



AA 09

Roman Emperors

**AUDIO ANALOGUE MAESTRO 192/24
CURRENT OUTPUT DAC CD PLAYER \$4299**

**AUDIO ANALOGUE MAESTRO SETTANA
INTEGRATED AMPLIFIER \$4999**

I'm amazed by the wide variety of hi-fi gear available in this country; we are definitely spoilt for choice these days with the number of quality brands on sale.

While I was living in England a few years back, an Italian company by the name of Audio Analogue caught my eye with its range of superbly built and styled amps and CD players. I was particularly interested in the gorgeous Bellini and Donizetti pre-amp and monoblock amplifiers, but soon I had my eye on the range-topping (and back-straining) Maestro CD and amplifier. Sadly, I didn't bring them back to New Zealand, having decided to funnel my hard-earned English pounds into projectors and home theatre gear instead, but to this day I still have their lush sonic signature in my head.

So imagine my surprise when my dear old Ed called me in to collect the very latest Maestro Settana integrated amp and matching CD player; it was almost like meeting old friends again.

The 70W Maestro Settana actually sits one down from the goliath Maestro Integrato in the range, and I have to say I was relieved at not having to lug that 45kg monster home. Still, at 18kg the Maestro Settana is certainly no flimsy lightweight, its hefty toroidal transformer and shapely aluminium construction adding mass to the gorgeously unique appearance.

The svelte front panel is an elegant but Spartan affair. Just two knobs are supplied either side of the classy LED display, one for input selection and a quality potentiometer for volume and on/off. The rear panel is slightly more complicated of course; the quality five-way binding posts will accept heavy gauge cable, spade lugs or banana plugs. Four line inputs and a mm/mc phono stage are available for your source components, and Audio Analogue has also included pre-outs – useful if you decide to bi-amp with an external power amp.



So that's the rundown on the Settana Integrated. Now it was time to check out the Maestro CD player. A dead ringer for the Settana, the Maestro is the flagship disc spinner from Audio Analogue and has some impressive specifications. This upsampling 192/24 player shares the same rugged casework with the Settana amp; two oversized transformers are used in the eight-stage power supply, while the choice of high-quality polypropylene capacitors improves sound quality even further.

The front panel mimics the sparse example set by the Settana as well. The control buttons are presented in a circular array with play/pause situated in the middle, while the only other button turns the player into standby mode.

Both conventional RCA and balanced outputs are incorporated (no balanced inputs on the Settana though), and a single coaxial SPDIF output is supplied if listeners should ever decide to upgrade to an outboard DAC (why?).

I can't wrap up the technology bit without mentioning both remote controls supplied with the components, for they are literally hewn from a solid billet of stainless steel and are probably the ultimate in coffee table remote elegance.

So it was with delight that the listening sessions began, and once cabled to my Wharfedale Opus 1s (and, sometimes, Castle Harlech floorstanders) the serious work of musical appreciation began.

This sophisticated Audio Analogue duo impressed straight from the box with a very composed sonic signature. Delicate recordings such as Diana Krall's *The Girl In The Other Room* were treated with velvety poise, and the sweetness of the upper midrange and treble were more than matched by the lovely grip and tunefulness of the tight bass. Donald Fagen's *Morph The Cat* has seen a bit of airplay at my place lately, so into the Maestro CD player it went. Once again I was treated to a most involving and luscious rendition of this well-mastered disc. The detail retrieval was excellent from the Italian double act, but at no stage did the sound quality become harsh or processed, just very organic and captivating.

I decided to test the mettle of the Maestros with some dangerous drum'n'bass courtesy of Sly and Robbie's *Stripped To The Bone*. The Maestros didn't miss a trick here, either, the thunderous bass retaining its composure and pace without resorting to boom or, even worse, slowing down the pace of the music.

I really enjoyed my time with Audio Analogue's Maestro Settana amplifier and Maestro CD player. Built to last a lifetime, they not only sound beautiful, they are gorgeous works of art to boot. Cheap they are not, but those in the market would be advised to go along to a hi-fi dealer and audition them. You may just go Italian. ■ GARY PEARCE

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DETAILS

CONTACT

www.internationaldynamics.co.nz

SPECIFICATIONS

Audio Analogue Maestro 192/24 Current Output DAC CD Player

- Two-channel CD player
- 192kHz/24 bit D/A Conversion
- Aluminium chassis
- Heavyweight remote control
- LCD display

DIGITAL OUTPUTS: Coaxial x 1, balanced and RCA analogue outputs

DIMENSIONS: 44.5 x 39.5 x 13.5cm (W/D/H)

WEIGHT: 14kg

Audio Analogue Maestro Settana Integrated Amplifier

- Two-channel integrated amplifier
- Aluminium chassis
- Heavyweight remote control
- RS232 input
- LCD display
- Oversized power supplies

POWER OUTPUT: 2 x 70wpc into 8 ohms

PREAMP OUTPUTS: x 1 DIMENSIONS: 44.5 x D 42.8 x 13.5cm (W/D/H)

WEIGHT: 18.5kg

PROS

- + Beautiful-sounding hi-fi gear
- + Exceptional build quality

CONS

- * Not for every budget

VERDICT

It was great to re-familiarise myself with Audio Analogue, and the Italian company has certainly delivered the goods with the aptly named Maestros

Aesthetics	94%
Performance	93%
Features	88%
Functionality	90%
Price value	88%
Overall	

