

manufacturer:	Marantz
model:	DV9500 Universal Player
category:	DVD Players
review date:	August 2005
reviewed by:	Brian Kahn

Marantz DV9500 Universal Player

Introduction

The DV9500 is Marantz's latest universal disc player, situated at the top of their line. The player boasts an impressive set of features in both performance and convenience. At \$2,099, the DV9500 is not cheap, but there is much to set it apart from the \$300 universal disc players found at your local retailer. Upon lifting the box, I immediately noticed that the DV9500 was a lot more substantial than most other single-disc transports at 18-and-three-quarters pounds. Once I opened the box and removed the player, which measured a fairly standard 17-and-one-sixteenth inches wide by four-and-a-half inches tall by 15-and-one-eighth inches, it was apparent that a lot of effort went into making sure that the chassis was solid and free of resonant chatter.



Some of the DV9500's numerous convenience features include the ability to read the following formats, DVD-Video, DVD-Audio, SACD-stereo and SACD multi-channel, DVD-R/RW, CD, CD-R/RW, SVCD, VCD, MP3 and JPEG discs. I think this should cover just about any five-inch disc format. While the player is technically called the DV9500 Progressive Scan Universal DVD Player, it is capable of outputting not only 480p, but also 1080i and 720p. This is a highly significant feature. The DV9500 has multiple video outputs, including HDCP compatible HDMI, Component Video, S-Video and Composite. On the audio side of things, the player can internally decode DTS (including DTS 96/24) and Dolby Digital, has adjustable lip synch delay, is the first single-disc player to feature Dolby Headphone, bass management and delay with DVD-Audio and SACD (SACD signals must be converted from DSD to utilized this feature). Other features include RS-232 and RC-5 connections.

The DV9500's performance features include a chassis that's built upon a damped double layer bottom plate, which is designed to provide a stable platform for the transport mechanism and circuits. The transport is a new mechanism engineered to provide precise tracking. Marantz has provided a huge new feature – dual transformers to minimize channel-to-channel interference or cross talk. The analog audio circuits feature high current High Definition Audio Modules (HDAM) and a zero impedance copper grounding plate. The DACs are 192kHz/24-bit and true DSD processing is used for SACDs. Video performance is assisted by a 216MHz/14-bit video DAC and a separate 10-bit video scaler with 3:2 and 2:2 pull-down. A special Noise Shaped video circuit is also incorporated to help minimize video noise.

In short, this is a universal disc player with a scalable HDMI output that can handle just about every format and is designed to do so without compromise.

Set-up and Connection

Connecting the DV9500 was fairly simple. I used Monster Cable's M1000 DAV HDMI cable to connect the DV9500 to my Marantz VP12S4 projector. The other outputs of the DV9500 – 5.1 analog, via Monster Cable M550i and digital audio, via Monster Cable Ultra Series THX 1000 – were



connected to a Krell HTS 7.1. There are several menus offering numerous adjustments and options that allow the user to tweak both audio and video performance. I did all of my critical viewing through the HDMI output set to 720p and my projector set to native mode, so that the DV9500 was the only component doing the video processing.

Test Patterns

I began my viewing with a couple of test discs, the first of which was Joe Kane's Digital Video Essentials. Looking at the RP-133 test pattern, I noticed movement in the multi-burst portion of pattern when using my reference Kenwood DV-5900M. The Kenwood was outputting a 480i signal through component cables. On the Kenwood, I also noticed borders around the horizontal bars within bars portion of pattern. When looking at the multi-burst vertical pattern, I noticed that horizontal edges of signal from the Kenwood were cut off. When testing the Marantz DV9500 with the Pb & Pr sweep, 0.5 to 5.75 MHz, the Marantz maintained resolution throughout the entire pattern and the Kenwood turned solid gray about two-thirds of the way through the pattern. Overall, the Marantz appeared to be much more stable on the high-resolution patterns, providing a much clearer picture.

I then placed the Silicon Optix Test Disc into the Marantz. On the opening test screen, the color bars were stable, with no movement in the higher frequency portion of the pattern. On the "Diagonal Jaggies" de-interlacing test, the Marantz did well, showing only signs of jagged edges at less than 10 degrees; with the three-bar test, only the bottom bar showed any signs of being jagged. On the motion adaptive de-interlacing waving flag test, the Marantz did very well, with the flag flowing smoothly. The bridge showed good detail in the bricks and grass, with noticeably more resolution than the Kenwood. On the noise reduction tests, the Marantz again did a great job. Overall, the picture was extremely close to still frame. On the simulated digital transmission, there was very slight smearing behind the roller coaster. On the 3:2 detection test, the Marantz locked onto the signal but moiré pattern in the stands was visible for perhaps half a second before it did so. The last portion of the test disc is comprised of various cadence tests on which the Marantz DV9500 performed very well, with only the occasional minimal jagged edge.

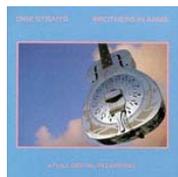
Music and Movies

I then switched to real source material and played a DVD from Season One of "Alias," something my wife appreciated much more than the test discs. While the characters were in an industrial park with larger tanks, I noticed mild jagged edges on a steel band that went around the tank. These were more noticeable when paused and much less so during playback. While the recording quality of the "Alias" discs was not extremely consistent, when watching any of the better recorded segments, the Marantz seemed to be well balanced across the color spectrum, with no noticeable aberrations.

