

Marantz SR 6004 A/V Receiver Review



Marantz has long been associated with stereo receivers and has produced an extensive line of components over the last 40 years. Times have certainly changed from when all-one-receivers were at the heart of many a 2-channel stereo system and were called upon to serve as amp, tuner and phono stage. Nowadays, a receiver can hardly get a second look unless it can serve up the video goods, too. Marantz's SR 6004 is part of the new breed of A/V receivers designed to accommodate practically any audio/video connection and demand imaginable. With a suggested sticker of \$1,249.99, the SR 6004 proves the old adage, "you get what you pay for." And it's quite a lot.

Features

It would be a short review if I focused on what the SR 6004 *can't* do, as its list of features is nearly inexhaustible. One could spend a week just exploring and fine-tuning the multitude of options at hand here. Most folks just want to get setup and call it good, though. And it's hard to imagine a setup scenario this receiver can't accommodate. Interconnectivity is what the SR 6004 is all about, whether your system includes Blu-ray, DVD, VCR, video projector, camcorder, satellite tuner, gaming device, iPod, flash drive or otherwise, you'll likely find the respective connection somewhere on this receiver. Six HDMI 1.3 ports – four inputs and two outputs – open the door for new formats such as Dolby TrueHD and DTS HD Master Audio and make it easy to connect two TV sets.



The SR 6004 replaces Marantz's 6003 model with several new functions and improvements. Perhaps most exciting is the receiver's integration with Bluetooth devices, which enables users to transmit audio signals wirelessly from up to eight devices, including iPhones, iPod Touches, Blackberrys and Bluetooth-enabled computers, and listen through a home theater system. This is accomplished via the RX101 wireless receiver that's bundled with the SR 6004. The front panel's USB input has also been upgraded and can be used to transmit audio from an iPhone or iPod Touch, but it's also capable of reading MP3, WMA and WAV files from other portable devices. If your iPod or iPhone is loaded with music, the receiver's USB transfers audio signals digitally and processes them using the SR 6004's 24-bit/192kHz DAC instead of the portable device. To boost compressed audio, M-DAX (Marantz Dynamic Audio eXpander) helps fill in the "gaps," adding greater high frequency to minimize any lossy effects.

The receiver also boasts some two dozen surround modes, including Dolby Digital 5.1, DTS Neo:6 Surround, DTS-DH Master Audio and Dolby Pro Logic II Height. If you want just the stereo facts, the SR 6004 features Pure Direct mode, which bypasses the tone control circuit, bass management configuration, output from the video jacks and even turns off the display to ensure faithful reproduction of the original recording.

An i-Chips video processor can take composite or component video signals, converts them to digital and upscale them up to 1080p for HDMI output. Conversely, the receiver can take any signal from the analog video monitor outputs and down-convert. Supported resolutions are 480i for S-video; 480i, 480p, 720p and 1080i for component video inputs and outputs; and 480p, 720p, 1080i and 1080p for the HDMI inputs and monitor output. The SR 6004 also sports component video output for a second zone to bring the sights and sounds into other rooms.

Far more than just an old 5.1 surround machine, the SR 6004 delivers 110 watts, at a miniscule 0.08% THD, across 7 channels (8 ohms) for plenty of noise-free power regardless of setup. The receiver is equipped for 7.1 surround playback via Dolby Pro Logic IIz, and can be configured for front height speakers or any other speaker setup you can dream of. Should you choose, the back surrounds can be re-assigned for bi-amping the front channels. The unit's 24-bit/192kHz DAC is available to all channels. The receiver can decode HDCD-compatible compact discs. An AM/FM tuner can store up to 60 preset and individually labeled stations. If you want to use the receiver for XM or Sirius satellite radio, no problem. There are even two A/C outlets to connect a pair of auxiliary components. About the only thing missing is a phono stage. The 90 pages of info in the User Guide can fill in anything I don't cover.



Setup

A GUI (graphical user interface) is control central for the SR 6004. The GUI can be viewed on a TV screen by connecting either a composite or component video or HDMI input from the TV to the receiver's VIDEO MONITOR OUT terminal. Otherwise, the GUI menu is accessible and displayed on the front panel. Every home theater room has a sonic personality that's unique. It's easy to overlook the effect that floor coverings, windows, drapes, furniture and other in-room accessories can have on the area's acoustics. To compensate for all these anomalies, Marantz employs an Audyssey Laboratories' calibration microphone to ensure that the sound passing from the SR 6004 and out your speakers is specifically tailored to your environment.

After connecting all speakers (the receiver's banana jacks work with bare wire and banana plugs but not with spade terminations), plug the mike into the SETUP MIC input, place it in the first and main listening position and select "speaker setup" from the menu. From there it makes a series of acoustical customizations specifically for the room to optimize the playback experience. Speaker size, speaker distance, sensitivity and cross-over network are all accounted for. Dynamic EQ adjusts surround and subwoofer level according to volume, so there's less degradation of dynamics when the receiver is played at lower volumes. It's an unfortunate reality that most home theaters have a very limited sweet spot when it comes to sound, so the Audyssey can be used to optimize up to six different listening points for everyone's enjoyment. In addition, Audyssey manages dynamic volume to reduce the blare of overly loud

TV commercials and save your hearing the next time someone peddles the world's greatest vegetable chopper.

