

# TURNTABLE SYSTEM 1

SYSTEM PRICE

**£997**

Elac Debut 5.2

**£249**

Rega Planar 2

**£399**



Marantz PM6006 UK **£349**



**W**hen it comes to hi-fi, 'simple' is rarely simple. Designing and building a piece of hi-fi equipment to 'just work', with little fuss or obvious added complications can take an inordinate amount of engineering skill, patience and time. Legendary turntable manufacturer Rega has got the concept cracked. You know what you're getting with a Rega deck: a well put-together piece of kit that performs reliably and sounds terrific.

Of course, the point of putting a system together, as we're doing over these pages, is to attempt to create a synergy between the components - to make the system as a whole sound better than the sum of the parts.

Marry the turntable with a similarly competent amplifier and pair of stereo speakers and you have what you find here: a 'simple' yet satisfyingly effective hi-fi system that will play your precious vinyl collection with rare skill and artistry, and do so fuss-free for many years to come.

We'll start with the Rega Planar 2. This is a deck that has been around, in one form or another, for the past 40 years or more - nominally at least. The deck you see here may look remarkably similar to the one you would have been able to buy in the shops in 1976, but it is different in almost every way.

Still, the no-nonsense set-up requires minimal effort, save for ensuring the speed is set correctly (speed change is manual) and fixing the weight to balance the tonearm.

### Hereditary traits

Anyone well versed in Rega decks will no doubt recognise this one's sonic stamp: balanced and authoritative with impressive scale and natural musicality.

The Planar 2 delivers bass lines with punch, its low-end earning its wings for handling the depth and texture of the guttural bass guitar in SBTRKT's *Gon Stay*. And it has the agility and momentum to bounce along to Ezra Koenig's perky vocal accompaniment.

Any hi-fi kit that's going to get the best of SBTRKT has to be fairly methodical in its handling of fluttering tinny beats, slicing percussions and frenetic rhythms, and while the Rega has the necessary precision and rhythmic know-how to coordinate them accurately in the soundstage, its delivery isn't without enthusiasm. The Planar 2 is big-sounding enough for the lush electronic

soundscapes laced with synth chords to sound bold and atmospheric too.

It's equally at home with the intricate, nuanced arrangements of Miles Davis' *Kind Of Blue* too, rendering the dynamic subtlety and timing to grasp the music's subtly shifting manner, and packing a single wistful trumpet note with texture and information.

The ability to tie all musical strands together and paint them on a precise and spacious canvas seems to come easy to the Rega, and in that aspect its delivery simply works. It's a proper step-up in performance from the entry-level RP1 too. The Planar 2 is a high-performing deck at a competitive price.

And, as we've hinted above, it marries wonderfully with the particular qualities of the Marantz amplifier here to create a

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sound that we'd certainly struggle to beat for anything near this money.

The PM6006 UK is a tweaked (tuned for British ears) version of Marantz's already Award-winning amplifier. If you're in the market for a stereo amp, then this is just about the finest performance you'll get in return for this amount of money.

### Why we love it

It's a characteristically full-bodied and focused Marantz presentation, with plenty of detail to boot. Musicality is one of the PM6006's strengths - the balance is tonally even and overall it's pleasingly insightful, with a nice wide soundstage; but even more so, it's rhythmically and dynamically confident, knitting together instruments in a manner that highlights this as a budget-to-midrange gem.

There's a certain smoothness between strands, yet also enough punch and drive to grab attention, with the Marantz's keen sense of timing accented by a dynamic range sympathetic to leading notes and auxiliary rhythms. The

PM6006 UK's talents are such that it will musically trump many amps much further up the food chain.

There are a number of fine loudspeakers that could go with the above duo to complete this impressive vinyl system. In the end, though, we can look no further than Elac's hugely entertaining Debut B5.2s - they really are brilliant performers for the money.

### Obliging flexibility...

These speakers are unfussy about placement, working best a little out into the room - we start at around 30cm and experiment - but still delivering relatively balanced results if not optimally placed. Ideally, of course, they should sit on rigid stands to get the best sound. Thankfully, the Debuts aren't particularly fussy about angling in towards the listening position, producing a wide, solid soundstage with little work.

These speakers merely reflect the quality of the signal fed to them rather than try to sweeten it.

Feed the Debut B5.2s Madonna's *Ray Of Light* and they have no trouble coping with the album's dense instrumentation and complex rhythms. These are expressive performers that deliver sound with a precision and cohesion that's rare for this level. The old Debuts timed well, but these go even further than their forerunners, conveying the changes of musical momentum beautifully.

### ...and versatility

They're even-handed and admirably balanced in the way they deal with poorer, more aggressive recordings. You can enjoy a wide range of music too. We listen to everything from the sparse electronica of Neneh Cherry's *Broken Politics* to Dave Brubeck's *Take Five* and these little speakers take it all in their stride. They have the dynamic expression, detail resolution and tonal sophistication to handle it all.

Elac has been in the speaker business since the 1980s and has made many fine products in that time. It's fair to say that these new Debut B5.2 speakers should be considered one of the company's finest efforts, particularly when their price is taken into account.

That, indeed, could be said of each component in this impressive system. The fact that all three combine to create an even more sublime whole only goes to demonstrate the magic of good system matching. For less than £1000, you're getting years of joy from your music collection. And that, of course, is priceless.