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Premium AV in perfect harmony



Looking to up your speaker count? This two-box system is ready for anything, says **Richard Stevenson**

The AV 10/AMP 10 marks Marantz's biggest AV flagship upgrade in the best part of a decade. It's welcome, too: while the outgoing AV8805A was an evolution of a string of similar-looking and sequentially named home cinema processors that preceded it, Marantz's partnering MM8807 seven-channel power amplifier had been around so long it was in danger of becoming retro-vintage.

Still, that combination has long been the audiophile's choice of AV processor and power amp. Maybe not one with the most exciting or aggressive sound, but fully featured, detailed and atmospheric, and one of the best pairings when it came to enjoying both serious cinema and audiophile two-channel replay.

I'm not just speculating here, either. I ran Marantz's AV8805A processor with a pair of the matching seven-channel amps as my reference until the recent Denon AVC-A1H (see *HCC #340*) came along and kicked them off the rack with its gung-ho dynamics and cinema scale.

Enter the AV 10 and AMP 10, available in just the one black finish (the silver of Marantz's Cinema series AVRs doesn't carry over), and bringing a whole new design structure and cosmetic to your kit shelf, albeit without throwing any of Marantz's signature engineering heritage and technology out with the bathwater.

The asking price is a breathtaking £12,400 for the pair (they sell individually for £6,200) and this is a sizeable hike over the outgoing models. However, considering the MM8807 had been around since George Lucas was in short trousers (okay, actually 2012), and had less than half the channels of the AMP 10, maybe this isn't a surprise. Furthermore, with the AV 10/AMP 10 system's basic specification putting it in the same context as offering from the likes of Trinnov or JBL Synthesis, the pairing looks rather good value!

DAC's aplenty

Attempting to list all the features of the AV 10 processor would see us through to the end of time, but the headlines include 15.4-channel processing via both balanced XLR and unbalanced RCA outputs; DTS:X Pro and Auro-3D support in addition to Dolby Atmos and standard DTS:X; an HDMI stage with seven 8K-capable HDMI inputs; built-in HEOS streaming/multiroom functionality; and calibration via Audyssey MultEQ XT32 as standard, with the option of upgrading to both Audyssey's MultEQ-X software or Dirac Live and Dirac Bass Control.

The AV 10's internals are no less impressive, if you're into that sort of thing. D/A conversion is handled by no fewer than ten two-channel ESS9018K2M DAC chips, managed by a low-noise crystal clock and offering a choice of filters, while signal processing is governed by dual-core SHARC silicon from Analog Devices. Marantz has gone to town on its circuitry too, upgrading the PCB to a four-layer construction to better

isolate signal, ground and power stages, and fine-tuning the layout to keep the AV 10's digital and analogue stages physically and electronically separate. Further emphasising the no-stone unturned approach, it's even considered the processor's four felt-tipped supporting feet, increasing their density to improve stability.

One result of these changes, plus an entirely new high-slew rate amplification stage before the analogue output, is, says Marantz, a significant reduction in distortion, and higher dynamic range, versus the outgoing AV8805A.

Sweet 16

Turning to the other box, the AMP 10 is a 16-channel beast, which just edges it ahead of the 15-channel decoding of the AV 10, but makes sense when you consider its

'Attempting to list all the features of Marantz's AV 10 processor would see us through to the end of time'

output is delivered by eight stereo modules. The rating is 200W per channel, and unusually for a Marantz AV unit, this comes from Class D rather than Class AB, using new custom amplifiers said to refine Marantz's proven HDAM-SA2 technology. This change in approach shouldn't surprise – Lyngdorf and Storm Audio are two fellow multichannel amp makers employing Class D – although it must be said Denon's AVC-A1H sticks with Class AB for its 15-channel power stage.

Anyway, with Class D modules onboard, the AMP 10 claims to offer a 25 per cent increase in efficiency >



AV INFO

PRODUCT:
15.4-channel processor and 16-channel power amplifier

POSITION:
New flagship AV system for Marantz

PEERS:
Anthem AVM/MCA; Lyngdorf MP/MXA

1. The AMP 10 is a 16-channel design with custom Class D amplification

2. The AV 10's remote hides a backlight button on its right-hand side





compared to Marantz's MM8807, and better maintains its full power rating when all channels are driven simultaneously. Maybe this Class D tech will catch on...

There's flexibility here, too. Each of the unit's amp pairs is capable of being bridged for a whopping 400W per channel or switched to a bi-amp mode, where each pair is fed the same signal. If you have a basic 7.1 system, you could bridge the lot for 8 x 400W, and in my 7.2.4 setup,

'The setup wizard, onscreen user interface and instructions are arguably best of breed at any price'

it allowed 11 channels at 200W for the in-wall cinema speakers, plus two amplifier pairs bridged and used to feed freestanding stereo speakers not otherwise connected to the AV system.

