

Q&A

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Musical Fidelity



ES: Given the level of internal revisions to the M6si, was any thought given to making it an entirely new model?

DW: It was always our intention that the M6si was a revision to the existing M6i. In fact, internally, the project was referred to as M6i Mark 2.

Does the M6si operate fully balanced from the XLR input as befits the SMD construction?

The M6si doesn't operate fully balanced internally. The benefits of XLR balanced connection are largely to do with preserving the signal quality through the cable rather than within the unit. For customers who desire the fully balanced connection experience, we can always offer the M8 Pre and M8 700m combination, which are fully balanced throughout.

With the fitment of digital inputs to the M6scd, does this effectively replace the M6 DAC too?

Although many customers will find the digital inputs on the M6scd sufficient for their needs, there are still those who require the additional ability of the M6dac. As well as the flexibility of Bluetooth with aptX support, the M6dac also supports 192kHz digital audio through its Audio Class 2 USB connection, whereas the M6scd only offers Audio Class 1 support which is limited to 96kHz.

The M6si is sufficiently powerful, it can drive most speakers but are there any that Musical Fidelity feels are an especially effective partner?

We have always designed our amplifiers to be able to drive virtually any speaker. As such, we don't have any favorites as far as speakers are concerned. People are able to choose whatever speaker suits their taste, happy in the knowledge that their Musical Fidelity amplifier will be able to drive it.

At first glance the pairing looks like the previous M6, but there are big differences



they can go to truly astonishing levels without showing a moment of harshness or strain.

The M6scd is also a worthy partner because it is unquestionably a better digital performer than the input fitted to the M6si. Although the specs of the USB inputs on both products are notionally identical, the scd manages to wring more performance from the connection and sounds genuinely excellent with both lossless and hi-res material. Where the M6si does add value, is with the phono stage, which with both moving magnet and moving coil cartridges is a great performer. The tonal balance is effectively the same as the amplifier it shares a chassis with, but the noise floor is exceptionally low and there is tremendous detail

retrieval combined with the same intrinsically forgiving presentation that the amp offers.

If you are budgeting for a phono stage, the one in the M6si is saving you an easy £400 or so over most standalone rivals, which is worth taking into account when weighing up the pros and cons of the asking price.

This same value calculation applies to the M6scd as well. Given that the player is effectively a six-input DAC (with a fixed CD input), it makes a great deal of sense as a crossover product, helping you to move from CD to other digital sources (or indeed sticking with CD and using it to take a look at hi-res). The inputs work seamlessly and manage to sound identical to the CD when the same material is being played and happy with the standard sampling rates you might use with hi-res (although it is worth pointing out that the optical inputs top out at 96kHz like the USB connection does). Although the balanced connection is not the one marked as CD, performance is best with the two devices connected in this manner with both products delivering their best results via XLR.

Conclusion

If you have been looking at the current market and recent product arrivals have left you a little cold with streamers and digital preamps now the order of the day, the M6si and M6scd are a welcome return to more conventional products, in many ways similar to their highly successful predecessors. Where Musical Fidelity has been extremely clever is in giving both products a useful selection of additional features that give them huge capability in adding extra sources, while boosting the performance and keeping the price pegged at the same level as before. This is a fine duo and one that should be flexible enough for another half decade in a demanding market ●

HOW IT COMPARES

The Musical Fidelity duo makes for an interesting comparison to the Naim CD5 XS and Nait XS2. The pricing of the respective units is reversed with the extra cost of the Naim CD player being balanced against the cheaper amp. In specification terms, the M6 components have the Naim pairing blown into the weeds and the enormous power output of the M6si is more than three times that of the XS2. Sonically, the Naim holds its own, though, with a darker and more intense performance than the Musical Fidelity pairing, which may be more to some customers' liking. The sweeter presentation of the Musical Fidelity duo should also impress.

HI-FIChoice

OUR VERDICT M6scd

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

LIKE: Smooth, beguiling sound, excellent choice of inputs and good build

DISLIKE: No USB2 mode or DSD; can sound a little safe

WE SAY: A clever CD/DAC that makes a fine partner for the M6si

OVERALL



HI-FIChoice

OUR VERDICT M6si

SOUND QUALITY
★★★★★

VALUE FOR MONEY
★★★★★

BUILD QUALITY
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

LIKE: Massive unburstable sound; excellent features; build

DISLIKE: Slightly vague volume control; indifferent remote

WE SAY: A well thought out revision to an excellent amp that should win many new friends

OVERALL





Hit for six

Musical Fidelity has been hard at work revising its M6 amp and CD player and **Ed Selley** has been sampling the results

Five years is a long time in audio. Even in the much more relaxed world of two-channel, much has changed about how we consume music in that time. In the specific context of Musical Fidelity – a company that can undergo entire philosophical shifts in rather less time – five years is an epoch. Despite this fact, its M6 range has made it to now with only a minor update, a reflection that the design was essentially spot on. At first glance this new pairing appears to be more of the same.

This hasn't stopped Musical Fidelity from making some fairly serious revisions behind the superficially

identical casework, though. The M6si integrated amplifier is now built around the company's SMB circuit layout. This means although it is an integrated amp in a single chassis, there are two mono amps and a preamp all taking separate windings from the power supply. This is completely different to the previous M6 and fairly unusual at the price.

