

THE WORLD'S BEST CLASSICAL MUSIC REVIEWS

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Esa-Pekka Salonen

on composing,
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a century on



● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Marantz ND8006

Aimed at being 'the complete digital music source player', the latest arrival from Marantz has both remarkable flexibility and fine performance on its side



MARANTZ ND8006

Type Network CD player

Price £1099

Discs played CD, CD-R/RW (including MP3/WMA files)

Digital inputs USB Type A and B, coaxial and two optical, Bluetooth, Airplay

Digital outputs Coaxial, optical

Analogue outputs Fixed or variable, plus headphones

Networking Ethernet/Wi-Fi

Other services Internet radio; Amazon Music, Deezer, Spotify Connect and Tidal; Alexa compatibility; HEOS multiroom

File formats played PCM-based to 384kHz/32-bit; DSD to DSD256/11.2MHz

Accessories supplied Remote handset, Wi-Fi antennae

Finishes Black or silver-gold

Dimensions (WxHxD) 44x10.6x36.9cm (H 16.5cm with Wi-Fi antennae)

marantz.co.uk

the Marantz has wide-ranging format compatibility, enabling it to play just about any file you may come across. As well as the usual coaxial and optical digital inputs, the combination of USB Type B 'computer

The design team at Marantz is on something of a roll when it comes to high-quality digital audio products. Hot on the heels of the remarkable SA-10 SACD/CD/digital player (4/17) – complete with its 'DAC-less' design, drawing on both the company's history in bitstream technology and its commitment to DSD audio – comes the new ND8006. It's aimed rather lower down the price spectrum than the 'New Reference' player, selling for £1099 – the same price as the matching PM8006 amplifier – against the SA-10's £5999, but offers almost as wide a range of technology (plus a few extra features), along with plenty of evidence of input from the same designers and engineers.

Marantz coined that 'New Reference' label for the SA-10 and its partnering PM-10 amplifier, and the ND8006 has a claim of its own: this, we are told, is 'the complete digital music source player', designed to address all the needs of the modern music listener. So while it lacks the all-new drive mechanism of the SA-10, which allows that player to handle not just SACD discs but hi-res music files burnt to DVD-R and CD-R discs, it will still play CDs, and MP3/WMA files on CD-R/RW media.

Hi-resolution capability is provided by its ability to play a wide range of music formats either from a computer connected via its asynchronous USB Type B input or on USB storage media plugged into its front-panel USB Type A socket. The ND8006 also has both Bluetooth connectivity and Apple AirPlay

compatibility, allowing instant wireless streaming from phones, tablets and computers. Furthermore, indicating that this isn't just a stripped-down SA-10 but an entirely different animal, the ND8006 has built-in network audio streaming, enabling it not only to play music from computers and network-attached storage devices over either Ethernet or Wi-Fi but also to deliver streaming services including Amazon Music, Deezer, Spotify Connect and Tidal (subject to the relevant subscriptions), and of course internet radio.

The ND8006 has a claim of its own: this player, we are told, is designed to address all the needs of the modern music listener

As if that weren't enough, the Marantz can be operated using Amazon Alexa devices, allowing it to be voice-controlled, and as the icing on the cake – well, not quite, as it's becoming an integral part of models across the Denon and Marantz ranges – there's also built-in HEOS multiroom capability. That allows the ND8006 to integrate with a wide range of HEOS-capable products to create a whole-house audio system, and not just HEOS speakers: HEOS is widely available now in both Denon and Marantz AV receivers, not to mention devices designed to add multiroom facilities to existing systems.

So it seems those claims of completeness maybe aren't too wide of the mark, and

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

There's an obvious partner for the Marantz player and one not-so-obvious one ...

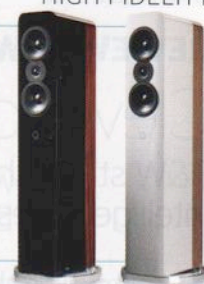
MARANTZ PM8006

Make the most of the sound of the ND8006 with the matching Marantz PM8006 amplifier, complete with 70Wpc output.



Q ACOUSTICS CONCEPT 500

Yes indeed, the big Q Acoustics Concept 500 floorstanding speakers – but the PM8006 is enough to drive them and the ND8006 has all the quality needed.



audio' and playback from USB storage media means it can handle PMC-based content all the way up to 384kHz/32-bit and 'quad DSD' (also known as DSD256 and DSD11.2MHz). That's all handled using a digital-to-analogue conversion system based around the ESS 9016 'Sabre' chipset, together with dual crystal clocks for accurate handling of both 44.1kHz and 48kHz and their multiples without any need for clock-rate conversion.

