

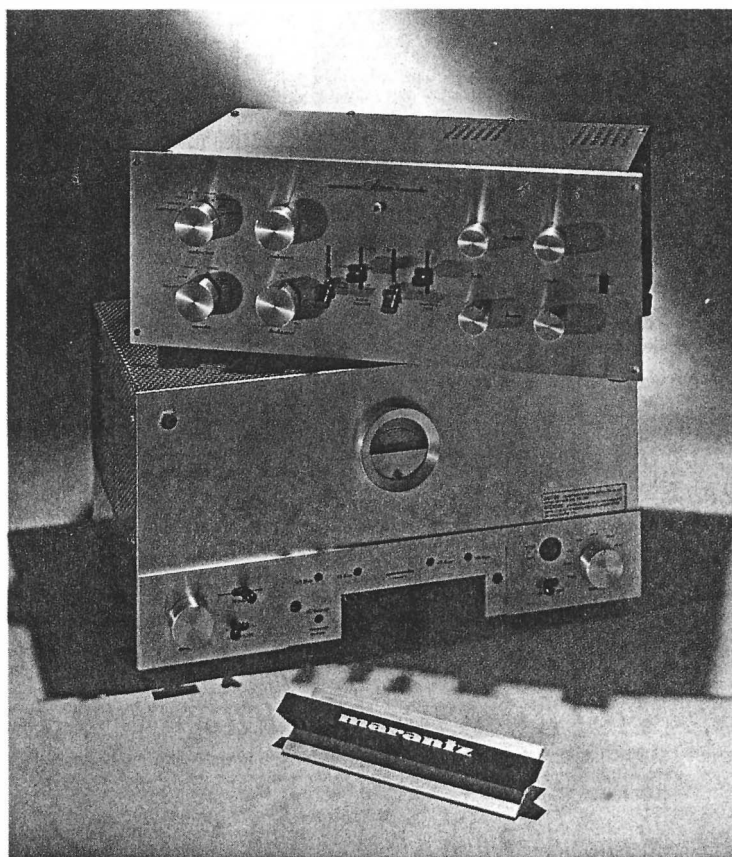
MARANTZ MODEL 7 PREAMP & MODEL 9 MONO AMP

I am no anachrophiliac. I get no spiritual warmth from the glow of tube filaments, and none of my gods rotate at $33\frac{1}{3}$ rpm. There are, however, a number of classic audio designs that deservedly have lived far beyond their time.

My first true high-end system was based on the Marantz Model 7 preamp and Model 9 mono amps and the original Quad electrostatic speakers. I made the mistake of selling this system before I went on an overseas assignment, and it was years before I had another that sounded as good. A number of very demanding audiophiles still use these components, and audiophiles in Japan have long imported vintage Marantz amps and preamps, often paying far more than the original prices. There is even a small cottage industry engaged in updating and refurbishing the Model 7 and Model 9. These Marantzes are among the most attractive components produced during the golden age of tubes, and the work of designers Sid Smith and Saul Marantz has become the stuff of legend. So it is perhaps not surprising that Marantz has brought back the Model 7 and Model 9 (and the Model 8B stereo amp, as well).

The new Model 7 and Model 9 are as close to exact copies of the originals as is possible today, down to their circuits, components, front and

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rear panels, and even the slightly irregular hand-drawn lettering of the front panels. The resistors and capacitors are virtually the same, and point-to-point wiring is still used.

The Model 9 still uses special multisection electrolytics and a TA-3 output transformer. But it no longer uses barrier-strip speaker connections, which are now illegal in Europe. The Model 7 preamp retains such now-arcane features as a tape-head input (omitted from other preamps for well over a decade) and equalization settings for old Columbia LPs and 78s as well as the RIAA standard.

Marantz is definitely not just exploiting a successful past model's name—you really do get the original, only without the problems associated with aging parts. But reviving these classics has not come cheap: The Model 7 preamp costs \$3,800, and the Model 9s cost \$4,200 each, or \$8,400 per stereo pair.

