



Joining the M-Two Movement...

Martin Pipe explores a capable duo from the revitalised Musical Fidelity marque.

Recently and with little publicity, Musical Fidelity was acquired by Austrian turntable specialist Project. Maybe that's why the cartons of their products

reviewed here – the M2si integrated amplifier and M2SCD CD player – feature a prominent 'Austrian Brand' message. The M2s are the entry-level options of an M-series that go all the way to 'no compromise' M8 products.

The new M2si amplifier is purely analogue, with no onboard DAC for digital sources. Oddly – given the new owner's passion for vinyl – there's no phono stage either. In all fairness, you'll get better results from



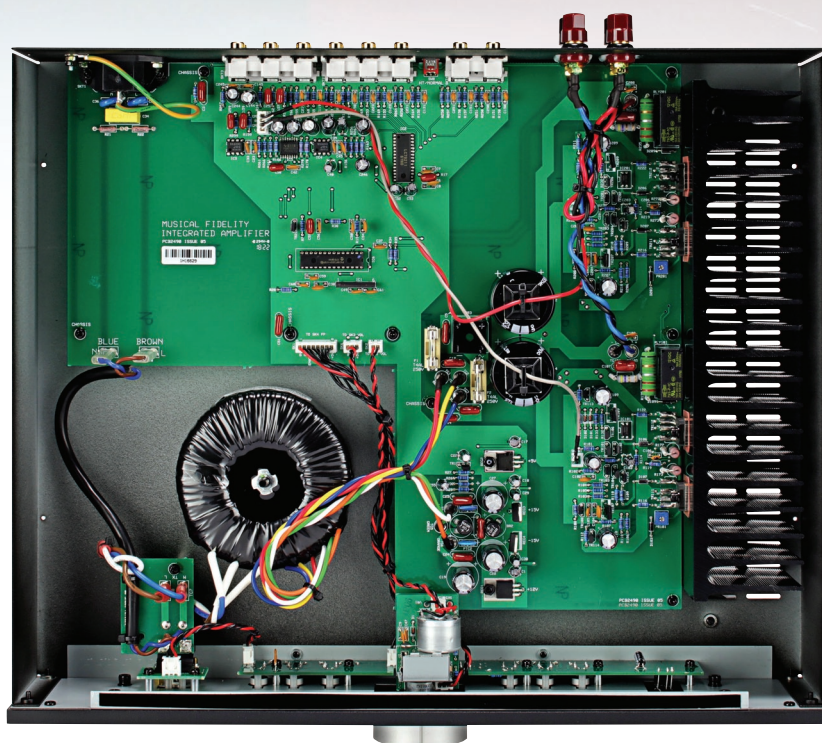
"can deliver music in a manner that does not in any way shame Musical Fidelity's enviable heritage."

a decent off-board pre-amp than you would from a cheap circuit thrown in to boost the feature count and I review a suitable contender – funnily enough, Pro-Ject's Phono Box S2 Ultra – elsewhere in this issue. In all, the no-nonsense M2Si is equipped with six unbalanced line-level inputs, on rear-panel phono sockets. A blue LED indicator indicates the one that's selected, either with the button underneath or the remote control (which will also adjust volume).

Promisingly, one of the inputs is marked 'Tape'. However, that's all it is – just another input; it's not the 'tape monitor' of a genuine tape loop, although the M2Si does dedicate a fixed line-level output so that the selected source can be fed to a recording device.

Next to this fixed output is 'pre out', which is subject to the actions of the volume control, allowing the use of an alternative power amplifier. The M2Si doesn't have tone controls, or any similar circuitry to potentially muddy music.

The only other feature of note is the M2Si's ability to dovetail with audio-visual cinema gear, enabling your amp and speakers to reproduce



On the unusually-shaped preamp daughterboard of M2Si lives the preamp and source selector. Its output passes, via the motorised pot that is the volume control (there's a Burr-Brown digitally-controlled volume control chip too), to the power amp section that dominates the right-hand side of the interior, with heatsinks needed to cool the output transistors.



Musical Fidelity has endowed the M2Si's rear panel with six analogue line inputs, but the tape input lacks a 'proper' tape monitor function. Only one pair of speakers are covered by the fitted terminals – that accept bare wire or 4mm banana plugs.

The remote supplied is a rather dated-looking affair. However, it will operate both amplifier and CD player (as well as some other MF products). Most of the higher CD-related functions are accessible only via the remote.



the all-important front channels. A switch on the rear panel bypasses the volume control when one of the inputs is selected. To this would be connected your home-cinema gear, which usually has its own volume control.

The amplifier's 60 watts per channel (into 8 ohms) power amps are of Class AB design; tis is not a budget Class D amplifier. They connect to your speakers via sturdy pairs of rear-panel terminals. The M2Si makes no provision for headphones.