Upstream of the DAC is the company's own Marantz Musical Digital Filtering system, designed as an offshoot of the development process for the SA-10 player and used in place of the standard filtering built into the DAC here. It provides a choice of digital filter settings – the default Filter 1 produces the cleanest, most detailed sound, while Filter 2 injects a bit of 'analogue' warmth – and also lets you select between 'Narrow', 'Medium' and 'Wide' digital lock range. In general the narrower the lock range, the less jitter and the clearer the sound, but too narrow a range can cause drop-outs, which is why the default is 'Narrow' for CD and 'Wide' for everything else. However, one can experiment. The USB Type B input and the optical/coaxial digital inputs have a noise reduction circuit, designed to avoid stray interference from the supplying device, and it's also possible to switch off the digital outputs, which again tidies the sound a shade.

The analogue section here uses the familiar Marantz HDAMs (or Hyper Dynamic Amplifier Modules), using miniature components where lesser designs would opt for chip amps, and the ND8006 has a dedicated headphone amplifier section, again HDAM-powered. The main analogue outputs are available on both fixed- and variable-level sockets, so the player can be used into a conventional amplifier or pre-amp, or direct into a power amp or active speakers. It's possible to turn off the variable outputs if required, again in the quest for signal purity, and both the headphone stage and the Bluetooth/AirPlay section can be switched off for the same reasons.

PERFORMANCE

Regular readers will know that I 'get' the way Marantz thinks, having enjoyed

both demonstrations and extended time spent with its products in the course of reviews; and the ND8006, for all its versatility, is very much classic Marantz at heart. That means a sound that puts the music to the fore at all times and uses the finer points of hi-fi – among them sound-staging, detail, dynamics and weight – to facilitate that task. This isn't a player to have you thinking 'heavens, that's very hi-fi': rather it wraps you in a musical performance with a remarkable sense of connection, whether you choose a solo instrumental set such as Martin Helmchen's recent release of Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations* (Alpha, 4/18) or the thrilling live recording of Rachmaninov's *Symphonic Dances* by the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra under Mariss Jansons (BR-Klassik, 4/18).

The balance here is warm and generous, yet with no hint of excessive bloom or bloat, meaning that rhythms are snappy and tight, and the growl of low strings is delivered with particular conviction. The midband is beautifully explicit and well judged, making orchestral recordings vivid, while the treble manages to convey plenty of ambience without ever straying into excessive brightness.

If you find this explicit sound a bit too much you can calm things down with that switchable digital filter, going for a smoother, slightly more lush presentation – as you might, for example, if your speakers are a bit treble-happy – but doing so steals a little of the airiness and presence that's so much a part of the way this Marantz plays things. I'd stick with the default filter and as narrow a digital lock range as you can manage without drop-outs: there's just a little less definition as the range is widened.

What's more, the Marantz maintains its performance across the full range of file formats and services it offers. Whether with Tidal music streams or what few quad-DSD files there are out there it sounds equally involving, and even lowish bit-rate internet radio streams are delivered convincingly. Plus it's also a rather good CD player, meaning it can form a neat bridge between 'physical media' collections and those more based around computers and files. **G**

Or you could try...

The all-in-one player solution isn't new: we've had CD receivers before. However, the idea is gaining momentum with the greater interest in computer-based audio, and models such as the Marantz are a sensible bridge between existing CD collections and streamed/downloaded music.

Onkyo's C-N7050

Onkyo's C-N7050, for example, is a CD player complete with both digital playback from a computer and network streaming, and can handle audio up to 192kHz/24-bit and DSD5.6/128. Selling for a little under £500, it provides a more affordable alternative to the ND8006. See more at eu.onkyo.com.



Yamaha's CD-N301

Even lower-priced is Yamaha's CD-N301, at £329: it's a slightly more basic player but will still access streaming services and network-stored music as well as playing your CDs. It comes in the company's characteristically simple but elegant styling, with a clean look and a marked absence of front-panel complications. More information at europe.yamaha.com.



Musical Fidelity M6 Encore Connect

The £3630 M6 Encore Connect is a frequent visitor to this section and it's not hard to see why. It may be premium-priced but it is hugely capable, adding disc ripping and storage to playback and network streaming. As well as offering an integrated solution, it can also act as a hub for other streaming players on your network – as you can discover at encore.musicalfidelity.co.uk.



Marantz SA-10

Finally, a mention for the ND8006's 'big brother', the £5999 Marantz SA-10. It lacks network streaming ability but is possibly one of the finest CD players ever built, and can work with your computer or USB storage to play downloaded music to a superlative standard. Find out more at marantz.co.uk.

