

Marantz ND8006/PM8006

Combining what's said to be 'the complete digital source' and a new amplifier design with a high-quality in-house phono stage, could this be the ideal do-it-all pairing?

Review: **Andrew Everard** Lab: **Paul Miller**

Marantz is pretty unequivocal about its new ND8006 network music/CD player/DAC, describing the £1100 machine as simply 'The Source Player'. Partner it with the matching PM8006 amplifier, which comes complete with a new 'Marantz Musical Phono EQ' stage and also sells for £1100, and it seems you have a pairing designed to cover everything from LPs to multi-DSD, with both solidly-built and neatly-finished units available in the usual Marantz choice of black or 'silver-gold'.

For a good while now the 8000 series has been one of the unsung secrets of the Marantz range. In practice, all the action has been at the entry level, with successive generations of the 6000 range [*HFN* Sep '16] culminating in the current 6006 UK Special Edition CD player and amplifier, launched last year. Then there has always been a yawning gap before one reaches the really upmarket Marantz hardware, topped out by the 10 series SACD player/DAC and amp [*HFN* Mar/Aug '17].

That's a pity, because the PM8005 amplifier, SA8005 player [*HFN* Oct '14] and ND8005 network player were always very solid performers, combining much of the prowess – and indeed a lot of the style – of the flagship Marantz models, but at a much more affordable price. Now, with the latest ND8006/PM8006, the midrange has become an even stronger proposition.

KEEPING WITH TRADITION

As is the way with Marantz, the digital and analogue functions are kept quite separate in this duo – you can see the same thing in action in the flagship 10 series. So all the digital heavy lifting is done by the player, leaving the amplifier as an all-analogue affair, as opposed to the path taken by stablemate Denon, where it's more common to find amps with built-in DACs.

RIGHT: The PM8006 includes the same beefy 'double-shielded' transformer [left] and 'block' electrolytics [centre] seen in the PM8005 but features a new two-stage RIAA circuit, improved volume chip and passives (resistors, etc)

The ND8006 may lack SACD playback but otherwise will handle just about anything digital you choose to throw at it, having both a 'computer audio' USB Type B input and Type A for USB storage devices, plus both Ethernet and Wi-Fi networking for playback from NAS drives and the like, and to access streaming services. The likes of Amazon Prime Music, Deezer Premium+, Spotify Connect and Tidal are supported, subject to availability and subscriptions where required, and of course there's also Internet radio, plus both AirPlay and Bluetooth with aptX to stream music wirelessly from portable devices.

The player also has one coaxial and two optical digital inputs to handle connections from conventional sources. Under the hood, Marantz offers its own 'Musical

Digital Filtering' system with a tried and tested ESS9016 Sabre DAC, the player handling content at up to 384kHz/32-bit and DSD256, depending on input.

Downstream of the DAC the player uses its discrete Hyper-Dynamic Amplifier Modules (or HDAMs) rather than chip op-amps. There's also a choice of fixed or variable analogue outputs, enabling the player to be used straight into a power amp or active speakers,

and the headphone output has its own amplification, again HDAM-powered.

The final appeal of the ND8006 is that, like many of the products in the Denon and Marantz stables, it has HEOS multiroom built-in, allowing it to share content with, or from, other HEOS-equipped hardware around the house. This integration has

'Drums have punch and slam, the cymbals sting and sizzle'





become a major theme for the companies' parent Sound United, and it opens up other intriguing possibilities [see boxout, below].

The partnering PM8006 amplifier is, by its nature, a pretty simple device, rated at 70W/8ohm [see PM's Lab Report, p51] and having four line inputs, one tape loop and that MM phono input. But the last of these is rather special, using a two-stage JFET/HDAM-equipped 'Marantz Musical Phono EQ' stage, which makes its debut in this amp. Volume is microprocessor-controlled, while tri-tone controls add a midband adjustment to the usual bass and treble.

MATCHED PAIR

By the standards of its class, this Marantz duo is very good indeed. Sure enough, the PM8006 may lack the absolute insight and extreme treble detail of some competitors,

but then there's none of that searing 'fingernails on blackboard' forwardness some – present company included – find almost unlistenable, replacing it with a much more integrated balance. And whether partnered with the ND8006, with its fresh, clean but well weighted sound, or a decent turntable, this is an amplifier offering a totally immersive listening experience. Here at least, the performance and the recording, not the means by which it's being played, is held centre-stage.

