



£700/£630 ☎ 01753 680868 @ www.marantz.com

## MARANTZ SA8003/PM8003

*Latest additions to the Marantz range show great potential*

**T**hese are the latest additions to the Marantz range and replace the well-loved SA/PM7001 KI units that have been in the range for some years now.

As you might guess from the 'SA' prefix on the CD player, it actually handles SACD discs as well as regular CDs. In the usual modern manner there is no multichannel support, nor is there a high-resolution digital output. The transport is an open-frame affair (a little noisier mechanically than we would ideally like), which feeds an audio board based on a Cirrus (Crystal) chip. The analogue output stages use Marantz's 'Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Module' or HDAM, a circuit made up of discrete transistors. Marantz has also provided a USB input for solid-state music players, iPods etc.

Over at the amplifier, business starts with an electronic input selector followed by a traditional motorised volume control. Beyond that, the circuitry again uses discrete transistors and culminates in a single pair per channel of output devices, mounted on an internal heatsink. Power is fed from a large toroidal transformer. Despite being new models, both units use almost entirely traditional construction techniques, with through-hole components mounted on single-side circuit boards with wire links where necessary, a stark contrast to Arcam, for instance. Most components are regular commercial-grade but a few key parts are higher quality. A discrete-transistor phono stage is mounted next to the relevant input sockets.

### SOUND QUALITY

Our solo reviews of each unit in recent months suggested that these were quite classy pieces of kit and our panel of 'blind' listeners tended to agree. It was immediately obvious to them

that the bass of the combination is a bit special, something we'd found especially with the amplifier and they were very taken with not just its extension but also its control and precision. Clear, tight bass like this gives a real sense of authority to music, they suggested, and they also felt that the midrange and treble were very well balanced against the bass and well presented in counterpoint to it.

Detail was felt to be good, if not outstanding, but what's perhaps more important in the long run is that there's no diminution of detail as dynamic levels increase – sound which becomes congested at high levels soon becomes tiring. On the contrary, our listeners specifically pointed to the way the detail in loud climaxes remains clearly audible as a strength of these units. To the extent there is any lack of detail, it's shown in the slight lack of air and space around performers and the mild compression of image depth. In fairness, it's so mild that were it not for direct comparisons with equipment even more capable in that regard, it might have gone unnoticed.

What may be the deciding factor for many listeners is the excellent rhythm and timing that Marantz seems to have built into these units. In any style of music and at any replay level there's a lovely vitality to the sound which, as one listener commented, keeps the foot tapping even when one isn't actively concentrating on the music. This kind of characteristic certainly sells equipment and, happily, typically keeps the buyer satisfied!

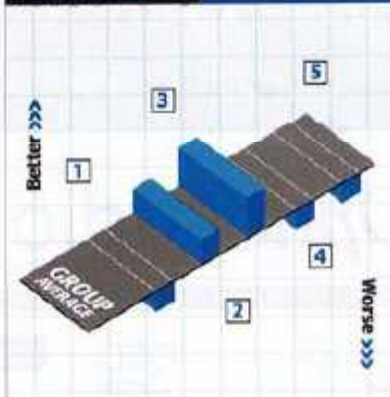
We can't close without mentioning the phono stage, which is a very clear cut above the usual standard one expects to find in a mid-price integrated amp. Fed from any decent moving-magnet cartridge, it achieves beautifully clear and well-balanced sounds, adding greatly to the amp's appeal for analogue lovers. **HFC**



### LAB REPORT

Despite a rather more modest rating than several amps here, the PM8003 comes very close to the 100 watts average in practice, though it has relatively little peak headroom. Its frequency response is once again remarkably flat, barely a tenth of a dB down at 20kHz and not even that at 20kHz. The disc player, of course, has a flat response within the audio band, but while the basic response shape is familiar, the digital filter used has an unusual feature in that its impulse response is asymmetric, with no pre-ringing. The significance of this is very much open to question. Another surprise in the SA8003 is the presence of some jitter, albeit not very much, but recent Marantz models have tended to show near-vanishing amounts. Distortion performance of both units is very good in general: the amp's distortion climbs into 4 ohms, as expected, and also rises a little at high frequencies.

### HOW IT COMPARES



- 1) Dynamic power >> -10%
- 2) Frequency response >> +10%
- 3) Distortion >> +20%
- 4) Dynamic range >> -10%
- 5) Jitter >> -10%

### SPECIFICATIONS

Measurement	Rated	Actual
Power output (8 ohms)	70W	91W
Distortion (1kHz/8 ohms)	0.02%	0.002%
Frequency response (20Hz-20kHz)	+0.3dB	+0.1dB

### VERDICT

<b>SOUND</b> ★★★★★	If detail isn't the best we've heard, the vitality of the sound from any source – CD, SACD or vinyl – makes this combination sound never less than liming and frequently quite thrilling.
<b>FEATURES</b> ★★★★★	
<b>BUILD</b> ★★★★★	
<b>VALUE</b> ★★★★★	<b>HI-FI CHOICE OVERALL SCORE</b> ★★★★★