



Marantz AV7005 AV Processor/Preamp / MM7055 Power Amplifier Review

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The ability to replicate the movie theater experience in the home would have been a dream just ten years ago. Multi-channel components and large screen televisions and projectors were expensive and heavy. Add to that the fact there was little multi-channel content available. Today along with DVDs and Blu-ray discs all mixed in 7.1, plus High Definition digital cable boxes that allow broadcasters to offer 5.1 surround sound, it is a whole new ballgame.

The advancements in home theater components have been dizzying, especially in the past two years, with network and internet connectivity, iPod streaming, HDMI switching, software based room correction and speaker set up all being thrown into the mix of features offered by most major manufacturers. More powerful multichannel receivers and power amps have also brought the home experience closer to the real thing.

Almost every major speaker company now has a line of home theater speakers designed for optimal set up with home theater components. Today, the ability to set up a home theater is only limited by room size and budget. But that being said, for around \$500 you can get a very decent AV receiver with plenty of features and good sound quality, with the only compromise being modest power, which may not be in an issue in a small living room or bedroom and very efficient speakers. Recently I have really started to enjoy multi-channel HD broadcasts by premium cable channels, the major networks, and of course movies on DVD. I don't currently have a Blu-ray player, but that may change sooner than later. The new breed of Blu-ray components is blurring the lines between AV receivers and disc spinners.



The subjects of this review are two brand new multi-channel components from Marantz, the AV7005 receiver and MM7055 power amplifier. The AV7005 is priced at \$1499 and the MM7055 at \$1199. The list of features and the connectivity capabilities of the AV7005 are mind boggling. And that may be an understatement. The MM7005 is a 5 channel power amplifier that is loaded with the company's latest circuit designs to provide a robust 140 watts per channel. Both units offer both balanced and unbalanced connections.

Set Up:

Setting up the Marantz pair was pretty straight forward. I would estimate that someone who is moderately knowledgeable about home theater components could have these up and running in under an hour. Of course, some tinkering down the road may be needed to achieve the ultimate performance for the specific listening environment where these will find a home. For proper set up, a fairly decent sized rack or cabinet is required, as these are very large components. The power amp alone weighs 35 lbs. Although neither unit seemed to create much heat, even after hours of use, Marantz does recommend decent space for ventilation. They also strongly advise against stacking other components on top of either.

The basic connections between the units included 5 single ended interconnects, one for each channel, and a remote trigger that allows the 7005 to power on and off the 7055. I connected all five of my speakers to the binding posts on the 7005, which accepts either bare wire or banana connectors. Next I ran a line out from the 7005 to my powered sub-woofer, then I connected my sources, which include a digital cable box, an Oppo DVD player, and a Panasonic DVD recording deck. All were connected via HDMI cables, which carries both audio and video. Lastly, I ran an HDMI cable out to my Vizio 55 inch HDTV.



After the physical set up, one must configure the system using the 7005's menu, deciding between manual or automatic set up. I chose to use automatic set up via the on board, highly regarded Audyssey system. I found it to be very impressive, providing accurate measurements and a solid, technically sound final configuration for watching movies, cable TV, and for multi-channel audio. Using Audyssey to set up your system takes ten to fifteen minutes, tops. You plug in the supplied microphone to the front panel and take a series of measurements in up to six listening positions using automated tones generated by the 7005. Audyssey then determines how many and what kind of speakers (small or large) you have, and your listening distance, which is actually very important. It then takes the data and appropriately balances the channels, provides other corrections, then stores the data. I was very pleased with the final set up, and did not make any changes after my final set of measurements. I made several sets of measurements to make sure I was getting accurate readings.

Performance and Features:

After all the fiddling, I got down to the business of exploring what the Marantz pair had to offer performance wise. Over the next month or so my wife and I watched hours and hours of digital cable, and DVDs. I also cued up some audio on some multi-channel DVD-As. I can say without hesitation the sound quality and ease of use was off the charts good. I judge that by how crystal clear dialogue was when watching movies and digital cable. Surround mixes were remarkable in their life like spread of ambient sounds while watching TV shows and DVDs. Random sounds like telephone rings, sirens, and doors opening and closing were so life like I often would be fooled into thinking my own phone was ringing or that someone had opened the door.

For the first time, I saw the value in 5.1 mixes on some classic albums, including the entire Doors catalog. It was quite an experience to feel surrounded by the instruments while listening to songs I have only heard in stereo for decades. The same goes for concert DVDs or various live performances mixed in 5.1 broadcast on the HD channel Palladia. It was really something to watch Elvis Costello and the Imposters play a small club in Memphis on *Club Date*, and if I was willing to give into the illusion, it was like being in the audience, minus the beer and cigarette smells.

