

System synergy

Marantz make great sounding systems of well matched components – and they don't cost the earth either. Tony Bolton lives with a Marantz CD6004 CD player and PM6004 amplifier, feeding Boston Acoustics A360 loudspeakers and finds real synergy.



So it has been your lucky day, and some of the lottery numbers actually match yours, and you now have £1500 to do with as you wish. Since you are reading this magazine, you are obviously going to go hotfoot to your nearest hi-fi dealer to buy yourself a new system. But what to choose from the plethora of equipment out there?

Well one suggestion would be the new Marantz PM6004 amplifier and its matching CD player, the CD6004. These have taken over from the award winning 6003 series and cost £309.90 each.

The amplifier casing retains the elegantly curved edges of its predecessor, and the practicality of five line level inputs and a built in MM phono stage. There are two pairs of speaker terminals to allow for bi-wiring, and remote control. Internally the case-shielded toroidal transformer and customised main capacitors have been retained, and supplemented with new circuit boards that feature discrete components in both the pre and power amplification sections. The previous model's ICs (integrated circuits or chips) have been ditched in favour of better performance. Defeatable tone controls are provided, as is a loudness control.

Matching this is the CD6004 CD player. The casework is identically sized at 440 x 370 x 110mm (w

x d x h) and both are available in the usual black or silver options. The 6004 has been considerably redesigned and now features a new transport mechanism, an upgraded power supply, and a solid metal bottom plate to eliminate vibration. There is also a new DAC, a CS4398 chip, and Marantz's new HDAM-SA2 amplifiers for each channel.

Apart from spinning the silver Frisbees, the CD6004 has a USB 2.0 socket on the front panel which allows either memory sticks or iPods and suchlike to be connected directly to the DAC for better quality reproduction of your mobile music source. iPods and iPads can also be recharged by the USB connection without, it is claimed, detrimental effect upon the sound quality.

A little searching around for suitable loudspeakers to match the Marantz units produced the A360 floorstanders from Boston Acoustics. These are the flagship model in the Company's A-Series and boast dual 165mm DCD woofers, a 89mm DCD midrange unit and a 25mm Kortec soft-dome tweeter housed in a quite handsomely styled cabinet. This measures 1060 x 345 x 274mm (h x w x d) and weighs 20kg. They are available in either gloss white or black finish and cost £719.90 per pair. Some thought has been given to the stability of the cabinets and there are two legs sticking out either side at the back which helped these tall columns to be quite stable even

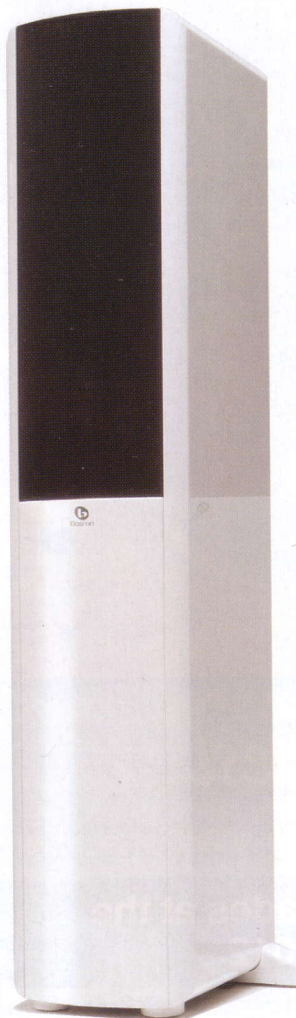
when sat on carpet without spikes attached.

The manufacturer's specs claim a frequency response from 38Hz to 25kHz, an impedance of 8 Ohms and a sensitivity of 90dB (SPL/2.8V/m) making them an easy match to a wide range of amplifiers. The plastic framed grills are held in place by magnets, meaning that there are no unsightly holes in the front panel when they are removed. A single pair of speaker terminals are mounted low down at the back.

I am a great believer in the beneficial effects of carefully chosen cabling when connecting up a system, and for this combination I chose Atlas Cables new version of the Equator interconnects. First introduced in 2002, these are now in Mark III form, and feature cold welded connections between the 99.9999% pure copper co-axial stranded conductors and the new Integra plugs. These are an unusual design and feature two brackets that extend over the conductors to eliminate RFI and four asymmetrical leaves that spring open when inserted into a socket and wipe clean the signal path. The cable is gripped by two conjugate brackets which do not compress the cable. Research at Atlas has shown that compressing a cable can alter its impedance, affecting the sound of the music that is flowing through it. Finally there is a non-magnetic ABS cover over the plug.

The matching Equator speaker cable comes in a variety of forms with either 2 or 3 sq. mm. conductors. The bi-wire version uses multi-stranded 2 sq. mm. for the bass and two 1.2 sq. mm solid core conductors for the treble. The dielectric is made of polypropylene and the conductors are contained in cotton yarn to reduce microphony.

The interconnects retail at £75 per metre pair and the speaker cable



Available in either black or white, the Boston Acoustics A360 have a pleasantly understated appearance.

starts at £6 per metre, rising to £12 per metre for the bi-wire version.