The last few months I've had a blast experimenting with different speaker configurations, not worried so much about the brand or employing all-in-one setups but focusing on speakers that sound great by themselves already. I assembled a team consisting of DCM KX10s, Athena LS-C50 (center) Athena AS-B1-1s (surrounds) and Role Audio's Sampans (back surrounds). It turned out very nicely, with lots of bass and shake from the front and plenty of crisp detail from the surrounds. Even without a subwoofer, the Marantz delivered the goods, whether with 2-channel music, 5.1 DVD-Audio or DTS Digital Surround-coded movies. I really wanted to try the Dolby Logic Pro II Z, taking the system to the next level, but I ran out of speakers!

Listening & Watching

The SR 6004 is an eminently listenable and fun-to-use receiver that operates very quietly. One of the SR 6004's greatest attributes is its sound, featuring the lovely Marantz mid-range and smoothness that's been a company stamp for decades. Listening to the DTS 5.1 DVD-Audio version of The Moody Blues' *Seventh Sojourn* was a revelation. I sat with my wife, both of us amazed at the sheer power and effect of being bathed in sound from the band and all the finery of the backing orchestration.

Though HDCD-coded discs never really captured the mainstream music-buying public's attention, I'm glad to have the feature and hear the few dozen such encoded discs in my collection at full 20-bit output. To me, HDCD discs are the bridge between redbook CD and SACD, and if you're a fan of the Grateful Dead, you'll like hearing the band's many recordings in HDCD resolution. Though it would seem an obvious feature, I also like having the playback type shown on the display. It's cool to see "HDCD" or "96/24" on the panel, indicating the signal passing through the receiver and verifying your choice.

I mentioned earlier how the SR 6004 can accommodate any number of video playback devices, but what makes it all work for me is being able to run, say, component video cables from a DVD player directly into the receiver and then output the signal with just a single HDMI cable by assigning the HDMI out to the DVD (or whatever else). It not only eliminates an extra tangle of wires, but it makes it possible for one HDMI cable to serve as the sole video path from the receiver to the TV, whether you're dealing with HDMI-compatible components or not.

Too often I rely on big-scale action films to test an A/V receiver's surround moxy, but what impressed me most about the SR 6004 wasn't for putting me in the middle of epic battles or car chases; rather it was during one of the quietest scenes from the 2005 film *On A Clear Day*. It's a feel-good film about a displaced worker named Frank, who decides to swim the English Channel to regain his self-worth and more. For practice, Frank frequents a public pool and there's a scene afterward in the changing room where he and some friends are talking and drying off. As I watching, I heard the sound of water dripping off one of the men, drop by drop. It came through in such detail from of the surrounds and with such an eerie sense of presence that I thought my kitchen sink had a slow leak. I realized it's easy to do "big" big, but it's the little details that make the difference between good and excellent.

I really like the versatility of the receiver's USB function. Not only is it



capable of handling large amounts of data – up to 700 folders and more than 65,000 files – but being able to connect directly to a media player, flash drive or hard drive is very cool and convenient. A chunk of my CD collection is backed up on a 250GB LaCie Brick desktop hard drive. To access these music files usually requires connection to a computer hard drive bearing some type of operating software and then opening the files in a media player. Good enough but not often the way I want to go. Sure, I can stream music to a network player and then through the receiver, but that, too, requires my computer to be powered on.

With the SR 6004, I could plug the LaCie directly into the receiver's USB port and access the complete collection without turning on a computer. The TV monitor (and the receiver's GUI) will both display track info, including artist name, album, song name and time data. Navigating through the folder structure is as simple as using the Up/Down arrows on the remote control. I could really get use to having this setup, which nearly eliminates the need for a CD player, save for playing HDCD-coded discs and enjoying the full dynamic range. I do wish the SR 6004 could play FLAC files, but you can still go the uncompressed route with WAVs. One feature I didn't put too much stock in was a real ear-turner – the M-DAX (Marantz Dynamic Audio Expander). I strongly recommend using the M-DAX function for playback of AAC, MP3 or WMA files. It's an easy experiment to hear the very real improvement in sound when this feature is engaged. Two degrees of effect are offered: "Low" and "High." Even at the low level, the music is much more rounded, 3-dimensional and closer to the real thing. I remain anti-compression, but the M-DAX made me soften my stance considerably. Check it out!

The receiver's FM tuner works very well, and can be fine-tuned in .05 hertz increments. The remote is designed to make this easy, by allowing step-by-step adjustments by pressing the Up/Down arrows once, or to find stations, simply hold down one of the buttons while the tuner scans the airwaves. Again, attention to detail.

I don't have any Bluetooth-compatible devices, as my trusty iPod recently died and I have yet to replace it. That doesn't lessen the receiver's capability with such equipment, however; and I think those of a more techno-bent will love being able to sync iPhones or laptops through just one receiver. I look forward to trying that in the future.

Final Thoughts

The SR 6004 is a fine performer across the board, with excellent sound and attention to all the controls and devices that users now demand. The quality and performance make this a deluxe model among the competition and often dulls the line of sonic differences between an all-in-one receiver and stereo separates. It's sophisticated yet easy to use and built for today's and tomorrow's technologies. What more can anyone ask?

System Setup

- Marantz SR 6004 A/V Receiver
- Yamaha DV-S5770 DVD-Audio/SACD player
- Nuvision NVU37L, LCD HDTV
- DCM KX10 loudspeakers
- Athena Technologies AS-B1-1 bookshelf speakers
- Role Audio Sampan mini-tower loudspeakers

<http://www.avrev.com/home-theater-av-receivers/av-receivers/marantz-sr-6004-a-v-receiver.html>