The company's meticulous care shows up in sound quality. I compared the new Marantz replicas to a

friend's 35-year-old originals. His system resembles my old one in that it uses Quad electrostatic speakers, albeit the modern version (the ESL-63); however, he has a much better turntable and cartridge than I'd had, and he has (horrors!) CD and DAT decks in the system. We conducted a prolonged A/B listening comparison, and it soon became clear that the new Marantz Model 7 and Model 9 sounded virtually identical to the older models—with a few important differences. The new Model 7 preamp was slightly quieter, and its switches made less noise and were more reliable. The new Model 9

Photo: Michael Groen

amps reproduced low-level passages a bit more clearly. I suspect that this low-level difference arose because of aging electrolytics in the old units.

The new Model 7 preamp and Model 9 amplifier had a very similar sound with a very well-chosen mix of characteristics. This sound was open and dynamic, with a great deal of musical detail. It was also slightly warm, without rolloff or loss of treble detail. The resolution of low-level passages was very good. Low-bass extension was good, bass power very good, and bass control and detail (inevitably somewhat dependent on amplifier/speaker interaction) also very good. Depth and imaging were very good to excellent, delivering a smooth, realistic soundstage. And the Model 7 preamp had just enough warmth to improve the sound of many CDs without significant loss of detail.

The Model 7 design did exhibit some signs of age. Some top-of-the-line modern competitors have a bit more dynamics here, a bit more depth there, and a little bit more low-level resolution. The Marantz preamp was slightly noisier than a number of modern tube preamps (but then, the Model 7 always stressed sound quality over lowest possible noise). For LP listening, this noise level definitely calls for a high-output moving-coil or moving-magnet cartridge, unless you like listening through tube hiss; some modern tube preamps work well with medium-output moving-coil pickups. I suspect that the various level adjustments, tone controls, and filters in the Model 7 do add a bit of coloration to the signal path, but they're very useful if you have a large collection of LPs or analog tapes. You may need to fiddle around just a bit with tube substitutions to get the lowest noise, and grounding can be slightly problematic. There are also faint, nearly inaudible, traces of hum and crosstalk that are not apparent in today's best designs.

The old-style RCA jacks are also a bit close together and do not have the tight fit of the best modern jacks. Thick, hard-to-bend interconnects and large-diameter RCA plugs would not be good choices, and I'd also be a bit careful of interconnects that are not fully grounded at both ends. Interconnect placement also requires some care to avoid picking up hum from the preamp and amplifier; however, it shouldn't take

you long to position your interconnects out of hum's way.

The Model 7 may not be the quietest or purest sounding preamp available, but I'd find it hard to believe that anyone who loves the natural sound of voices or acoustic instruments would not find the Marantz preamp still competitive.

The Model 9's sound quality was equally impressive. There are many superb tube amps whose sounds differ in nuances of soundstage, transparency, dynamics, and timbre, and such nuances should affect your choice of amps for your particular tastes and system. But I do not know of any amplifiers at the Model 9's power level that are decisively better in an absolute sense.

Even if one were not seduced by the Model 9's classic styling, its smooth musicality would be impossible to ignore. The sound was just slightly warm, but it was so open and dynamic that the upper octaves remained transparent and clear. The Marantz amp's soundstage wasn't as detailed as that of the best Audio Research, Conrad-Johnson, and VAC amps, but it had highly realistic proportions and the level of information was often more natural than the sometimes exaggerated detail of other amps. The Model 9 wasn't quite as sweet and musically liquid as the best triode designs—or as colored—but it provided an exceptionally realistic illusion of a live performance.

The Model 9 had excellent power bandwidth, providing outstanding dynamics at frequencies approaching the deep bass with speakers such as the large Thiel and B&W models. But, as it delivers just 70 watts, its bass dynamics will depend on the sensitivity and character of your speakers.

A minor caution is that the Model 9's transformers generate a fairly large hum field (not unusual in a tube amp), so, as with the preamp, you need to use fully grounded interconnects and take care to position them out of this field. The stylish speaker connectors can be used only with flexible, small or medium-sized speaker cables.

