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ARCAM FMJ AVR600 HD SURROUND RECEIVER

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Arcam
FMJ AVR600
HD Surround Receiver

Peter Moncrieff

Introduction

Performance is everything. The new Arcam AVR600 surround receiver's performance is a stunning advance in the state of the art. The AVR600 is a reference benchmark for the future that you can buy today. And, therefore, this review will concentrate on performance, since this is what makes the AVR600 so distinct from, and so far above, all competing A/V receivers.

Functionality

So let's briefly discuss the AVR600's feature-set functionality (connectivity, processing options, control flexibility) first, and get it out of the way. With its new top-of-the-line model, Arcam has brought its A/V offering up to date, giving the AVR600 a healthy suite of capabilities that is competitive with the latest high-end A/V receivers from other brands, all of which are well equipped to handle the wide variety of situations possible in today's electronic home. There might be subtle pros and cons, among competing high-end A/V receivers, related to the slight differences in their functionality suites, but most of them, including the Arcam AVR600, can well fit (or be adapted) into most any situation.

The AVR600's control and communication connectivity includes RS232, ethernet, USB, IR for all three zones, and rLead/rDock. The AVR600's remote control is compact and not overloaded with keys, yet it is powerful. It can control all your other system devices and can be programmed with macros to make your control chores even easier and faster.

In addition to the built-in AM/FM tuner, there are input jacks for SIRIUS radio and DAB (use depends on country). Incidentally, the quality (both sonic and RF) of this on-board AM/FM tuner is, to put it kindly, merely serviceable. If you want FM performance that is sonically (and RF-wise) worthy of the AVR600's spectacular sonics (especially for what the AVR600's incredible surround space enhancement can do to enrich FM stereo enjoyment), you need to get a high-quality dedicated outboard tuner.

Like other competing high-end A/V receivers nowadays, the AVR600 works with and operates upon both video and audio signals' input and/or output via HDMI 1.3 with deep color (unlike Arcam's earlier AVR350, which merely passively passed through HDMI signals without even intercepting them). The AVR600 gives you a lot of flexibility to choose input formats, in order to optimize them for your system. For example, for one input you can choose to bring video in via HDMI but bring the audio from that same source in via sonically superior SP/DIF, while on another input you can choose to bring in both video and audio via HDMI (as you would have to do when playing the lossless

Dolby® TrueHD or DTS-HD Master Audio™ audio track from a Blu-ray Disc™).

The AVR600 accepts and processes all contemporary popular signal formats, including the lossy and latest lossless audio formats from Dolby and DTS®, and works with both bitstream and PCM signals.

The AVR600 offers a good set of video-processing capabilities (upscaling, converting analog to HDMI, etc.), at up to 1080p. Video processing is accomplished via the Pixelworks PW338 chip, used in many high-end video-projection systems, instead of by the Realta or Reon chips commonly employed by competing A/V receivers. The AVR600's video processing includes the following video adjustments: brightness, contrast, color saturation, edge enhancement, general noise reduction, mosquito noise reduction, and block noise reduction. Of course, these adjustments might be duplicated in your particular video source and/or display. But the AVR600 offers (and remembers) different video-processing settings for each individual input, which can be helpful and convenient for making all your video sources more equal in their visual properties, and "improving" your video sources that are subpar. As to the video output side, the AVR600 can output HDMI to both zone 1 and zone 2, but it has only one HDMI video processor onboard, so if you have set the AVR600's controls to output HDMI for zone 1, then any video processing being executed (on the input selected at the moment) will also appear on the HDMI output for zone 2 (this is a common restriction among today's A/V receivers).

The AVR600 offers automatic loudspeaker setup, which employs a microphone (included) that plugs into the front. It automatically detects which loudspeakers are present in your system, their type (small or large), sets up the AVR600's adjustments for optimum level from all loudspeakers, matched time delays, optimum crossover to your subwoofer or large loudspeakers, and basic EQ compensation of room modes. Then, for each of the inputs you can configure the AVR600 to implement (or not implement) this room EQ item.

