

Jamie Biesemans wires up his TV to Marantz's diminutive do-it-all amplifier

# HEOS heads up the M1

For some, the design of the Model M1 will be instantly recognisable – just not as a typical Marantz amplifier. Here the company is giving us its own take on the modern compact amplifier, offering streaming, multiroom and HDMI eARC capabilities from a box small enough to easily hide away.

Rivals products therefore include the Sonos Amp, WiiM Amp and Bluesound Powernode Edge, and like those the £899 M1 is intended for two user groups. On the one hand it suits consumers looking for an unobtrusive amplifier to play music and TV audio, possibly fitting into a broader multiroom system. But Marantz is also pinning its hopes on the custom install crowd, offering a kit to mount the Model M1 (or two units side by side) in a 19in rack, and adding a mono mode (recommended for ceiling speakers) and integration with smart home platforms. It's also cool-running, courtesy of a Class D Axign chip delivering a rated 2 x 100W into 8ohm speakers.

## Made for TV

While at heart a stereo amplifier, there's a lot here to make the Model M1 an interesting alternative to a soundbar. Dolby Digital Plus processing is present, which makes TV setup easier – you don't need to look for that PCM audio output option. However, this doesn't mean you can expand your system to multichannel playback by adding a pair of wireless speakers, such as the Home models from Marantz's sister brand Denon.

Okay, so surround sound is off the menu, but Marantz has added a few extras that regular stereo amplifiers miss out on. One of these is as a Virtual mode that adds a spatial aspect to the presentation coming from your speakers. There's also a soundbar-like Night Mode, which tunes down the low frequencies so Godzilla's footsteps don't wake sleeping family members,

and a dialogue enhancer. Features like this set the M1 apart from the many other streaming amps where catering to TV audio stops at an HDMI ARC port.

Additionally, Marantz markets its amp as a 2.1 design, and this means more than just the inclusion of a subwoofer pre-out on the rear. Via the partnering HEOS app you can configure both a low- and high-pass filter, next to a separate sub level. Handy stuff if you want to add some oomph to a set of small speakers to make films and games more satisfying.

The M1 takes its minimalism seriously, with no display or large collection of push buttons on its fascia. A row of capacitive buttons and a status LED are present, but for real control you need the aforementioned HEOS app. This will be a familiar sight to any Denon or Marantz user, and acts as both a remote control and a gateway to several streaming options. In the latter regard it's not as comprehensive as the platforms of some rivals,

but there's also AirPlay, Bluetooth, DLNA and Spotify Connect on hand.

If you own other HEOS products, you can use the app to share streams and physical inputs (such as the HDMI eARC port on the M1) to other 'zones'. And should you prefer holding a real remote in your hand, you can 'recycle' an old IR zapper to control the M1.

## Sounds familiar

When listening to a Marantz amplifier, there are certain expectations about the sound signature. A touch of warmth, smooth detail and a full-bodied performance are part and parcel >

### AV INFO

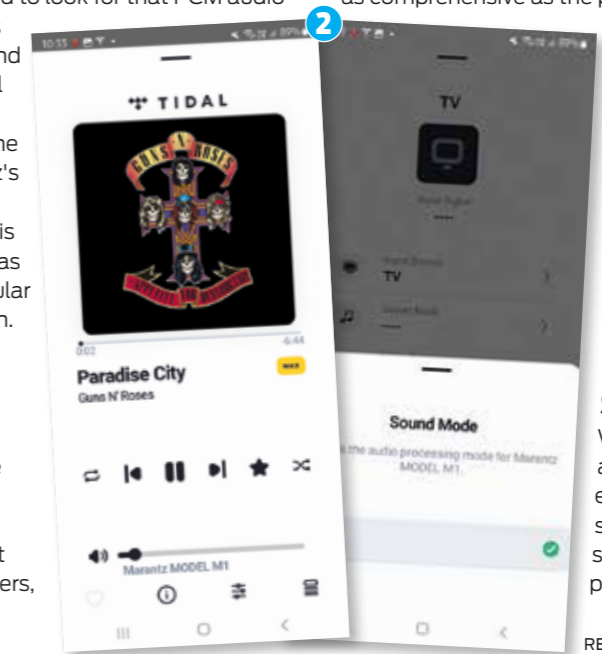
**PRODUCT:** Compact stereo streaming amp with HDMI eARC

**POSITION:** Baby of the brand's two-channel Model range

**PEERS:** Sonos Amp; Bluesound Powernode Edge

1. The M1 measures 24cm wide, 8.4cm high and 22cm deep

2. There's no remote bundled, but the HEOS app offers everything you need, including sound mode selection





## REVIEWS

of a distinctive 'house sound' that has remained relatively consistent even through significant technological changes down the years. The Model M1, manufactured at Marantz's main Shirakawa Audio Works in Japan, toes the line in that regard, although during listening it appeared a tad brighter than I expected. Nonetheless, this petite amp captures the essence of Marantz, happily setting it apart in terms of sound quality.