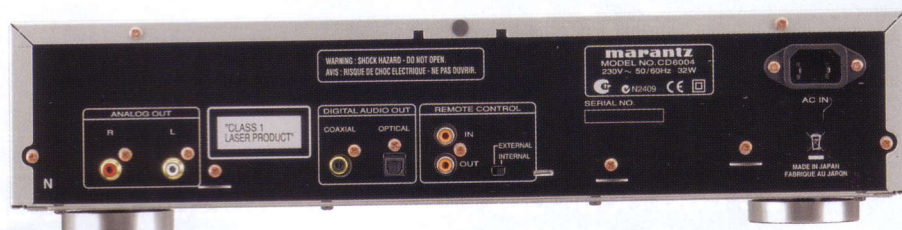
I initially set this system up in a spare room and left it to burn in with the CD player on repeat for a couple of days before moving it all into the front room and starting listening.

Bearing in mind that two pairs of the interconnects on my front-room system cost as much as this entire set-up, you will understand that I felt a little trepidation when inserting the first CD. I needn't have worried. Morcheeba's album 'Big Calm' (Indochina Records ZENO17CDX)

flowed out of the A 360s with a smoothness that was instantly easy to listen to, and very involving. Skye's voice had that lovely velvety texture that I find so beguiling and seemed to be firmly placed in the centre of the music. The band was nicely spread around a quite reasonably large area in front of me, and got on with the business of playing their tunes in an unruffled and entertaining way. Bass notes were well shaped and seemed to have good depth and solidity, allied to quite a punchy presentation when the music required. Mid range and treble detailing was good, helping to create a sonic picture of a group of musicians relaxed and at ease with their craft. I enjoyed the music, which was displayed with enough class that I could forget the relatively modest cost of the equipment, and focus on

Soloists stood in front of the mass of sounds being generated behind them, without getting swamped by the wealth of musical detail available. I could be churlish and comment that there was a certain thinness to the sound of stringed instruments that was not totally tonally accurate, but that is partially a result of my being used to listening to this music on a system that costs many times the value of this one. Considering that music was passing through the on-board phonostage of a £310 amplifier and £720 loudspeakers, the results were very impressive and more than acceptable.

I also tried each of the components separately, attached to the Leema electronics and Charios as appropriate. Each gave a good account of itself and the amp



the sounds that it was creating.

In fairness the Marantz system was not about to do a David and Goliath and take on the resident Leema Acoustics Tucana II, Antilla IIS Eco and Chario Ursa Major set-up, but neither did it disgrace itself in taking over as the main source in the room for a few days. During this time it reproduced radio and television sound in a very capable way. Background detailing was quite comprehensive, helping to flesh out the images moving across the screen. Radio 3 transmissions were reproduced with a level of depth and body that was impressive for equipment at this price point, and throughout I was pleased by the neatness of the sonic package presented to me. It did not try to show off with overly deep rumbling bass or brightly defined treble. Rather, I felt that there was a balance

to the sound – one that was convincing and well mannered.

Since the phonostage was MM only I moved my Linn Sondek, complete with the MusicMaker III moving iron cartridge, downstairs, and settled down with Von Karajan conducting the Berlin Philharmonic through the Beethoven Symphonies (Deutsche Grammophon 2740 172 - 10). The demands of the fourth movement of the 9th Symphony, with the power of a full orchestra and chorus, were handled well.

surprised me by seeming to produce higher sound levels than I expected given its relatively modest 45 Watts per channel claimed output.

The Atlas Cables loom proved particularly capable when installed in my resident system, sounding as though it had cost a lot more than its price. It displayed levels and textures in the music that I would not normally have expected to hear at these prices and seemed to offer exceptional performance for the money.

As a complete system costing, including cables, under £1500, I felt that the inexpensive '6004' system was very capable. The Marantz products worked well individually, but combined, they produced a sound that seemed to build on the strengths of both items and to nullify any small weaknesses.

The Boston Acoustics A360 'speakers' complemented this with a down-to-earth honesty that was enjoyable and satisfying.

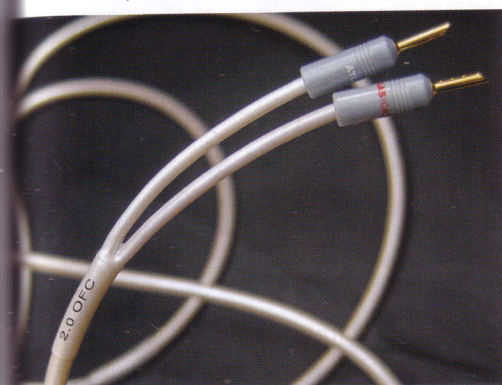
If you are on a tight budget, or looking for an affordable second system, then I would recommend this combination without hesitation. The amp and CD player offer excellent connectivity, covering all sources from analogue to the latest digital devices, and the speakers, while being unobtrusive in size and styling, proved capable of producing sounds in a manner that was fatigue free and musically coherent.

The back panel of the CD6004 carries analogue and digital outputs, the latter in electrical and optical form.

MARANTZ PM6004
AMPLIFIER £309.90
MARANTZ CD6004 CD
PLAYER £309.90
Marantz UK
☎ +44 (0)1753 680868
www.marantz.co.uk

BOSTON ACOUSTICS A360
LOUDSPEAKERS £719.90
Boston Acoustics
☎ +44 (0)2890 279830
www.bostona.eu

ATLAS CABLES EQUATOR
MK. LLL INTEGRA
INTERCONNECT PER
METRE PAIR £75.00
EQUATOR LL SPEAKER CABLE
FROM PER METRE £6.00
Atlas Cables
☎ +44 (0)1563 572666
www.atlascables.com



The Atlas Equator speaker cables