothing like as gimmicky as the concept may sound!

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