What's more, the integration of the two components either via the hard-wired Marantz remote link between them and the unified handset supplied with both, or using the HEOS app to drive the ND8006, makes them simple to use despite the performance on offer. Evidently, Marantz's designers have built the player, for all its

ABOVE: ND8006 [top] uses two multifunction controls, has a slot for USB drives and a 'phone output with its own amp; PM8006 has unusual 'tri-tone' controls, with a source direct switch

flexibility, to be entirely non-threatening for someone coming to it from a conventional CD player-based audio system.

It's possible to warm up the sound of the combination using the selectable filtering on the ND8006. Filter 2, said to give a more 'analogue' sound, does turn on the lushness but I preferred the player using its default setting. I also set its digital input lock range to as narrow as possible without drop-outs (which was pretty narrow in my system) and with the player's headphone amp turned off, which also cleaned up the sound a bit more.

THE SMOKE CLEARS

Having cleared the air with 'Smoke On The Water' from Deep Purple's *Machine Head* in DSD64 [from Warner Bros WPCR 14166], I hugely enjoyed the insight the Marantz duo gave into 'Space Truckin'. This may be a player and amplifier very much at home with the filigree detail of a classical work or plaintive singer/songwriter stuff, but it can also boogie, thanks in no small part to its deep, fast bass. The drums have forthright punch and slam, the cymbals sting and sizzle, and that big Richie Blackmore riff snarls from the speakers.

The Marantz pairing delivers the tracks with a nasty raw edge, but that's just as it should be – the presence and sheer power here makes it sound like it was recorded last week, not the better part ➔

HEOS IN THE HOUSE

Sound United is going full steam ahead integrating HEOS, originally launched under the Denon banner, into as many of its products as possible. As well as the HEOS speakers themselves, the system is now built into just about every AV receiver in the Denon and Marantz ranges, and is also appearing in its hi-fi products, from new Denon lifestyle systems through to the likes of the Marantz ND8006. With HEOS onboard, and the HEOS app loaded onto a smartphone or tablet, it's possible to integrate equipment into a whole-house system, playing network-stored music, Internet streaming services and more. You can choose different content to play in any room, group rooms together into zones, or run the whole house in a synchronised 'party mode'. On a simpler level, a HEOS wireless speaker in the kitchen means you won't miss any of the music when you nip out for a drink! And there's another twist: with one of Amazon's Echo devices in your home, and the HEOS Home Entertainment Skill loaded to your Alexa account, you need only say 'Alexa, play *Dark Side Of The Moon* in the living room', and the music begins through the ND8006 and PM8006. Say hello to the future!

MARANTZ ND8006/PM8006



ABOVE: Network/CD player/DAC [top] has Ethernet, Bluetooth Wi-Fi, two optical, one coaxial and USB digital inputs alongside optical/coaxial digital outs and fixed/variable analogue outs (on RCAs). Amp [below] includes MM phono, four line, one tape loop, pre out/power amp in and A/B sets of 4mm speaker binding posts

of half a century ago. By contrast, almost recorded last week is Buddy Guy's *The Blues Is Alive And Well* set [Silverstone 19075-81247-2; 96kHz/24-bit], one where the old boy – he's 81 now – sounds half his age, both in his vocals and his playing. Here the Marantz player and amp do a remarkable job with the big, rich Tom Hambridge production, delivering the great wash of sound while still allowing the individual performances to be picked out.

That's especially so on 'Cognac', where Guy is joined by Jeff Beck (74) and almost-75-year-old Keith Richards to show just how good 230 years of guitarists can sound together! The Marantz makes it pretty clear who's playing what to spectacular effect.

CUBAN HEELS

Spinning CDs shows the ND8006's disc-drive is no makeweight, even though it lacks the multiformat

capability of the SA10's transport which also plays DVD media. Here it's CD-only, but it does a fine job across a range of classical and rock discs.

However, to hear the Marantz player really shine, you need only feed it with some well-recorded hi-res content such as the Latin-tinged jazz of

Cuban pianist Harold López-Nussa on his *Un Día Cualquiera* set [Mack Avenue MAC1135; 96kHz/24-bit]. The all-Cuban band – the pianist's brother Ruy Adrián is on drums and Gaston Joya on bass – is as tight as you could want, whether playing wistful tunes reminiscent of their home or charging through 'Conga Total/El Cumbanchero'.

Whatever the track, the fast, clean but perfectly weighted 'Marantz sound' is just the thing to track these interweaving instrumental lines. That mix of detail and deceptive smoothness also proves just the thing for classical music, allowing both realistic scale in the soundstage and that vital air in recordings made 'as live'.