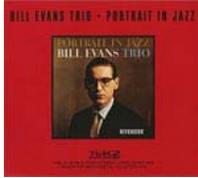


While watching "The Incredibles" (Walt Disney Home Entertainment), I saw no signs of the chroma bug. The color fields were uniform, with very clean transitions and no noise. Overall, while viewing several rental discs and a few from my collection, the blacks were slightly better with the Marantz than with my Kenwood and the Marantz's picture was consistently sharp and stable with smooth, accurate colors.

I began the audio portion of my review by listening to some regular old red book CDs. I first played Janet Jackson's "Go Deep" from the Velvet Rope album (Virgin Records). This track is rich with solid, detailed bass that the Marantz replayed better than any other player I have had in my system. The midrange was relaxed and natural, with highs that fell only slightly shy of what I have heard on the best and most expensive CD players in terms of airiness and extension.

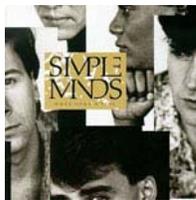


Moving on to Dire Straits' Brothers in Arms (Warner Brothers) album, the classic demo track "Your Latest Trick," the clean midrange did well with Knopfler's voice. The high end of the cymbals was clean and clear, with the entire package combining for a solid, well-placed soundstage.



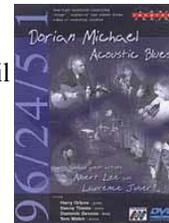
When switching to SACDs, I pulled out some other SACDs I had on hand. Most played without a glitch. Bill Evans Trio's Portraits in Jazz (Fantasy Jazz) "Come Rain or Come Shine" had noticeably more depth and detail, with better imaging on its stereo SACD track than on standard CD track. I noticed a more solid body and more texture in the bass on the SACD track.

The Dave Brubeck Quartet's Jazz at Oberlin (Fantasy Jazz) opens with "These Foolish Things," in which Paul Desmond's alto saxophone sounded absolutely amazing and was well placed in the soundstage. "Stardust" also features great saxophone playing and sounds, with Brubeck kicking up the piano towards the end. Even though the original recording is not great, there is a sense of involvement and cohesion that is revealed. On "How High the Moon," the Marantz maintains good rhythm and pace and great synergy within the entire quartet. Again, Desmond's sax playing stands out, but the rest of the quartet is working together like a well-oiled machine and I could hear a good amount of detail from each instrument, as well as a cohesive picture of the entire quartet.



Moving to DVD-Audio discs, I played Simple Minds' Once Upon a Time (EMI Records), which I had just received. The track "All the Things She Said" brought back high school memories as I listened to this track, which had obviously been heavily processed (as many were in the '80s). The track was very clean sounding, as was the entire disc. I noticed more details in the many synthesizer lines than I remember from the original, along with a large, smooth soundstage. "Sanctify Yourself," another hit from the '80s, was equally clean and detailed, with a large soundstage.

I then played Dorian Michael's Acoustic Blues (AIX Records) album. This album was recorded, mixed and mastered in 96kHz/24 bits. The track "All Dressed Up" had great detail throughout, but especially with the guitar and bass tracks. It was very easy to imagine myself in the room with the musicians as I listened to the notes from the strings slowly decay and the music resonate from the instrument bodies. The drums were also solid with good weight and detail to help make a very cohesive mix, full of texture and life.



Lastly, the Insane Clown Posse's The Wraith Shangri-La (Psychopathic-DTS) "Ain't You Bidness" confirmed that the Marantz does deep and powerful just as well on DVD-Audio as it did on CD. Additionally, this track is fast-paced and complex, something the Marantz had no problems with, keeping all the details intact and in the right place.

The Downside

I had some issues with the remote. I am a firm believer that any remote that is intended for use during a movie, such as that of a home theater processor or video source, needs to be easy to use in the dark. The remote that comes with the DV9500 is not backlit and is unintuitive. Thankfully, the buttons are of different shapes, and with regular use, you can learn to use it in the dark. The remote fell short of the superb design achievement found in the player.

I was excited about the prospect of playing the epic Tommy from The Who, but unfortunately it wouldn't play in the Marantz. I am unsure if this was a disc issue or a player problem, as this is the only SACD player I currently have for testing purposes. In this day and time, it's not uncommon to have a couple of discs that act funny in a player. Unfortunately, this nuance was found during the last day of the review, so I didn't get a lot of time to test additional copies of the same material.



Another item I would have liked to see in this top of the line DVD player is some sort of high-resolution digital audio output. The HDMI output does not transmit the digital high-resolution tracks from SACDs or DVD-Audio discs. Some other high-end players, such as the Denon 5910, have made provisions for outputting the high-resolution digital audio tracks, which would provide for more future flexibility, something I would like in a long-term investment piece such as this.

Conclusion

The Marantz DV9500 is a universal player in the truest sense of the word. It will play darn near anything that goes on a five-inch disc. Its packaging is solid, reminiscent of players cost two and three times more. Marantz spared no expense in such details as the use of dual transformers to assure perfect channel separation. Compared to other players in its class, the DV9500 provided a better video picture and more refined sound for all formats tested. Movie and music players have come a long way over the last couple of years. The fact is that the Marantz DV9500 is a better-sounding and looking player than players that had cost five times more just a few years back. If your player is dated or incapable of playing the more modern formats, perhaps you are ready for a huge step up in performance to the DV9500. It's a solid performer and excellent value.