

Marantz TT-15S1

Quality player confirms that music still matters

Sourced from one of Europe's top turntable companies, and built to Marantz specifications, the TT-15S1 is very special, says Caroline Osborn

Some 20 years ago Marantz introduced its last audiophile turntable, the TT1000; now it's back with the brand new TT-15S1. Why? Marantz Brand Ambassador Ken Ishiwata explains it like this: 'Today when you go to a record store, there are lots of CDs, but additionally you will find SACDs and an increasing number of LPs. I noticed this phenomenon quite some time ago and started to think about the re-introduction of a turntable. But it had to be reasonably priced and of high quality to fit in with the Marantz philosophy.'

This time it is an original product made by a respected turntable firm – Clearaudio – for Marantz. All of the parts have been specified and designed by Ishiwata and are not used in any other product from the German company, the principal reason for this being that Ken and the people in Germany, while respecting each other's point of view, have different ideas on turntable design.

Ishiwata told me, 'I met Peter Suchy of Clearaudio in Germany, and he understood what I was trying to do. He was kind enough to make the different parts I was interested in such as a new platter, arm, platter-mat and a base with special feet, but I took the Clearaudio moving-magnet cartridge without modification. The platter is different in its resonance, and the new arm was designed to have what I believe to have an ideal resonant frequency for an arm/cartridge combination. Clearaudio never uses platter mats, but I believe a mat will give extra damping and a smoother balance. The base and feet are not just there for cosmetic harmony, but they also change vibration and resonances.'



TT-15S1 is based on a Clearaudio design, but with extensive input from Marantz Brand Ambassador Ken Ishiwata (below right)

The TT-15S1 comes with a Clearaudio cartridge, and set-up is hardly difficult: the main chassis has three large feet, with a large round cut-out on the right hand side and to the back for the asynchronous motor, with a 2mm gap all round to ensure that there is no transmission of vibration.

The motor stands on six synthetic rubber feet, and drives the platter through a silicon belt from a stepped pulley. The power switch is mounted on the side of the motor body, and the tonearm height is set by using the counterweight as a spacer and then tightening a grub screw in the chassis on the side of the central column.

Another plus point is the direct feed from the back of the cartridge to the amplifier by oxygen-free copper cable connectors terminating in RCA phono plugs. Some rival turn-tables use phono sockets for conventional interconnects, thus placing another termination in the path of the delicate low-level signals from the cartridge. A finishing touch is the small record clamp. For a small piece of plastic with no moving parts it is surprisingly effective, giving the sound a more substantial and solid feel.

Performance

A major contributor to the impressive performance is the Clearaudio cartridge – a moving magnet device fully able to reveal the unique qualities of fine LP recordings played well. The tonal range and extension is

superb without any top-end harshness, giving a sound that is rich and full, displaying fine tonal density and weight.

I tested the player a Musical Fidelity X-150 and a pair of X-P200's and then to my Kelly Transducers, the X-150's phono stage matching the Clearaudio cartridge ideally, giving good extension right across the tonal palette. Should you want to keep things all Marantz, Ishiwata has also developed the PM-11S1, a new integrated amplifier with a built in mc/mm phono stage he describes as 'very special indeed'. He's been using the TT-15S1, PM-11S1 and new Performance speakers from Mordaunt-Short at shows recently, and comments that 'If you had to buy a mc/mm phono stage of the quality of that in the PM-11S1, you'd need to pay more than £1000.'

And the turntable is certainly revealing. Naxos has reissued some classic Gilbert & Sullivan recordings from the late '40s and early '50s of the D'Oyly Carte Opera Company, and it was interesting to compare the Decca *ffrr* disc of *The Gondoliers* against the new CDs. The Marantz turntable shows the Decca to be so much more full and musical, a more dynamic and involving experience; the reissued transfer is best described as adequate but light weight.

The TT-15S1 has a clean, open sound that brings out satisfying levels of detail in large orchestral pieces. The fluidity and smooth-

ness of the player's response always brings a smile. A 1972 DG recording of Tchaikovsky's Fifth Symphony on Deutsche Grammophon with the London Symphony Orchestra under Claudio Abbado had all the pleasing lyrical warmth that one expects from LP. The sound is smooth yet crisp, open yet tight.

The combination of cartridge, tone arm and the decoupling of the motor and the acrylic platter and chassis delivers a detailed and involving response. Marantz is serious in offering the music enthusiast the opportunity to rediscover the joys of vinyl, as is clear from the thinking of the irrepressible Ken Ishiwata and his holistic view of systems and their sound. ☺



MARANTZ TT-15S1

Type Turntable

Price £999.95

Speeds 33.3/45rpm

Drive Belt, from asynchronous DC servo motor

Operation Manual

Cartridge Moving magnet

Dimensions (W x H x D)

440 x 350 x 110mm

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