Boris Giltburg's reading of 'Rach 3' with the RSNO under Carlos Miguel Prieto – one of those bargain Naxos hi-res recordings [8.573630, 96kHz/24-bit] – has fabulously wide dynamic range and presence. Here Marantz's ND8006/PM8006 pairing gives all its drama and expression full rein. For relatively affordable, and very flexible, components, that's some achievement. ☺

HI-FI NEWS VERDICT

A well-matched pair, conceived to exploit all that hi-res music and streaming can offer without scaring off those moving across from an all-CD collection – and the fine phono stage in the amp will even please vinyl enthusiasts. Beautifully built in Sound United's Shirakawa factory (Japan), and designed for ease of use and high standards of music reproduction, this is a highly impressive duo, and fine value for money.

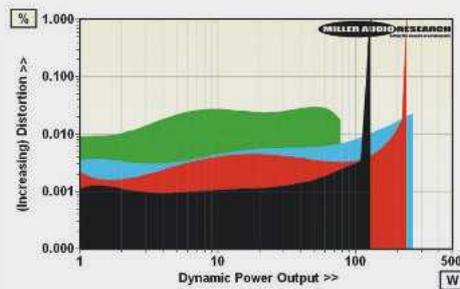
Sound Quality: 84%



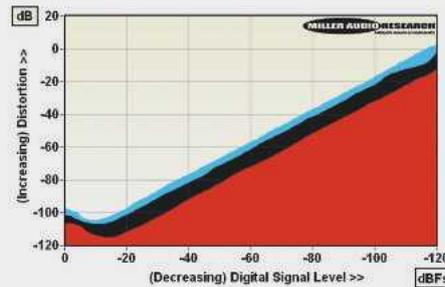
LEFT: System remote control governs all 8000 series components, including access to extra features

While the underlying performance of Marantz's earlier PM8005, PM8004 and PM8003 amplifiers [*HFN* Oct '14 and Nov '10] was almost identical, the latest PM8006 has clearly been 'tweaked'. Still rated at 70W/100W into 8/4ohm, the PM8006 delivers a robust 100W/160W, increasing to 128W/235W under dynamic conditions into 8 and 4ohm. Protection limits its output to 260W/78W into 2/1ohm loads [see Graph 1, below] – about 1A more than the PM8005. However, the A-wtd S/N ratio is now reduced from 91.5dB to 85.6dB (re. 0dBW) – no bad thing subjectively – while the frequency response has been tailored to give a near-DC bass extension allied to a very slightly adjusted treble (-0.14/20kHz to -1.6dB/100kHz vs. 0.0dB/20kHz to -0.8dB/100kHz for the PM8005). Distortion falls as low as 0.0007% through bass and midrange frequencies, increasing to 0.015% at 20kHz and 0.030% at 40kHz (all re. 10W/8ohm).

Marantz's partnering ND8006 player is necessarily more evolved than the ND8005 and SA8005 [*HFN* Oct '14] not least because the Crystal CS4398 DAC has been replaced by an ESS ES9016. The (2.3V) analogue output offers a slightly improved 110dB A-wtd S/N ratio and significantly lower jitter (textbook 115psec via CD and a vanishingly low 5psec via USB and network). The response (and stopband rejection) depends on your choice of digital filter: 'Filter 1' is a slow-roll type with minimal pre/post ringing that offers a mere 6.2dB image rejection and a roll-off of -4.1dB/20kHz (CD/48kHz files), -6.4dB/45kHz (96kHz files) and -16dB/90kHz (192kHz media) while 'Filter 2' has more post-event ringing with a slightly 'flatter' -0.8dB/20kHz, -3.5dB/45kHz and -12.7dB/90kHz response. PM



ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max. current is 11.4A



ABOVE: Distortion versus digital signal level at 1kHz (USB/Network, red; CD, black) and 20kHz (CD, blue)

HI-FI NEWS SPECIFICATIONS

Continuous power (<1% THD, 8/4ohm)	100W / 160W
Dynamic power (<1% THD, 8/4/2/1ohm)	128W / 235W / 260W / 78W
Output imp. (20Hz–20kHz, Player/Amp)	100-103ohm / 0.021-0.051ohm
Freq. resp. (20Hz–20kHz/100kHz)	+0.0 to -0.14dB/-1.58dB
Digital jitter (CD / USB / S/PDIF)	115psec / 8psec / 5psec
A-wtd S/N ratio (Player/Amp)	109.9dB (0dBfs) / 85.6dB (0dBW)
Distortion (Player/Amp)	0.0007-0.0012%/0.0007-0.015%
Power consumption (Player/Amp)	16W / 275W (28W idle)
Dimensions (WHD, Player/Amp)	440x128x379/440x106x341mm