

# MARANTZ SA-7S1

*Marantz has decided that the time is right to deliver its best-ever CD player, and the results are simply stunning*

**PRICE** £5,000 **CONTACT** Marantz UK, Kingsbridge House, Padbury Close, 575-583 Birch Road, Lymington LB7 0HE ☎ 01753 680208 🌐 www.marantz.co.uk

**M**arantz has just launched its most ambitious hi-fi components yet: a CD/SACD player, preamplifier and monoblock power amps unleashed under the new legendary Series banner. *Hi-Fi Choice* had been waiting for its review sample of the SA-7S1 player for over a year before it finally arrived, following a host of tweaks and revisions aimed at delivering perfection. And boy, was it worth the wait.

The SA-7S1 looks rather like the older Marantz CD-7 and has a similar arrangement of switchable filters, but the CD-7 was a dedicated CD player. This is a stereo SACD-cum-CD player, and its real forerunner was the SA-1, Marantz's first and, until now, only high-end SACD player, which was discontinued some years ago when the SA-7S1 was just a gleam in its designer's eye. Reading between the lines, it seems at least possible that Marantz never intended to issue a follow-up to the SA-1. If true, this implies that the SACD format is showing more signs of life at this stage in its cycle than some at least may have anticipated.

One surprise was to find that the SA-7S1 uses a new mechanism made in-house, with a very substantial 10mm thick loader, rather than the Philips or other non-proprietary mechanism we expected to find when we applied the tin opener. The chassis is copper plated, and major sections of it are extremely heavy: the player tips the scales at over 22kg. Instead of opto couplers to sort out the earth returns from the various circuit blocks, the Marantz uses hi-tech digital Giant Magneto Resistance technology. Power supply design is unusually painstaking, and the main output is

available in single-ended and differential balanced form, the latter reflecting the internal circuit architecture.

The player is not exactly swimming in gadgets, but it includes absolute phase inversion, various anti-aliasing filters designed, for example, to give a more analogue like or a more neutral characteristic. For our money, the default setting (No. 1 for CD and SACD alike)

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is the most convincing and somehow even-handed of them all by a narrow margin. The Marantz can also use an outboard high-precision master clock, but the company doesn't make its own and, from discussions with the maker, we detected a note of scepticism about whether an external clock would make an improvement or simply a difference.

Musically, the Marantz performs superbly with both CD and SACD. There's something very easy and relaxed about this player, but it is not in any sense lacking in speed, dynamics or resolution. Just the opposite: this is one of the most thoroughly musical and least mechanical-sounding players we have ever heard, even by comparison with most other SACD players around this price level, or higher in some cases. There's an unmistakable warmth and grace about the sound of this player: not exactly a valve-like warmth but something with a more solid, tighter core, perhaps. It is,

nonetheless, expressed with an airiness and a natural quality that is simply not on the menu with the majority of players, at this or any other price, making the Marantz unusually graceful and easy to listen to irrespective of the musical genre involved.

SACD definitely has the edge on CD – at least it does in the majority of cases – but the Marantz is no less adept with CD, which has

clearly been treated very seriously. It lacks the atmospheric quality, spaciousness and articulation of SACD but the shortfall is not large. The Marantz also has an unusual ability to realise timing information in a coherent, foot-tapping way. The audio spectrum is completely homogenous: the bass is tactile yet subtle, allowing the music to do its own thing. There is no strain and no distinction between different frequency bands, as long as the rest of the system is up to its job.

Significant new technology has been developed over the last few years for this player, which also boasts superb engineering. In most respects it's at least on a par with the best available from elsewhere, which, on consideration, makes the player look like something of a bargain – even at £5k a pop. ■

*Alvin Gold*

*See the September 2007 edition of Hi-Fi Choice for the original review of this product*