After 40 years, the Model 7 and Model 9 designs hold up well against the latest tube preamps and amps. The new Model 7 and Model 9 are extraordinary tributes to the design skills of Sid Smith and Saul Marantz and to the work of VAC's Kevin Hayes in helping to re-create the original designs and manufacturing methods. **A**

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- DE- Sound Studio; Newark, Wilmington.
- FL- Absolute Sound; Winter Park; Audio Advisors; West Palm Beach; Audio Center; Deerfield Beach; Audio Video Store; Tallahassee; The Audiohouse; Vero Beach; Cooper for Stereo; Clearwater; Hoyt Stereo; Jacksonville; Palm Audio; Destin; Sound Components; Coral Gables; Sound Ideas; Gainesville; Sound Insight; Ft. Pierce; Stereotypes; Daytona Beach; Stuart A/V; Stuart.
- GA- Laser Disc Enterprises; Atlanta; Merit TV; Columbus; Stereo Connections; Valdosta; Stereo Festival; Atlanta.
- HI- Audio Center; Honolulu, Waipahu.
- IA- Audio King; Cedar Rapids; Des Moines; Archer Audio Video; Ft. Dodge; Audio Video Logic; Des Moines; Audio Visions; Sioux City; Camera Corner; Davenport; Hawkeye Audio; Iowa City; Cedar Falls.
- ID- Ultimate Electronics; Boise; Wise Buy; Idaho Falls.
- IL- United Audio Centers; Chicago & Suburbs; Good Vibes; Champagne; Jon's Home Ctr.; Quincy; Sound Forum; Crystal Lake; Sundown A/V; Springfield.
- IN- Classic Stereo; Ft. Wayne; Mishawaka; Good Vibes; Lafayette; Kings Great Buys; Evansville; Ovation Audio; Clarksville; Indianapolis.
- KS- Accent Sound; Overland Park; Advance Audio; Wichita; Audio Junction; Junction City, Manhattan.
- KY- Ovation Audio; Lexington, Louisville.
- LA- Alterman Audio; New Orleans; Metairie; Lake Charles Music; Lake Charles; Mike's Audio; Baton Rouge; Wright's Sound Gallery; Shreveport.
- MA- Cookin'; Chestnut Hill, Saugus; Goodwins Audio; Boston; Shrewsbury; Nantucket Sound; Hyannis; Northampton Audio; Northampton; Pittsfield Radio; Pittsfield.
- MD- Gramophone; Baltimore, Ellicott City; Myer-Emco; Gaithersburg, Beltsville, Rockville; Sight & Sounds; Easton; Soundscape; Baltimore; ME- Cookin'; Portland.
- MI- Pecar's; Detroit, Troy; Classical Jazz Holland; Classic Stereo; Kalamazoo, Grand Rapids; Sand North; Iron Mtn.; Stereo Center; FRAV; Flint; Court St. Listening Room; Midland, Saginaw.
- MN- Audio King; Minneapolis & Suburbs; Rochester, St. Cloud; Audio Designs; Winona.
- MO- Independence A/V; Independence; Reference Audio; Sedalia; Sound Central; St. Louis.
- MS- Ideal Acoustics; Starkville; McLelland TV; Hattiesburg; Players A/V; Biloxi.
- MT- Aspen Sound; Missoula, Kalispell; Avitel; Bozeman; Rocky Mt. Hi Fi; Great Falls.
- NC- Audio Video Systems; Charlotte; Audio Visions; Wilmington; Now Audio Video; Durham, Greensboro, Raleigh, Winston Salem; Audio Lab; Wilmington.
- NE- Custom Electronics; Omaha, Lincoln.
- NH- Cookin'; Nashua, Manchester, Newington, Salem, S. Nashua.
- NJ- Hal's Stereo; Trenton; Monmouth Stereo; Shrewsbury; Sound Waves; Northfield; Woodbridge Stereo; West Caldwell, Woodbridge.
