



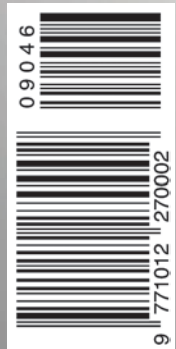
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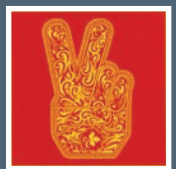
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INTEGRATED AMPLIFIERS & CD PLAYERS

Musical Fidelity M6i Amplifier & M6 CD Player

Music with fine fidelity

For the past few weeks I've virtually been home bound. Barring the daily pre-school run and occasional shopping outing to buy vital sustenance, I haven't been past my front door much.

There have been a few reasons for this. It's been cold, there hasn't been too much for me to do at the office – so why go in – and I've had lots of stereo equipment to review, which I usually do from the comfort of my home.

The latest stereo duo, and a pair that has had me happily seated in front of my speakers for quite a while, hail from Musical Fidelity, and proudly wear the M6 badge on their front panels.

My review units, an M6i integrated amplifier and M6 CD-DAC wore matt black clothing adorned by a smallish display – I would have preferred a slightly larger one – and a row of small input and CD control buttons on

the CD player. The amplifier featured similar looking control buttons, and instead of an LCD display, featured a large rotary and centrally mounted volume control.

Both models looked good, were exceptionally well finished, and felt like they would last a good few years longer than their warranty period.

Technically, both the amplifier and CD player were impressive too, with the CD player featuring a 24-bit/192 kHz true up-sampling DAC and what Musical Fidelity call "selected CD mechanisms" for maximum data retrieval from a spinning silver disc.

Importantly, the player also featured a trio of digital inputs. Of these, the coaxial and optical inputs are by now pretty standard, but the USB input is a little rare for stand alone CD players, if not for outboard DACs.

While I certainly appreciated the digital

inputs, as they mean that Musical Fidelity has recognised that there are other digital source components out there in Audio Land (by this, I mean PC-based and stand alone media players), the manual for the player stated that the DAC only supported CD, WAV and MP3 files. No mention was made of lossless audio formats, and as these are growing in popularity, support for these would be appreciated.

The M6i amplifier, just like the CD player, featured quite a few noteworthy technical features.

For example it was also equipped with a USB input that could be fed directly from a media player, and naturally it had a set of balanced inputs to match up to the output of the CD player. It also featured an input with a switchable home theatre input. This input could be configured as a standard line level in,



Vital Stats

or it could be set to receive the pre-amplifier line out from an AV receiver.

When set to A/V mode, the input bypasses the internal pre-amplifier of the M6 and signal level is controlled by the AV processor. This means that the main speakers of a home theatre system are powered by the M6.

Of course you would only do this if the M6i's amplification was better than that found in an ordinary AV receiver.

As the M6i has been configured as two mono bloc power amps and a separate pre-amp, each with their own transformer windings and power supply, and the amplifiers have both high power and current capabilities – Musical Fidelity claim up to 800 watt peaks at 2 ohm – it is highly unlikely that you'll find too many AV amplifiers that better the quality of the M6i.

While it's nice to know that the M6i has more than a little bit of power on tap, it's the quality of the power delivery that impressed me.

This, in a word, is "effortless". And at all times it sounds and feels like the amplifier is always in control.

Bass was taut, controlled, and there was virtually no overhang, and this translates into lower octaves that reveal the texture and tonality of bass instruments. I could, for example, see the size and location of the double bass in a jazz trio and I could feel the resonance of its ample body.

The transition from frequency to frequency too, was as seamless as I've heard in a while, and voices, from artists as diverse as Andrea Bocelli to Sarah K simply flowed from my speakers in a balanced and neutral fashion.

Also balanced were the high frequencies, and these were silky smooth and super detailed. I on occasion did feel that I could have done with just a little more extension to the highest of notes, but here I'm being extremely critical, as overall the amplifier managed to be revealing enough to convey the musical message in all the genres I listened to, yet not so critical that it took all the joy out of listening to less than stellar recordings.

A large dose of what I've described above could also be due to the M6 CD player that was connected to the amplifier via some balanced cables.

To a large degree the M6 CD reminded me of the Audio Research player I reviewed a short while ago.

It features a similar solidity in build, with even the CD tray opening and closing with authority.

Just as with the amplifier, the CD player had a liquidity about it that let music flow with a fine balance between hyper revealing detail – that could perhaps be better described as digital hardness – and musical warmth.

While the player certainly is musical, and it made most music enjoyable to listen to, it wasn't shy about telling me when a recording was really sub par and that even its processing was incapable of getting to the heart of the music.

To close I'm going to try and talk a little about the value of the Musical Fidelity duo, and this isn't quite as easy as it may seem.

While in high end terms, neither the amp nor CD player are that pricey, their selling price isn't exactly at a point where Mr Average would consider buying them. This perhaps is a good thing as I'm not too sure Mr Average would appreciate their sonic qualities.

An audio fan would however appreciate this, and the same audio fan would probably even appreciate the additional inputs on the amp and CD that would let them get superior audio from the latest in digital sources. This same audio fan would even appreciate that the components are a little bigger and better built than super store, mass produced players and amplifiers.

In this respect, and even though the M6 components aren't exactly cheap, they do offer good value to music fans and just as Musical Fidelity states in its own PR material, many people would wonder if they ever need better, bigger or more expensive products.

Joel Kopping

M6 CD-DAC

Digital conversion...24-bit Delta-Sigma

Frequency response..... 10 Hz – 20 kHz

Signal to noise..... 117 dB

Outputs.....Balanced XLR, single-ended RCA analogue, coaxial and optical digital

Inputs..... Coaxial, optical and USB digital inputs

Dimensions (WxHxD)

.....440x125x385 mm

Weight..... 11.2 kg

M6i Integrated Amplifier

Power output..200 watts per channel at 8 ohm

Frequency response.... 10 Hz – 20 kHz

Signal-to-noise ratio 100 dB

Inputs..... 4 pairs RCA, 1 balanced, USB

Outputs.....Speaker out, tape out, pre-amp out

Dimensions (WxHxD)

.....440x125x400 mm

Weight..... 16.6 kg

VERDICT

Both components offer musicality as their defining reason for being. USB inputs on amp and CD player and additional digital inputs on the CD are bonus for media player users who want to hear the best from these devices.

PRICE

M6i.....R49 990

M6 CD-DAC.....R39 990

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