Compact amplifiers like this are often paired with small, inconspicuous speakers. My DALI Rubicon 2 standmounts are rather less diminutive, but still in the ballpark. Utilising the Model M1's sub settings, I added an ELAC Sub 2050 for more low-end thrills.

Listening to Anne-Sophie Mutter's playful violin on 'Devil's Dance' (from *The Witches of Eastwick*) on *John Williams – Live in Vienna* (Blu-ray), the strings were textured but just a bit bright. A quick treble adjustment via the HEOS app's equaliser softened up the sound, letting Mutter's flighty solo become a better part of the whole. The subwoofer was a useful addition here, adding impact to the interventions of the orchestra percussion, giving the M1 the space to make the flutes appear as part of a grander background.

Considering Marantz's amp doesn't possess truly advanced subwoofer integration options, such as those of an AV receiver, the result was more than satisfactory. My 2.1 setup presented Williams' hits on a large scale, in sharp contrast to the M1's physical size.

### Universal appeal

I also used the amplifier as part of a strung-out revisiting of every single *Star Trek* film, even the really bad ones. The sense of envelopment from two speakers was pretty good when watching *Star Trek V: The Final Frontier* (Apple TV, Dolby Digital+ 5.1), but selecting the Virtual sound mode in the HEOS app proved worthwhile. The DSP broadened the soundstage without adding too much artificiality, and the experience was the same during the desert exercises scene in *Top Gun: Maverick* (Netflix, Spatial Audio).

In its class this Marantz amp is a respectable music performer, capturing the essence of the delicate genre-and culture-hopping of Arooj Aftab's *Night Reign* (Tidal), with the piano in 'Na Gul' resonating convincingly in a larger space played through a pair of Q Acoustics 5040 floorstanders. And while the M1 focuses on intimacy and a rich sound,

it conveyed sufficient spatial information to make 'Diya Hai' and 'Last Night' emotionally stirring. The DAC and amp stages here also dealt well with the change of pace to 'New York, Let's Do Nothing' by King Hannah,

## SPECIFICATIONS

**ONBOARD POWER (CLAIMED):** 2 x 100W (8ohm, 0.05% THD) **CONNECTIONS:** 1 x HDMI eARC; 1 x optical digital audio input; Ethernet; USB; stereo RCA line input; subwoofer pre-out; IR input **AUDIO FORMAT SUPPORT:** Dolby Digital/Dolby Digital+; WAV, ALAC, FLAC up to 192kHz/24-bit; DSD to 5.6MHz **REMOTE CONTROL:** No. HEOS app or IR learning instead **DIMENSIONS:** 239(w) x 84(h) x 217(d)mm **WEIGHT:** 2.2kg

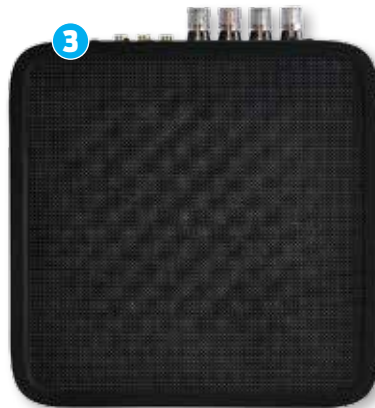
**FEATURES:** HEOS streaming module with multizone/app control; Apple AirPlay 2; Spotify Connect; Bluetooth; front-panel touch controls and status LED; support for Crestron, Control4 and AMX control systems; Virtual, Dialogue Enhancer and Night Mode settings; bass and treble EQ adjustment; dual-mono mode; high-pass and low-pass filter adjustment on subwoofer output; playback from external drives via USB; digital Class D amplification

## TESTED WITH



### JOHN WILLIAMS – LIVE IN VIENNA:

Deutsche Grammophon's Blu-ray release of this 2020 concert, conducted by Williams himself, presents its 19 tracks from films including *Jurassic Park* and *Jaws* in DTS-HD MA stereo, 5.1 and Dolby Atmos mixes – many also offered as audio-only to give your TV a break.



where the slightly distorted guitars had a pleasing warmth and crispness. The soundstage wasn't vast, but the overall performance was captivating, encouraging me to keep listening to the rest of this indie album.

### Reverse approach

Marantz isn't aiming at surround sound aficionados with this unit, but rather trying to tempt people away from just adding a soundbar to their flatscreen TV. Such devices are intended for TV viewing but are frequently used for listening to music as well. As the Model

M1 proves, there's sense in taking the reverse approach, starting with a music-first device but accommodating telly use too. This might be just what your system needs! ■

**3. Speaker binding posts are mostly finished in grey, so don't mix them up**

**4. Tidy rear panel sports HDMI eARC, optical and USB (for external drives), plus analogue input and subwoofer pre-out**

## HCC VERDICT



### Marantz Model M1

→ £899 → [www.marantz.com](http://www.marantz.com)

**WE SAY:** A deep feature set lets the Model M1 cater more to TV viewing than most rival streaming amps. Not being able to expand to surround is a pity, but as a 2.1 solution it's a cracker.