- NM- Ultimate Elect.; Albuquerque; Sound Ideas; Albuquerque.
- NV- Ultimate Elect.; Las Vegas; Upper Ear; Las Vegas.
- NY- Audio Breakthroughs; Manhasset; Audio Den; Lake Grove; Audio Expressions; Newburgh; Clark Music; Albany, Syracuse; Stereo Exchange; Manhattan; Hart Elect.; Vestal; Innovative Audio; Brooklyn; Listening Room; Scarsdale; Rowe Camera; Rochester; Speaker Shop; Amherst.
- OH- Audio Craft; Akron, Cleveland, Mayfield Hts., Westlake; Audio Etc.; Dayton; Classic Stereo; Lima; Ohio Valley Audio; Cincinnati; Paragon Sound; Toledo; Stereo Visions; Columbus; Threshold Audio; Heath.
- OK- Audio Dimensions; Oklahoma City; Ultimate Electronics; Tulsa; Photo World; Bartlesville.
- OR- Bradford's HiFi; Eugene; Chelsea A/V; Portland; Beaverton; Kelly's Home Ctr.; Salem; Magnolia HiFi; (Portland), Beaverton, Clatskanie; Stereo Plant; Bend.
- PA- Audio Junction; Pittsburgh; Gary's Elect.; State College; ENT Stereo; Lancaster; Hart Elect.; Blakely; Hi Fi House; Abington, Broomall, Camp Hill, Harrisburg; Listening Post; Pittsburgh; Palmer Audio; Allentown; Pro Audio; Bloomsburg; Stereo Shoppe; Sellersville; Williamsport; StereoLand; Natrona Heights; The StereoShop; Greensburg.
- RI- Stereo Discount Ctr.; Providence.
- SC- A/V Design; Charleston; Custom Theater & Audio; Myrtle Beach; Upstairs Audio; Columbia.
- SD- Audio King; Sioux Falls; Sound Pro; Rapid City.
- TN- College HiFi; Chattanooga; Hi Fi Buys; Nashville; Now Audio Video; Knoxville; Modern Music; Memphis; Sound Room; Johnson City.
- TX- Home Entertainment; Dallas, Houston, Plano; Audio Tech; Temple, Waco; Audio Video; College Station; Brock A/V; Beaumont; Bunkley's Sound Systems; Abilene; Bjorn's; San Antonio; High Fidelity; Austin; Krystal Clear; Dallas; Marvin Electronics; Ft. Worth; Sound Quest; El Paso; Sound Systems; Amarillo; Sound Towne; Texarkana.
- UT- Alpine Elect. Provo; AudioWorks; Salt Lake City; Crazy Bob's; St. George; Sikes Bros.; Logan; Ultimate Elect.; Layton, Murray, Orem, Salt Lake City.
- VA- Myer-Emco; Falls Church, Tyson's Corner, Fairfax; Audio Connection; Virginia Beach; AudioTronics; Roanoke; Home Media Store; Richmond.
- WA- Magnolia HiFi; Seattle & Suburbs; Tacoma; Silverdale, Spokane; Aspen Sound; Spokane; Pacific Sight & Sound; Wenatchee; Tim Ear; Kennewick.
- W.VA- Sound Post; Princeton.
- WI- Audio Emporium; Milwaukee; Absolute Sound & Vision; Sheboygan; Hi-Fi Heaven; Appleton, Green Bay; Sound World; Wausau.
- Puerto Rico- Precision Audio; Rio Piedras.
- Canada- A & B Sound; Calgary, Edmonton, Kelowna, Vancouver & Suburbs, Victoria; Advance Electronics; Winnipeg; Bay Bloor Radio; Toronto; Canadian Sound; Brampton Ont.; Digital Dynamics; Clearbrook; Harrington's; Peterborough Ont.; Kebecson; Montreal; Lipton's; New Market Ont.; Peak Audio; Halifax; Sound Room; Vancouver; StereoLand; Windsor; Target Hi Fi; London; Treble Clet; Ottawa.
- Mexico- Contact Grupo Volumen; Mexico City.