

Marantz SA-11S1 CD/SACD Player

Robert Harley



Marantz' new SA-11S1 doesn't try to be all things to all people. It doesn't offer multichannel capability, DVD-Video, DVD-Audio, or compatibility with other disc formats. In fact, all it does is deliver high-quality two-channel CD and SACD playback. Although not inexpensive at \$3499, it boasts a much higher level of performance than universal players, yet is priced below the megabuck machines from high-end companies.

I am no longer surprised by the stunning build and finish quality Japanese manufacturers deliver when making what is for them an ultra-expensive product. Manufacturing efficiencies allow these companies to create gorgeous products at prices that aren't extravagant by high-end standards. The SA-11S1 exemplifies this; it is simply stunning, inside and out. The thick exterior metalwork (the player weighs thirty-one pounds) is curved and intricate, and finished in the gorgeous champagne color Marantz was once famous for. The remote is one of the most elegant I've used—the long, thin metal body features a control surface like a DVD player's remote, allowing you to control most functions with your thumb.

Inside, the chassis is copper-plated, and copper shielding abounds (even the TO-220 voltage regulators are encased in copper shielding). The transport mecha-

nism is largely metal—a step above the increasingly flimsy plastic mechanisms found in today's players. The audio circuit is all discrete (no op-amps) and occupies a significant chunk of real estate. Tweakers will love this player; you can select between three digital filters, as well as engage or disengage a DC filter. (I recommend leaving the DC filter off.) The SA-11S1 offers balanced and unbalanced analog outputs as well as digital outputs (44.1kHz, 16-bit only) on coaxial and TosLink jacks.

The SA-11S1 is significantly better-sounding on both CD and SACD than Marantz' DV-8400, which I reviewed in Issue 145. The SA-11S1's sound quality with CD—a vital aspect of the player's performance—is outstanding. A good point of comparison is the \$2995 Sony SCD-XA9000ES multichannel SACD player I reviewed in Issue 145. The Marantz sounded noticeably smoother in the midrange and treble—a relaxed and easygoing presentation. I also heard more space and depth from the Marantz, with a greater sense of air between instruments. In addition, the SA-11 went a little lower in the bass, and had a tighter midbass than the Sony's.

The SA-11S1's terrific CD sound tempted me to compare it to my CD references—a Theta Generation VIII DAC driven by a Mark Levinson No.31.5 transport via the excellent Audience Au24 AES/EBU interconnect. The Marantz fared surprisingly well in this comparison; the player's nice sense of depth, ultra-smooth mids and treble, and easygoing musicality remained enjoyable. The Marantz didn't go as low in the bass or have quite the resolution of these \$15k sepa-

rates, but it wasn't a one-sided comparison.

On SACDs, the Marantz again revealed its outstanding sound quality. In fact, this was the best SACD playback I've heard, short of Sony's \$5k SCD-1. Compared with the SCD-XA9000ES, the Marantz delivered a deeper and better-defined soundstage, with a wonderful three-dimensionality, bloom, and sense of air between instruments. Listen, for example, to the totally natural spatial presentation of piano, bass, and drums on Warren Bernhardt's *So Real* disc on DMP. I was also impressed by the Marantz's ability to resolve individual instrumental lines during complex passages.

Finally, the SA-11S1 had a rhythmically involving bass, even if it didn't quite extend down to the bottom octave. Roger Waters' driving bass lines on the SACD release of *Dark Side of the Moon*, for example, were tight, propulsive, and created a visceral involvement with the music.

The SA-11S1 gets an unqualified recommendation, both for its outstanding CD performance and even better SACD sound. Moreover, the unit's stunning build quality, silky-smooth disc drawer, sensual remote control, and gorgeous metalwork made it a joy to use. The Marantz SA-11S1 is a perfect choice for those looking for true high-end performance from a mid-priced player. **Q**

SPECIFICATIONS

Outputs: Balanced on XLR jacks, unbalanced on RCA jacks; digital output on RCA and TosLink optical
Dimensions: 17 5/16" x 4 3/16" x 16 7/16"
Weight: 31 lbs.

MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

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1100 Maplewood Drive
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Price: \$3499