As before, the power output might be best described as 'healthy.' With 220W available into 8ohm and even more into 4, the M6si should be able to drive most speakers at anything like the same price without incident and go as loud as you might reasonably want it to. This prodigious power output is

then made available to one balanced and five unbalanced line inputs – one with an AV bypass – and an MM/MC capable phono stage.

The last input is the most unusual. It's a USB-B connection that works as a driverless audio input capable of receiving sample rates up to and including 24/96kHz. This means that if your preferred digital source is a laptop, there isn't any requirement for another piece of source equipment. This does work on the proviso that you have no need for 24/192 or DSD playback as there's no means of natively supporting either.

Against these wholesale revisions, the changes to the M6 CD player to become the M6scd are less dramatic but no less significant. As there wasn't a lot wrong with the Burr-Brown DAC and transport mechanism of the original, these are retained, but the number of digital inputs has been boosted. There are now two optical, two coaxial and a USB-B input, which at the price gives the M6scd a better choice than some standalone DACs.

Like the amp, the CD player has to make do without a state of the art USB input. As the Musical Fidelity is

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Musical Fidelity
M6scd

ORIGIN
UK/Taiwan

TYPE
CD player

WEIGHT
11.2kg

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
440 x 125 x 385mm

FEATURES
• 32-bit DAC
• 2x coaxial; 2x optical digital inputs
• 1x 24/96kHz-capable USB input
• Stereo RCA output and XLR outputs

DISTRIBUTOR
Musical Fidelity

TELEPHONE
0208 9002866

WEBSITE
musicalfidelity.com

DETAILS

PRODUCT
Musical Fidelity M6si

ORIGIN
UK/Taiwan

TYPE
Integrated amplifier

WEIGHT
16.6kg

DIMENSIONS (WxHxD)
440 x 125 x 400mm

FEATURES

- Quoted power output: 2x 220W into 8ohm
- Dual mono construction
- 4x RCA line inputs
- 1x XLR input
- 1x MM/MC Phono stage
- 1x 24/96kHz USB input

DISTRIBUTOR
Musical Fidelity

TELEPHONE
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musicalfidelity.com

adjustments have a rather profound effect on the overall level. The remote control handset is also something of a blunt instrument in this case and while perfectly easy to use, it doesn't quite manage to match the rather lovely finish of the main units.

Sound quality

As there wasn't a great deal wrong with the performance of the original M6 series, any changes will have been done in the absolute certainty that there's a benefit in doing them. The good news is that the adjustments to the M6si in particular have been tremendously effective. There are some classic Musical Fidelity traits to the performance – making it sound big, powerful and with excellent bass – but there are some additional details that have moved the game on further.

The most immediately noticeable of these is that the presentation is a very clever balance of refinement matched with a sense of urgency and purpose that wasn't always there with the older model. The M6si is happier to get up and go with more uptempo material and can do so while remaining refined and able to produce truly prodigious bass. My resident Neat Momentums have never been bass light, but the Musical Fidelity seems able to extract additional heft from them without trying. If a piece of music is supposed to have impact, at anything above tick over, you can rest assured that the M6si will find it.

Thankfully, this near-seismic heft is well integrated into the rest of the frequency response and the same tonal sweetness that marks out Musical Fidelity products is well in attendance. This makes the amplifier an excellent

partner for a very wide selection of music. In the course of a lengthy listening session that begins with Ray Charles' *Genius Loves Company* meanders through various genres and ends with The Prodigy's *The Day Is My Enemy*, this duo remains entirely unfazed. There are shades of the M6si's bigger brother (the M6 500i) in the flexibility and sense of enormous power being handled in an entirely effortless way. The power output is more than just an abstract number even at low levels, giving the amplifier an authority and scale that many rivals struggle to match.

The influence of the M6scd on this is less immediately obvious, but after using both it and the Wadia di122

They can go to truly astonishing levels without showing harshness or strain

(reviewed on page 52), the Musical Fidelity is a warmer and more full-bodied player than the razor-edged Wadia. It can still produce a rhythmically satisfying performance, but the emphasis is more on the midrange which is full, detailed and rather more analogue in presentation than the di122. This makes it less dynamic, but very easy to listen to.

When you bring the two together, though, the strengths of both combine to great effect. The warmth and fullness of the scd partners with the huge reserves of power that the M6si can deliver to produce a system that feels utterly unburstable in use. The refinement of the pairing is such that ▶

driverless and has no class 2 mode, it tops out at 24/96kHz with no option for anything more. In a real-world sense, this is barely a limitation – we're hardly swimming in hi-res material – but it does mean that the duo has to trade a little ground to rivals here. The coaxial inputs are 24/192-capable and support use of an USB-to-S/PDIF converter if you really need this additional functionality.

Otherwise, this is a very capable and well specified duo that should be able to handle most requirements without stress. Their appeal is aided by the build and finish. Both products are handsome, logically laid out on the front and back panels and extremely well built. The panels are thick and the gaps between them are imperceptible. The CD player display is a little small and doesn't give any information on incoming sample rate, but what it does show is clear and easy to read.

It's not all good news, though. The volume control of our M6si review sample is not an ideal partner for an amp of 220W. It has a small amount of slack in it, which makes fine adjustment tricky – and with this amount of power on tap, small

CONNECTIONS