The AVR600 is one of the few A/V receivers thus far to offer Dolby Volume, a sophisticated gain-compression circuit that reduces dynamic range (e.g. for quiet evening listening) while maintaining superior sonic fidelity, compared to relatively crude compression circuits employed in the past.

I found the throughput video quality and the video processing of the AVR600 to be excellent. Of course, many of your video sources and displays also have on-board video processing, and you don't want to duplicate some aspects of video processing at plural links in your chain, so you must choose, based on your own experiments, which link you assign a particular video processing task (e.g. upconverting) to. The quality of on-board video processing varies widely among products acting as these other links in the chain, and only you can know how

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Arcam FMJ AVR600 HD Surround Receiver

Inputs
Audio: 2.0-channel analog (7); 7.1-channel analog (1); MM phono input (1); front 3.5mm AUX input(1); optical digital(4); co-axial digital (3); front 3.5mm optical (1)
Video: HDMI (5) (up to 1080p, Deep Color); 5 Component (5); S-video (5); Composite (5)

Outputs
Analog audio outputs: Two-channel (11, including Zone 2 and 3); 7.1-channel (1, RCA-type, 3 subwoofer outputs)
Video: HDMI (2) (up to 1080p, Deep Color); component (1 - up to 1080i); S-video (1 monitor + 2 tape outputs); Composite (1 monitor + 2 tape outputs)

Analog Audio Features
• 120WPC continuous power output into 4 or 8 ohms loads (all 7 channels driven at 1kHz)
• Stereo output power over 150WPC into 4 or 8 ohms, 20Hz to 20kHz
• Toroidal power transformer and high efficiency class G amplifier
• In 5.1 speaker setups, channels 6 & 7 assignable to bi-amplify front left and right or for use in Zone 2
• Stereo direct mode bypasses and disables all digital processing for 2 channel analog sources
• Zone 2 stereo audio, from analog inputs (Source and volume control independent from main zone)
• Zone 3 stereo audio, from analog inputs
• Linked to Zone 2, volume control independent
• DAB/FM/AM or FM/AM stereo tuner with 50 presets
• Sirius Home Connect compatible input
• Support for iPod via Arcam rLead / rDock (independent of RS232)

Digital Audio Features
• Contains Analog Devices ADSP-21366 & ADSP-21367 DSPs for surround decoding, Crystal Semiconductor 24bit 192kHz DACs, stereo ADC and precision electronic volume controls
• Supports Dolby TrueHD, Dolby Digital+, Dolby Digital EX, Dolby Pro Logic IIx, DTS HD Master Audio, DTS High Resolution Audio, DTS-ES Discrete, DTS-ES Matrix, DTS96/24, DTS Neo:6
• Dolby Volume
• Adjustable crossover switching 40Hz, 60Hz, 80Hz, 100Hz, 120Hz, 150Hz
• Global audio delay, adjustable from 0-1000 milliseconds
• USB input for audio file playback from UPnP mass storage devices
• Ethernet connection for Internet Radio and audio streaming

General
Independent Zone 2 (audio & video), with fixed/variable volume
Zone 3 audio with fixed/variable volume
RC-5 remote input jacks for all three zones
IR pass through for source components
Full suite of discrete IR RC-5 codes, including separate on / off etc
12Volt triggers, on / off for zones 1, 2 and 3
Full duplex RS232 control input for more complex control systems
Ethernet connection for IP control
Back-lit CR102 learning remote control
Large, high contrast dimmable VFD front panel display
User switchable between 120 & 230Volt mains supplies
Dimensions (WHD In Inches): 17.1 x 7.3 x 17.1
Weight (In Pounds): 55.1
Price: $5,000

Manufactured In The People's Republic Of China By:
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Pembroke Avenue
Waterbeach
Cambridge CB25 9QR
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www.arcam.co.uk

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American Audio & Video
4325 Executive Dr.
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then the AVR600's video capabilities will suit you very well. On the other hand, if you are a video purist, then you believe in calibrating each component (each video source and each display) to a standard for optimum video performance. You might want to optimize the video processing within each of the links that can perhaps do it best for that link, and perhaps use a dedicated outboard video processor for tasks like scaling conversion and de-interlacing. This could obviate the need to use the AVR600's video processing, and indeed obviate the need to even bring any video into the AVR600 at all.