The Marantz pair seemed to be driving the Paradigm speakers with such ease, I never had to roll the volume level anywhere near the limit, as I usually have to do with my Cambridge Audio receiver, rated at 80 wpc. The pair barely broke a sweat, and offered a clarity and definition I have not experienced before in my own set up. I admit to being hooked on the way the Marantz pair allowed me to enjoy fatigue free listening for extended periods at fairly lifelike volumes.

The 7005 also provides fast and reliable HDMI video switching which really simplifies a set up with multiple video sources like Blu-ray players, cable boxes, or game consoles, and eliminates the need for extra remotes. With the Marantz supplied remote control, I was able to switch between various sources and HDMI inputs with ease. But here is the interesting part. The picture quality was actually better when using the 7005 for video switching than routing HDMI cables from the various sources into the HDTV directly. This could be due to the inclusion of the latest Anchor Bay 10-bit Video Processor/Scaler. It was easy to tell the difference.

The 7005 processor is way more than a home theater hub. It also accepts an Ethernet connection so you may use it with several online services like Rhapsody, Pandora, Napster, and Flickr. I was able to go on to Flickr and browse through picture galleries with great ease and speed. There is also an on board AM/FM/HD tuner, and you can connect to Sirius satellite radio. It also allows you to connect to a networked home media server of your choice. It automatically detects your network and connects without any need for special configuration.

If all that were not enough, the 7005 is Bluetooth compatible, and allows you to connect any USB device to the front panel, and it allows for *digital iPod* connectivity, which is very cool. You can scroll through the iPod's menu with your album folders displayed on your TV using the remote control. Just recently, Apple updated their iPod Touch and iPhone operating systems, and the update included a new feature called AirPlay, which allows you to stream music to other devices. The 7005 is one such equipped device. Now you can hold your iPod touch or iPhone and without a cable or need for your TV, scroll through, and play tunes through your home theater. The 7005 also allows for multi zone operation. In case you thought they forgot something, there is an on board Moving Magnet Phono input. Vinyl and iPods can live happily together.

To put it through its paces, I tested some of the above mentioned features, and had a blast doing it. I plugged my iPod Nano into the USB slot and scrolled through the folders, enjoying excellent sound. I also plugged in a thumb drive loaded with JPEG files from a recent Hawaii vacation, blown away by the ability to see my pictures in high definition on a big screen, instead of the usual computer or laptop screen. I was intending to use my wife's iPod Touch via the new AirPlay app and connect to the 7005 via Bluetooth but I realized the review sample did not have the required optional wireless receiver. Lastly, I did a bit of listening to CDs to get a grip on the combo's 2 channel performance. What I got was excellent musicality, typical of the Marantz product line. You can also create "surround stereo" which means it will take a stereo source and route it to all your speakers.

Conclusion:

Marantz has brought to market for 2011 a pair of AV separates that I believe offers absolutely killer performance for an investment of \$2700 that would mercilessly trounce a \$25,000 home theater system from just ten years ago. The long list of on board features are not just parlor tricks, they all work and work well. Not only was there gobs of power from the 7055, but crystal clear dialogue and vocals from the center channel speaker, a real clarity and presence from every other channel, floor shaking bass, and an overall quality of sound that belies the \$1199 price tag.

The 7005 processor and preamp is a true marvel at \$1499. It offers a multitude of surround sound modes, endless connectivity options, HDMI switching, USB inputs, networking, and excellent set up flexibility. The inclusion of Audyssey is a huge plus, and I found it to be a valuable asset. Of course, I do have a very short list of things I wish had been included, like the ability to stream from Netflix or similar services. I realize that this feature is available on most Blu-ray players today, but in this era of moving beyond physical media, it would have been cool. The only other nitpick I have is that there was no code for the Vizio brand to allow the Marantz remote to power on and off my HDTV. Just about every other brand was represented. That is pretty much all I was left wanting.

The 7005 and 7055 were very impressive across the board, and across all the functions packed into these two boxes that would have taken up an entire room years ago at a cost unaffordable to all but the most fortunate. I believe Marantz has hit it out of the park on their new line of AV products. They are future proof, offer endless flexibility and connectivity even to older components, and make use of technology from Marantz's high end Reference Series, all in a highly attractive, distinguished looking package. Beware, for if you decide to jump in, you may find yourself upgrading your speakers, cables, and accessories to make them commensurate with the performance of the 7005 and 7055. These are keepers.