Blue is the colour

As for the new look on Marantz's hardware, my personal jury is out. The checked cheeks are all a bit fussy and plastic for my liking, and by default the yellowy-white illumination across these cheeks isn't inspiring. This, plus the illumination of the AMP 10's VU Meter, can be switched off if desired. However, just when I was reminiscing with Marantz about the subtle blue lighting of the outgoing models, it pointed out that this is still an option, achieved by button presses on both the units. Why this isn't made clear in the manual is a mystery (you can find out how to do it via Marantz's YouTube channel) but I'm glad it's an option. As for that VU meter, this shows the output of the amplifier's 'Channel 1'.

The small round display on the AV 10 processor is a little limited

but behind the processor's drop-down flap, which is flanked by control/zone select buttons, is a large informative screen showing a plethora of information. This is also replicated on Marantz's supporting app.

The neat rear panel layout of both units eases wiring and connection, doubly so if you're running through Marantz's step-by-step, and frankly idiot-proof, setup wizard. I opted for balanced XLR cables between the two although RCA is a more cost-effective option for shorter runs. The bespoke Marantz speaker terminal binding posts on the AMP 10 are borderline 'too' chunky, being massive devices suitable for larger cable and/or mooring boats. As there are 16 pairs in line on the 44cm-wide rear panel, the gap between each is so small it's damn near impossible to get your fingers in to tighten them securely. A small plastic tool would have been super useful here.

Thankfully, the posts also sport solid 4mm banana plug sockets, which, given the potential speaker cable carnage of 32 wires, are by far the better bet than bare copper or spades anyway.

Wizards world

The AV 10/AMP 10 setup process doesn't break from the familiar Marantz/Denon mould. That is not a bad thing as the setup wizard, onscreen GUI and instructions are arguably best of breed at any price. It's logical and informative, if not the fastest to respond to major commands. >

3. Marantz's flagship processor has XLR outputs for all channels, including four subwoofers

4. Behind the AV 10's front flap is a more comprehensive display, plus USB and setup mic ports





Press the 'menu' button and a second or two elapses before the system pops up a page onscreen.

Marantz's now-familiar speaker configuration menu now has many more options given the vagaries of placing 16 channels, prior to running the full Audyssey setup with speaker delays, bass management and EQ, etc. Well, I say 'full Audyssey'. The onboard MultEQ XT32 system uses the supplied microphone and in-processor measurement and correction and is relatively basic. It's fire and forget too. You only have the option of the Flat or Reference EQ (or off) with no way to adjust the effects, Dynamic EQ, Dynamic Volume and Low Frequency Containment.

On the other hand, should you wish to stump up £160 or so for Audyssey MultEQ-X software on your laptop plus an £80 pre-calibrated Audyssey mic, you get many more options to manually fettle post-measurement. You will have to add that to the bill as Audyssey doesn't license its software as standard to third parties like Marantz.

And, as mentioned, if Audyssey isn't your thing the AV 10 also has the option of Dirac Live. This is available in many forms, from limited-bandwidth (no sub-bass EQ) to full-bandwidth with multiple subwoofer equalisation, ranging from \$259 for the basic to a whopping \$799 for the 'everything we got' bundle. Dirac was in the process of implementing multi-sub bass control at the time of my review, so this isn't something I got to play with.

Musical maestro

At this point, you have to start thinking about the 'au naturel' performance of the AV 10/AMP 10 and the resulting performance with the EQ implementation, because they are very different beasts. Using the AV 10 as a pre-amp in Pure Direct mode, connected to the AMP 10's two bridged channels feeding a high-end pair of freestanding loudspeakers, the combination was stunningly articulate,

revealing and communicative for an AV-focused device. Pure music performance gets dangerously close to the space and dynamics of my NAD Masters M12/M32 stereo pre/power combination, and does so with a smoother and slightly more mellifluous attitude that adds vital warmth and enjoyment. This Marantz pairing is very, very good with music, and with the wide-ranging skills of HEOS (which integrates Tidal, Spotify, Amazon Music and other platforms), you never need be more than a couple of clicks on the app away from enjoying it.

For AV, my test got a lot more complicated, however. The first trial run of the minimum three-position Audyssey MultEQ XT32 setup resulted in some head-scratching. The EQ had trimmed the bass nodes in my room with a scythe, leaving the balance clear, detailed, crisp and, with the subwoofer set to LFE only, rather lightweight. A re-run using an eight-point measurement massively improved the balance, but I still wanted a bit more low-end back in the main channels to add richness all around.



The solution was to shell out for a MultEQ-X license. Lumme, what a difference! After a nine-point measurement and some light manipulation of the results, I was enjoying one of the cleanest, most detailed AV sounds I am yet to hear. A dive into the Dolby Atmos version of George Michael's 'Jesus to a Child' via Apple Music saw it rendered with breathtaking clarity and space, highlighting just what a good immersive audio mix can do.