Furthermore, video purists might always want to seek the shortest, most direct path from player to display, for optimum video fidelity, thus bypassing the receiver. Likewise, audio purists might also want to keep video signals, with their attendant noise contamination, out of an A/V receiver's chassis as much as possible, for optimum audio fidelity.

The Sound

And that segue brings us to the audio performance of the AVR600. An A/V receiver might be able to process both audio and video, but its audio performance is primary, because an A/V receiver is always in the audio signal path, whereas its inclusion in the video signal path is optional. You are always listening to an A/V receiver (its audio power amplifier and audio processing front end), but you are not always watching through an A/V receiver. That's especially true if you video-bypass the A/V receiver entirely, going directly from video sources to video displays (perhaps via dedicated outboard video processors) for optimum fidelity (both optical and sonic). And it's also true for all those times you use your A/V system for listening to music instead of watching films. The primary reason for bringing video through an A/V receiver is for distribution and switching convenience, not for obtaining the ultimate quality in video. In sum, video performance in an A/V receiver is overall secondary to audio performance.

Just how good is the AVR600's audio performance? The most relevant place to start is to compare the AVR600 to other competing high-end A/V receivers, since that's the buying decision most of you are looking at. My colleague Doug Blackburn is known for his positive feedback, for always being able to look at the optimistic side of each product he reviews. Yet even positive Doug, in his recent review of a competing high-end A/V receiver (which at $5,500 actually costs more than the AVR600), was forced by its performance to admit that its power amplifier section doesn't sound as good as his dedicated outboard separate power amplifier, and its front end doesn't sound as good as his dedicated outboard separate preamplifier and/or processor. I agree completely with Doug. Other high/end A/V receivers sound pretty good, but they still sound like, well, receivers. And that's all we consumers expect from receivers.

Enter Arcam's own previous flagship A/V receiver offering, the AVR350. In critical listening, I found that Arcam's AVR350 sonically equaled the performance of high-end separates, and actually surpassed many highly regarded separates. So, with its AVR350, Arcam was already sonically ahead of what other high-end receivers today achieve.

To evaluate the Arcam AVR600, I employed my lab reference system, including the following components: Esoteric DV-60 as music and DVD source, mounted on a comprehensive Mapleshade support system; a Pioneer Blu-ray Disc player (Arcam's own forthcoming Blu-ray Disc player was not yet ready at this time); a surround array of seven B&W 802D loudspeakers; Nordost Valhalla loudspeaker cable; Nordost Optix video cable; digital coax interconnect by Mapleshade; Von Gaylord Chinchilla analog interconnects; and Von Gaylord Chinchilla power cords. The Arcam AVR600 was tested in its role as the central hub of this lab reference system.

I conducted a critical assessment of the new AVR600's sonic performance in all basic operating modes: straight stereo music via analog direct (wherein only the AVR600's power amplifier is being

good the video processing is in your particular links, so only you can find out for yourself whether they or the AVR600 do a better job of what you want done, and therefore, choose which links to allocate your desired video processing to. Thus, any potential benefits of employing the AVR600 (instead of other links) for any video processing are specific to your own particular system and your own preferences.

Certainly, if you have multiple video sources, and like the convenience offered by controlling all video processing in one central box,

evaluated); enhanced 7.1 surround for music sources (wherein the AVR600's front-end processing is also engaged); lossy film sound-tracks (5.1, either straight or enhanced to 7.1); and lossless HD film soundtracks. The AVR600's setup was optimized carefully for each of these modes, in order to probe and discover the best sound it could deliver in each of these basic modes. So, what were the results?

