



hardware

marantz

CD5003 CD player

as reviewed by Ed Kobesky



Remember when a decent hi-fi system was a big investment? I can, but barely. A fashionable direct drive turntable and cartridge, behemoth receiver, and speakers cost about a month's pay, maybe more. Today, you can buy something like the new \$349 Marantz CD5003 CD player, pair it with the company's matching \$449 PM5003 integrated amp, and add a pair of bookshelf speakers for about one *week's* pay. Imagine if that were true of other things, like cars. Unfortunately for me, a Porsche 911 that cost a year's salary in the 1970s still costs about a year's salary today.

Here's another sign of the times. This \$349 CD player is so good it shouldn't necessarily be relegated to an entry-level system. Then again, maybe I shouldn't be so surprised. Marantz have always made excellent budget CD players at around this price point, and nowadays it seems like there are new price-performance breakthroughs on the digital front every few months. So, I take it back. The CD5003 is simply what I've come to expect from Marantz disc spinners, with all the benefits of the latest chipsets plus a little bit of trickle-down engineering from their Reference series.

It's no secret that NAD and Cambridge Audio also make some excellent players around this price. If you're in the market, you should audition them. But for starters, the CD5003 has them beat to hell in terms of appearance. It's one refined looking machine, and cosmetically not much less impressive than the four-figure machines Marantz sells. (It has the same basic curves, but it's built to a price.) When I first saw it in the product literature, I thought they must have gotten the price wrong. It also has a good headphone jack plus electronic pitch control, which the competition lacks.

Where the Marantz falls slightly short of competing with NAD and especially Cambridge Audio players is in terms of pace and high frequency extension. It just didn't get my toes tapping as convincingly, nor did it have as much sparkle. Again, that's no surprise. Marantz players have always been a little rhythmically aloof—more David Niven than Dave Matthews. But the CD5003 is hardly a slouch and it responds to big dynamic shifts with confidence and easily keeps the beat in such a way that, unless you're doing an A-to-B comparison with a far more capable player, you'll never notice. The leading edges of notes may simple seem a little polite.



On the other hand, what I like about the CD5003 is its notable finesse. Some of its competition sounds a little rough and ready by comparison. While high frequencies aren't as extended as the Cambridge Audio, they're smooth though perhaps slightly blunted, and you don't need to worry as much about pairing the CD5003 with an amp and speakers that leans toward the bright end of the spectrum. The Marantz makes other players sound aggressive by comparison.

The CD5003 also has a nice weightiness. Vocals have real palpability, bass drums hit with a feel-it-in-your-chest solidity, and the whole presentation seems well anchored

ED KOBESKY'S SYSTEM

LOUDSPEAKERS
Spendor S5e

ELECTRONICS
PrimaLuna ProLogue Two integrated amplifier, Rotel RQ-970 phono stage.

SOURCES
Rega Planar 3 turntable with Linn Basik LVV tonearm and Denon DL-110 cartridge, Rega Planet CD player, Sony DVP-NC875V DVD/SACD player, Pioneer DV-563A universal player.

CABLES
MonsterCable Interlink 400, 250 and 200 interconnects, AudioQuest Alpha Snake interconnects, MonsterCable XP speaker wire, others.

ACCESSORIES
Record Doctor II record cleaning machine with Disc Doctor brushes, Sennheiser HD580 headphones, Rotel RLC-900 line conditioner.

in the performance space. Backgrounds are very clean and quiet for something that costs this little, helping to create an expansive soundstage with good imaging and exceptionally correct scale.

Detail retrieval isn't quite as good as the competition in terms of raw in-your-face resolution, but the CD5003's remarkable composure is, again, David Niven-like. Ask Sir David a question and he doesn't know the answer, he'll charm his way around it. Likewise, when the CD5003 runs across a musical passage it can't quite untangle, the whole thing doesn't devolve into a murky mess. Rather, the CD5003 seems to lock onto musical elements that keep the listener involved—vocals, percussion, maybe a bass line—so that it never gets aurally fatiguing to hum along to.

The CD5003 is even more impressive when listened to under the microscope of revealing headphones. I spent some time running it through its paces with the warm, lush Sennheiser HD580 and the spacious, revealing AKG K701 and came away very satisfied. And don't neglect its built-in headphone jack. While it couldn't quite drive the power-hungry AKGs with sufficient authority, it did a commendable job with the Sennheisers as well as a set of Grados I plugged in for a few tracks. If your headphones happen to be relatively easy to drive, you might consider buying this as an all-in-one CD playback solution.

Ergonomically, the CD5003 is commendable. Controls are well laid-out on both the unit's front panel and the remote control, which feels a little chintzy by comparison and definitely nowhere near the hefty Cambridge Audio handsets. The faux brushed-aluminum faceplate and trim are nice, though. Its transport mechanism feels solid, operates smoothly and quietly, and responds to commands quickly. I noted no glitches during the review period.

There may seem to be some caveats attached to my recommendation, but in everyday real-world listening, few players under \$1000 are as consistently satisfying as this Marantz. It doesn't dazzle at first listen, but neither does it ever become tiresome or fatiguing. That doesn't make it a ho-hum performer—this is a true high-resolution music machine that will mesh well with a wide variety of different systems.

You can buy some very good CD players for chump change these days. Heck, even a \$10, garage sale PlayStation makes surprisingly listenable music. But the Marantz has looks to kill, refinement to spare and a headphone jack that competes with entry-level standalone amps. It's a must-audition if you're shopping anywhere below \$1000. It's also my new reference for under \$500. **Ed Kobesky**

CD5003

Retail: \$349

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web address: www.marantz.com