Army of speakers

The Dolby Atmos/Dolby Vision presentation of *Army of Thieves* (Netflix) is a stunner, both visually and sonically. The entire film is underpinned by a surround sound festival of mechanical lock sounds, and the clever

'The performance is super-clean and super-analytical, inviting you to pay attention to the nuances of the mix'

use of spacious ambient effects to pin the atmosphere and tension. As Sebastian creeps through the darkened streets to the underground safe-cracking competition, the Marantz duo envelops you with a breathless, oppressive feel that mirrors his nervousness. As he walks in, the sound of the crowd fills the room with cheers and jeers, accurately portrayed in the echoing concrete hall.

The detail in the soundstage is first-class, from the tiny clicks of levers and metallic sounds of tumblers engaging to the mighty thumps of the safes unlocking. These effects are backed by a tight, solid bassline in the score, rising to a crescendo as Sebastian wins through (late spoiler alert). Just as it was with music, the performance is super-clean and super-analytical, inviting you to pay closer attention to the nuances of the audio mix.

Switch up the tempo to some classic Nicolas Cage action in *Ghost Rider* (Blu-ray) and Cage's first transformation into the film's namesake, presented in humble LPCM 5.1, is a whirling festival of crashes, metal,



SPECIFICATIONS

AV 10

DOLBY ATMOS: Yes **DTS:X:** Yes, incl. DTS:X Pro **IMAX ENHANCED:** Yes **MULTICHANNEL INPUT:** No **MULTICHANNEL PRE-OUT:** Yes, 15.4 **MULTICHANNEL OUTPUT (CLAIMED):** N/A **MULTIROOM:** Yes, Three zones, plus HEOS **AV INPUTS:** 4 x digital audio (2 x optical and 2 x coaxial); 5 x analogue stereo (1 x XLR) **HDMI:** Yes, 7 x inputs; 3 x outputs **DIMENSIONS:** 442(w) x 456(d) x 189(h) **WEIGHT:** 16.8kg

FEATURES: Audyssey MultEQ XT32 room EQ; Dirac Live upgrade option; Auro-3D; 8K video passthrough/upscaling; HDR10+ and Dolby Vision passthrough; 4K/120Hz, VRR, QFT and ALLM; Marantz App; HEOS and AirPlay 2 streaming; 360 Reality Audio and MPEG-H; 10 x stereo DACs; MM phono input; Pure Direct mode; Amazon Alexa/Google Assistant/Apple integration; two-way Bluetooth

AMP 10

POWER OUTPUT (CLAIMED): 16 x 200W (8 ohm, 1 kHz, 0.05% two-channel measurement); 8 x 400W (bridged) **CONNECTIONS:** 16 x inputs on balanced XLR/RCA; trigger input; trigger output; 16 x speaker terminals **DIMENSIONS:** 442(w) x 446(d) x 189(h)mm **WEIGHT:** 19.8 kg

FEATURES: Bridgeable Class D amplification; front-panel level meter

TESTED WITH



ARMY OF THIEVES: This 2021 prequel flick to Zack Snyder's same-year *Army of the Dead* explains how Matthias Schweighöfer's mad-cap German safecracker ended up in Vegas later on. More overtly funny than Snyder's zombie fest, and with a cleaner visual aesthetic, like that flick it remains locked in Netflix's walled garden.

fire and screaming. There is a lot going on sonically with masses of detail, but the Marantz system does not gloss over the fact that the film's mix sounds like it was created in a food blender rather than a studio. The AV 10/AMP 10 is not kind to ropey recordings or mashed-up soundtracks, its clean, subjectively distortion-free sound revealing all.

A direct comparison to Denon's AVC-A1H here is interesting in that the Marantz pair makes the film sound a lot less congested, and the clarity of the dialogue is better with almost every film I tried. Never once did I feel the need to click on the dialogue enhancer, while that had been set to 'low' almost by default on the Denon amp. Yet by the same token, the AVC-1 A1H punches harder and with a sense of gung-ho fun that makes it far easier to ignore dodgy recordings. That's not to say Marantz's AMP 10 isn't delightfully powerful and evocative, it's that both it and its processor sibling exhibit different characteristics.

Sophisticated sonics

This brings us neatly around in a full circle because I have been saying something similar about Denon and Marantz AV electronics for over two decades. You want all-out fun and action, go with Denon. If you want refinement and sophistication with movies and outstanding stereo music performance, Marantz's AV 10/AMP 10 system should be at the top of your list. And switch on the blue lighting! ■

5. Input and speaker connections are neatly arranged, in pairs, on the rear of the AMP 10

6. You can have either blue or yellow accent lighting on both units

HCC VERDICT



Marantz AV 10/AMP 10

→ £12,400 (£6,200 each) → www.marantz.com

WE SAY: Marantz's 16-channel amp marks new territory for the brand, while the AV 10 processor has serious brains – the result is home cinema sound that dazzles with its sheer refinement.