Allow me to get personal. In my job as a high-end reviewer (and as a research scientist always pursuing perfection), I get to hear a lot of spectacular systems and industry demos at the cutting edge. Many of these systems cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. In many, just the electronics doing the same job as the AVR600 cost about $400,000 (seven dedicated monoblock power amplifiers, discrete separate outboard DACs, surround processors, EQ, etc.). As you see, I have been lucky enough to experience the very finest repro-duced sounds this planet can offer, and I remember them very well.

The new Arcam AVR600, at the hub of my lab's reference system, gives me the finest sound I have heard in my life, from any system. Ever. Anywhere. Regardless of price. Period.

The sonic performance of the Arcam AVR600 is a stupendous engineering achievement. As you know, when working at the cutting edge of the state of the art, engineering-design advances are usually small and hard-won, and often cost you dearly in a higher price, as

the power amplifier) to handle accurately.

In the bass, the AVR600 gets more deep bass extension out of my full-range loudspeakers than I have ever heard before, delivering transient bass impact even far below the nominal resonance frequen-cy of the loudspeaker system's woofer. And the AVR600 handles this very deep bass with tremendous control, authority, power, and slam. My lab system's loudspeakers, the B&W 802Ds, have relatively small 7.8-inch woofers, housed in merely a moderate size (not large) cabi-net, so their bass is inherently not as deeply extended nor as power-fully strong as many larger loudspeaker systems. Yet, with the seven channels of the AVR600 driving the seven B&W 802Ds, for the first time I heard bass from my system that obviated the need for any added dynamic subwoofer. The bass from the AVR600 is so high in quality and authority that, even driving conventional full-range loud-speakers, it surpassed the quality and controlled authority of the best I have heard from any and all dynamic subwoofers.

When you delete the subwoofer from the AVR600 setup menu, it can spread the LFE .1 channel among all your large full-range loud-speakers, and the AVR600's bass performance is so amazing that it drove the full-range B&W 802Ds from this LFE energy with ease, to infrasonic, powerful impact that actually shook my stone castle (so it will certainly shake your wood-frame house). The B&W 802D might

"The margin of the AVR600's superiority
in sonic performance is so huge, so dramatic..."

the law of diminishing returns sets in. Thus, for such a huge sonic advance beyond the state of the art to be achieved in any product, let alone a modestly priced product, let alone a receiver instead of perfectionist separates, is mind-boggling. The AVR600 wears and fully deserves Arcam's FMJ moniker, the designation they reserve for their premium design efforts, their all-out assaults on the state of the art. In this case, Arcam has not merely achieved state-of-the-art per-formance, but has succeeded beyond the state-of-the-art, and by a significant margin. The three years of design effort by the Arcam team were very well spent, and we are all the richer for it.

The margin of the AVR600's superiority in sonic performance is so huge, so dramatic, that it belongs at the heart of every modest sys-tem that can possibly budget for it, since it will elevate the rest of your system to sonic heights beyond what you ever in your fondest dreams imagined it could achieve. And the AVR600 also belongs at the heart of virtually all high-end perfectionist systems (whose budget could afford far more than the AVR600's modest $5,000 price), since it will elevate your system's sonic performance even beyond what your present expensive electronic separates are doing.

Furthermore, the AVR600 belongs not only at the heart of every A/V system, but also at the heart of every audio-only music system, for the staggering advance in musical information and musical enjoy-ment it brings. That's true even if you are loyal to straight two-channel stereo (one of the basic modes I tested and found so sonically supe-rior in the AVR600). Then, with the AVR600 as your music vendor, obtainable at such a modest price, you should consider converting to seven-loudspeaker surround sound, for the huge sonic benefits you'll hear when playing your large reservoir of (and investment in) two-channel sources (your only extra expense is buying more loudspeakers).