The M2SCD CD player is as nonsense as its companion amplifier. It offers none of the features – MP3 compatibility, network streaming or DAC mode – that so many manufacturers deem necessary these days. Discs are loaded into a front-panel slot, rather than a tray, which precludes playback of certain discs – like the 3in. CD singles of the late 1980s, certainly if an adaptor isn't being used. However, audio-format (i.e. Red Book) CDs on CD-R or CD-RW media are accepted.

A row of basic controls are positioned beneath the player's LCD screen, which is capable of displaying CD-Text data as well as the usual numerical information. The remote that drives the M2Si will also control the M2SCD and it's necessary to access more advanced playback functions such as intro-scan, shuffle, programmed playback, repeat, track-scan and section repeat. You can also dim the display backlighting, for late-night listening.

The rear panel of the player is equipped with phono-socket (unbalanced) analogue outputs. Optical and coaxial digital outputs

are also provided for external DACs, providing an upgrade path.

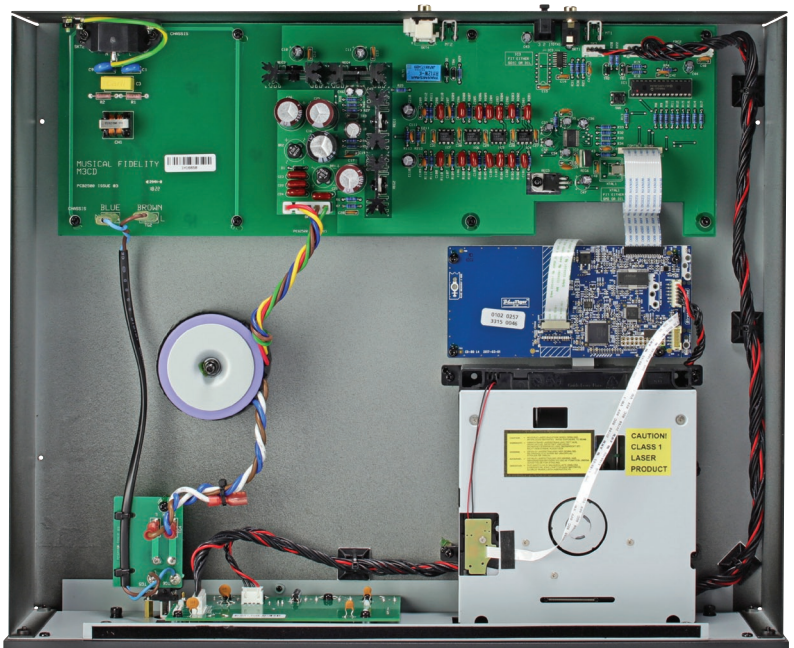
PERFORMANCE

The pair gave a decent account of themselves – I tried two sets of speakers, Quadral Aurum Wotan Vllls and – to represent a more compatible price-point – Rogers GS5s. QED X-Tube speaker cabling was used, in a conventional 'monowire' arrangement. Both sets of speakers were driven more than satisfactorily, and grip was never lost; in all, the M2Si has a tight and dry sound. Kraftwerk – notably the track Etape 2 – revealed that the system is fast and rhythmically-compliant, which has the effect of naturally-engaging the listener. For this reason, it also succeeded with Radiohead's Burn The Witch (from A Moon Shaped Pool) and Steve Reich's Music for 18 Musicians (Ensemble Signal/Brad

Lubman, Harmonia Mundi).

We're not talking about particularly-expensive equipment here, and so it's a credit to the company's design team that the Radiohead track's complex production sounds uncluttered and correctly-proportioned. The Reich work, meanwhile, was given urgency and 'flow' responsible for its unique character – the music washes over you in a compelling and enjoyable way. Another great musical character is Johnny Cash, whose closely-miked baritone in The Man Comes Around (American IV) is conveyed with its emotional charge intact. He's accompanied by guitars, bass piano and – way back in the mix – organ. The Musical Fidelity system can comfortably-resolve these elements, without undue bias or exaggeration.

I also enjoyed a 1987 digital recording of Mussorgsky's Pictures at



Above the slot-loading CD drive is a 'Blue Tiger' board, bought in from Asian Philips offshoot Stream Unlimited, that controls its laser and motors in addition to providing most of the other core functionality of a CD player. The top boards contain the DAC and linear power supply with toroidal mains transformer.



Old-school connectivity from the M2sCD – no Ethernet or USB ports here! The player has analogue unbalanced phonos (no balanced XLRs) to feed amplifiers like the M2si directly. Standard optical and coaxial S/PDIF digital outputs will feed an external DAC.

an Exhibition (Slovak Philharmonic/ Daniel Nazareth, Naxos), and took great pleasure by being able to define specific orchestral textures.

