



The same but different...

HAVING LAUNCHED ITS 30 SERIES A WHILE BACK, MARANTZ HAS MOVED ON FROM ITS NEAR-CONVENTIONAL COMBINATION OF STREAMING SACD/CD PLAYER AND ALL-ANALOGUE AMPLIFIER. NOW THERE'S THIS NETWORK-ENABLED AMP – BUT IS IT AN AMPLIFIER WITH BENEFITS, OR AN ALL-IN-ONE SYSTEM? WHICHEVER, IT'S RATHER GOOD, SAYS ANDREW EVERARD

As a company, Marantz has long been able to spring surprises; there was the massive T-1 monobloc amplifier, launched 1995; the Consolette system – with its mix of slender component and a large speaker housing leading an acquaintance to describe it as looking like 'a little amp with a huge afro hairdo'; and then, in the last decade, a range of retro-styled components starting with the HD-DAC1, complete with signature 'porthole' display and (faux) wood side-panels.

However, what emerged in 2020 was a major shift even for a company so adventurous: the 30 Series models ushered in not just a new styling language, albeit one informed by designs of the past, but also a new approach, with the adoption of the slogan 'Modern Music Luxury' in place of the long-running 'Because Music Matters'. OK, so the company was swift to backpedal, saying that the decades-old mantra would still be in the mix somewhere, but it was clear that this new line up, of Model 30 amplifier and SACD 30n SACD/CD player, was part of a move to reposition the brand further upmarket, while retaining traditional values.

Indeed, so close were the new 'designer' models to the Marantz brief of confining all the digital stuff to the player, and leaving the amplifier as a purist all-analogue device, that they were rather similar to the 'conventional' SA-12SE/PM-12SE SACD player and amplifier Marantz had launched only a few weeks previously. It took a bit of reviewer head-scratching to work that one out, but the differences didn't take that long to emerge: while the SA-12SE is a purist SACD machine, although with added digital inputs including USBs for a computer and storage devices, making it in some ways a junior version of

the flagship SA-10, the SACD 30n is a rather different beast, thanks to network connectivity for streaming from online services and locally-stored music files, not to mention integration of stablemate Denon's HEOS technology to facilitate multiroom audio as well as controlling all that network stuff.

Nonetheless the principle of 'digital player, analogue amplifier' laid down in the high-end 10 Series models, and engineered there to spectacular effect in the cause of keeping high-speed digital electronics well away from delicate analogue preamp signals, was maintained in the 30 Series. Indeed, at the time of the launch of 'Modern Musical Luxury', the engineers made it clear this was a fundamental part of Marantz design, especially at this elevated level. To that end the new models featured an in-house-engineered phono stage, dubbed Marantz Musical Phono EQ: first rolled out in the PM-10 integrated amplifier, this is the company's answer to the boom in interest in vinyl, and – rather than going for a simple chip-based phono solution just to keep up with fashion – the company went for its own design.

This involves splitting the usual re-equalisation and amplification into two functions, and using JFETs in the input stage to provide high input impedance,