Amazing Bass, Delicate Treble

Let's discuss sonic specifics, and begin at the frequency extremes, since these are the most difficult for electronics (especially

have puny 7.8-inch woofers, but when 14 of these woofers (2 per loudspeaker) are all pumping out at you the same LFE bass signal, you'll be getting a much larger diaphragm area than a couple of 15-inch dynamic subwoofers give you (large diaphragm area is crucial to acoustically give you truly authoritative bass). And all of these 802D woofers are temporally synchronized in a circle all around you, directed at pressurizing, from all sides, the center of the circle, where the pit of your stomach sits, so this can be perceptually more impactive/impressive/frightening than a couple of subwoofers stuck off at the side of your room. The AVR600 might be merely a receiver, but I'm duty bound to report what I objectively hear: the Arcam AVR600 simply has the best quality bass of any power amplifier I've heard. Ever. Anywhere. At any price.

In the bass, and indeed throughout the spectrum, the AVR600 also sounds far more powerful than its rated seven channels at 120 watts per channel. Consider what it had to do for me. The seven B&W 802Ds are moderately inefficient, and are a difficult load to drive, and my listening room has a huge 15,000 cubic feet to fill (it's the ballroom of an old Spanish castle). Yet, faced with this difficult task, the AVR600 effortlessly played as loud as I could stand. If your listening room is smaller than this, you'll get even more loudness capability from the AVR600. Incidentally, the AVR350 also did well for its rated 100 watts per channel, but I could get it to clip and some-times sound strained when playing really loud in this huge ballroom, while the AVR600 sounds happy, relaxed, and powerful as it knocks me over. The AVR600 maintains its authoritative, direct, powerful con-trol of each loudspeaker, even into loud levels, and over the entire spectrum, again sounding as though there were a 300+-watt monoblock power amplifier right behind each loudspeaker.

The AVR600 also sounds exceptionally clean and pure, free of the subtle distortions and the time-smearing and energy-dispersion that afflict virtually all other electronics. And the AVR600 maintains this clean purity for the whole spectrum when playing loudly, and even when pump-ing out massive amounts of LFE bass (thus obviating the need for

separate subwoofers and/or separate subwoofer power amplifiers).

At the treble extreme of the spectrum, the AVR600 sounds as spectacularly superior as it does in the bass. Here too the AVR600's sonic performance hits the ideal point of balance, to be very revealing and accurate in presenting treble information. The ARVR600 is very articulate (not soft or mushy, like some other products), yet at

other components are simply unable to. With other components, these details of reality have been utterly missing—with the AVR600, these details of reality are suddenly right there, clearly revealed. That's what you call a dramatic transparency difference!!

The Arcam AVR600's transparent ability to reveal sonic details, more realistically than I have ever heard them before, is a crucial key

the same time very delicate (not artificially hard, like some other products). It is very fast in handling treble detail, yet at the same time handles it with finesse and subtlety. It is very coherent and focused, not smeared or defocused, like so many other products. It sounds open and airy, not at all closed in, like some other products. And its upper extension at the treble extreme matches its deep extension at the bass end, taking my loudspeakers beyond what I had ever heard from them before.

Transparency

The best is yet to come. The Arcam AVR600 is so transparently revealing that it achieves new heights and sets new standards for the state of the art. The AVR600's new standard of transparency is markedly superior to any other electronics (processor and/or amplifier) I have heard, in making music, film sound, and surround space itself, all sound more real and believable. And, bottom line, isn't this reality and believability exactly the goal you most want your system to give you?