A tad more clarity – across the board – is exposed through direct comparison with a Chord Qwest DAC (£1200) that was inserted between one of the M2sCD's digital outputs and a spare auxiliary input on the M2Si. But in all fairness, the

DAC provisions of the M2sCD – a 24-bit delta-sigma dual-differential configuration with 8x oversampling, the company say – acquits itself surprisingly well. And that you can hear the difference with an amp that is modest by high-end standards deserves praise.

CONCLUSION

As a system, the M2sCD and M2Si

worked very well together, and – with appropriate speakers, installed correctly – can deliver music in a manner that does not in any way shame Musical Fidelity's enviable heritage. This duo is quite old-fashioned in outlook, with no direct concessions to streaming or for that matter the vinyl revival. Such bases are however covered via the multiple line inputs.

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

M2si AMPLIFIER

The M2si integrated amplifier produced 78 Watts into 8 Ohms and 132 Watts into 4 Ohms, enough to go very loud with all loudspeakers.

Distortion levels were low at both low and high outputs at all frequencies, the critical 1W/10kHz value – a measure of crossover distortion – coming in at a very low 0.01% our analysis shows. In the midband (1kHz) distortion measured 0.003% at 1 W and 0.004% just below full output. With a high damping factor of 60 the M2 is will sound powerful but tight and very clean.

Input sensitivity was just 200mV, meaning the amplifier will work well with low output external phono stages for those who want to spin LP. There is no internal phono stage, nor a digital input.

Frequency response measured flat from 6Hz to 53kHz, unaffected by volume control position.

The M2si produced a fine set of results. It is a very low distortion design with plenty enough power for most systems and homes. **NK**

- Power** 78W
- Frequency response (-1dB)6Hz-53kHz**
- Distortion (10kHz, 1W)** 0.01%
- Separation (1kHz)** 92dB
- Noise (IEC A)** -87dB
- Sensitivity** 200mV
- Damping factor** 60

M2sCD CD PLAYER

Frequency response of the M2sCD CD player measured flat to 21kHz our

analysis shows – a normal result for CD.

Distortion at peak level (0dB) measured 0.001% but at -60dB, 0.23% as our analysis shows. This is close to the 0.2% possible, set by 16bit quantisation noise and harmonic distortion from CD, resulting in an EIAJ Dynamic Range value of 100dB – close to the 102dB possible.

Noise is low at -113dB but this is due to infinity-zero muting; noise with a -60dB tone notched out measured -100dB.

Output measured 2V, right on CD

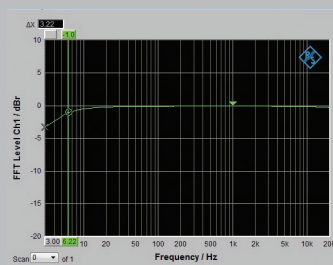
standard. There are no balanced XLR-socket outputs nor a headphone output or adjustable output level.

The M2sCD produced good if standard CD performance under measurement. **NK**

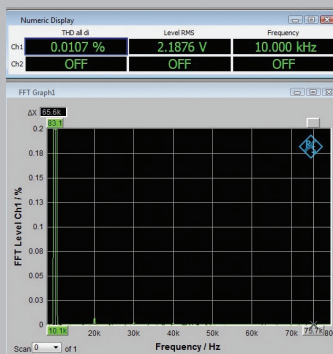
- Frequency response** 4Hz- 21kHz
- Distortion (-60dB)** 0.26%
- Separation** 95dB
- Dynamic range** 98dB
- Noise** -113dB
- Headphone output** none

MUSICAL FIDELITY M2si

FREQUENCY RESPONSE

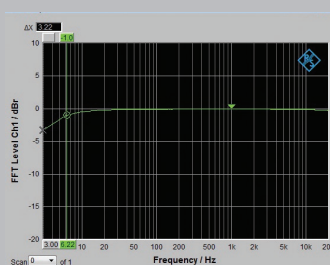


DISTORTION

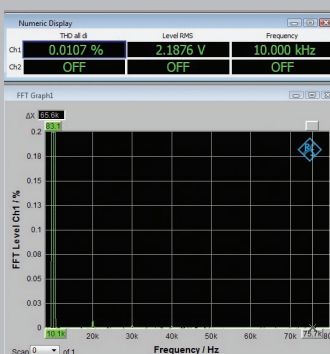


MUSICAL FIDELITY M2sCD

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION



MUSICAL FIDELITY M2sCD AND M2Si £799 EACH



EXCELLENT - extremely capable.

VALUE - keenly priced.

VERDICT

A worthwhile combo, especially if your primary music source is the humble CD. And it's free of hassle.

FOR

- six line inputs
- revealing yet musical sound
- ease of use
- remote control

AGAINST

- no XLR in/out
- no USB in
- no phono stage

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