An integral adjunct to the AVR600's transparency is its phenomenal intertransient silence, an utterly black, quiet background, against which all sonic details are thereby much more transparently revealed. I tested the AVR600's transparency by directly comparing its performance against state-of-the-art components (including the AVR350) on transient sounds, both from a music CD and from a DVD film soundtrack. In both examples, the AVR600 was far more transparently revealing than anything else I had ever heard before. Then, when you use today's latest high-transparency media as sources (24/192 for music, and Blu-ray Disc lossless HD for a soundtrack), the AVR600's margin of superior transparency that you'll experience will be even more dramatic.

Furthermore, I was shocked to hear that the AVR600 actually revealed new sounds, new sonic details, that were simply and utterly missing from the presentation by the other state-of-the-art components. The AVR600 clearly revealed important details of reality that

in taking your experience across the subliminal threshold, into the magic of believability, for both music and film soundtrack. The AVR600 stands alone in its ability to take a quality system across this threshold, from fake to real.

Space

In my review of Arcam's earlier AV8 surround processor, I noted that space is the final frontier, and I discussed why it's so important for your system to be able to portray a believable surround space, to enrich your experience, both for music and for film soundtracks. Since then, I have chronicled the improvements in surround space portrayal achieved by successive Arcam products, the AVR300 and then the AVR350. The AVR350, with its new mask of silence technology, achieved a blacker background and better intertransient silence, which, together with improved basic transparency, allowed the very subtle sonic cues that define space itself to shine forth more clearly, thereby creating the best, most convincing surround space I had heard to date.

So I conducted direct A-B's of the new AVR600 against the state of the art in surround space portrayal (which happens to have been Arcam's own AVR350). It was shocking. The AVR600 re-creates and portrays a surround space that is about 10 times bigger! The AVR350 already made the walls of my listening room disappear and transported me aurally to the recording venue, which was a larger alternative space (assuming that venue was large). The new AVR600 makes that alternative space about 10 times larger, hence much deeper, wider, and higher.

The AVR600 is also far more accurate in defining where the walls of the alternative venue are (e.g. the concert hall or cathedral walls), and where the echoes and reverberant ambience are coming from and bouncing off of. This, of course, enhances even further the believability of the new, 10-times-larger space you have been aurally transported to, since you can now also clearly hear the boundaries of that space.

Additionally, the AVR600 is far superior at reproducing a halo of believable space around each voice, each instrument, each sound

effect. This halo of space around each direct sound source helps to better localize each such direct sound source, in relation to the over-all surround space (you can better hear that this direct-sound source is right over there), which greatly helps the overall realism of the total sonic picture, hence greatly helps your involved immersion in the whole experience. This halo of space around each direct sound source also makes each sound source itself sound more solid and three-dimensional, hence more realistic and believable.

In comparison to the AVR600's towering performance in portray-ing surround space, other high-end processors and receivers col-lapse and compress the space, and portray it vaguely and amor-phously instead of believably. They render direct sound sources (sprinkled around the surround periphery) as flat cardboard cutouts arranged in a simple flat circle around you (i.e. located at a uniform distance from you), whereas, the AVR600 renders them as three-dimensional solid entities, located at different varying distances from you, in the rich three-dimensional space all around you.

Enhancing Surround Space

The AVR600's ability to convincingly enhance two-channel and 5.1-channel material to 7.1 channels, via Dolby PLIIx, is also a vast improvement over the previous state of the art. The fidelity of all channels that have been put through the matrix enhancement deriva-tion process is better than I've ever heard before. And the generated surround space enhancement is far more convincing than I've ever heard before. Also, the occasional steering artifacts (pumping, etc.) are remarkably reduced. Some of these Dolby PLIIx improvements are doubtless due to the AVR600's dramatically improved ability to transparently and more accurately reveal subtle detail information, including the subtle phase relationships that Dolby relies on for its matrix extractions and logic steering. I suspect also that Dolby them-selves might have been subtly tinkering with the PLIIx process, as built into the very latest products, for example, by making the time constants shorter for quicker logic steering with less audible pumping.

The AVR600 is truly amazing in utilizing PLIIx for creating a believ-able surround space with seven loudspeakers. So much so that I would urge everyone to invest in a system with seven loudspeakers, of as high quality as your budget and listening room space allows. And of course buy an AVR600 to run it. When you have seven loud-speakers, you can use the two back surrounds, spaced 60 degrees apart, to a richly ambient, believable space in back of you (and indeed for the entire rear hemisphere), while you use the two side surrounds (directly at your sides) not merely to reproduce side sounds and side hall ambience, but even more importantly to magi-cally, amazingly widen and deepen the stage up front, where most of the action is (with both music and film soundtrack recordings). Note that most surround recordings are now professionally mixed for loud-speaker placement at 60-degree increments around a circle (plus the center channel), which means that you should employ seven loud-speakers (at these same 60-degree increments around a circle) to play these surround recordings correctly.

If you are limited to five loudspeakers, you will still hear vastly superior surround space from the AVR600 than you have ever heard before, from any other electronics. Indeed, even if you are a two-channel stereo music buff, you still need to get the AVR600 for your music playback. I deliberately tested the AVR600 playing two-chan-nel material through just two loudspeakers, and even here the AVR600 portrayed 10 times the volume of space than I had heard before, with much richer depth, ambience, width, and localization precision, on the stage image portrayed in front of us.

If you are smart enough to build your home theatre system for the best sound you can get, then you can also use it for your music lis-tening, so this one system serves a dual function, saving you the

money of having to build a separate two-channel system for music only. And now I'm telling you that, if you are smart, you will install the new AVR600 as the heart of your system.

If, on the other hand, you have a system dedicated only for music, I'm telling you here and now that you also want an AVR600 for that music-only system. The AVR600's sonic fidelity is so manifestly supe-rior that you are cheating yourself if you employ anything else. Yes, I know it's only a receiver. But sound is sound, and it's my job to tell you the truth about what I objectively find in my research investigations.

If you have a music-only system that is merely two channel, you still want the AVR600 for its superior fidelity, even as a simple amplifi-er in two-channel direct mode (the very mode I first tested it in). But, after you install the AVR600, I would urge you to take advantage of its stunning surround space performance. The AVR600's surround space enhancement of two-channel recordings, re-creating a realistic surround space and immersing you in a concert hall experience, has to be heard to be believed. You, like me, might have a substantial investment in a library of two-channel music. Now is the time for you to revisit your library collection and re-hear all your best recordings, but this time, as a totally different concert hall experience. It's simple to accomplish; just get an AVR600 and add some loudspeakers.

Conclusion

Arcam's new AVR600 marks a huge advance over the previous state of the art, in all sonic parameters, and also boasts of video superior to most other A/V receivers. It's human nature to believe that the state of the art, at any given time, is as good as things can ever get. But when we experience something that, like the AVR600, goes far beyond what we have heard (or seen) before, it expands our hori-zons of what is possible, and it literally re-defines the state of the art.

You want to get the AVR600 if you want bass that is deeper, more powerful, and higher quality by far than any other receiver (and than virtually all separates), so much so that it virtually obviates the need for conventional subwoofers. You want to get the AVR600 if you want the effortless loudness and authoritative control that sounds as though you had a dedicated 300+-watt monoblock power amplifier directly at each loudspeaker. You want to get the AVR600 if you want trebles that are more extended, airy, quick, articulate, detailed, and delicate than you have heard before. You want to get the AVR600 if you want sonic transparency that brings you realism and realistic subtlety such as you have never experienced. You want to get the AVR600 if you want surround space that is 10 times larger and much better defined and more believable than you have ever heard before.

You want to get the AVR600 for your system that plays only films, and for your system that plays only music, and/or any mix of the two. You want to get the AVR600, whether you have seven loudspeakers, or five, or two, to experience the best magic your system can deliver. It doesn't matter what you have in your present system or how much it costs—just try putting the Arcam AVR600 into your system, and you too will be an amazed convert.

Performance is everything. Any questions? **WSR**