

# All in the family

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## Can the Rotel family make sweet music together? By Max Christoffersen

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### Rotel RSP-1066 preamp/processor. \$3399

Family reunions are always interesting affairs. Sometimes volatile. Sometimes revealing. Sometimes plain good fun.



Most of all, it's a chance to catch up and compare notes and to see if the family still walks and talks the same way.

So it was with a sense of reunion that the Rotel 1066 pre-amp processor was introduced to its kin-brother; the outstanding [Rotel 1095 five channel amplifier](#).

Frankly they're twin sons of different mothers. If these two were separated at birth the family traits of Rotel were still obvious for all to see. Cosmetically the handles of the 1066 are sculptured to match the 1095 heat sink handles and the family likeness in design and intent is undeniable.

But time has moved on and while the Rotel 1066 now demonstrates the current thinking of multi-channel surround formats for both film and music, the 1095 is not fully compatible with the new 1066 for a very simple reason: It is a five channel amplifier and the Rotel is a six channel processor offering DD/DTS/ES/EX six channel decoding. If you buy both products you're a channel short! (Wishful thinking says you could buy the Rotel 1090 or another 1095... but there is the mortgage to consider).

### Why a dedicated processor?

The theory says dedicated components are superior because they are

'specialists' in their field. Unlike other all-in-one-box solutions, dedicated products offer fewer design and build compromises. So it is with the Rotel 1066. And at \$3399, Rotel are aiming at the serious home theatre enthusiast who may be trying to maintain fidelity with two channel music as well as multi-channel film soundtracks.

Serious competition comes in the form of the Tag McLaren, Proceed and Meridian pre-amp processors.

But while sonics are the draw for a specialist units in this league, the ergonomics of multi-source, multi-surround format processors can't be ignored. Ease of use for me at least, remains a big factor as does easy connectivity to other components. The 1066 delivers a range of interconnections including computer port ungradeability and external remote and external zone 2 facilities, two very handy 12 volt triggers (that allow remote turn on off 12 volt equipped amplifiers) and component switching.

Ergonomically the unit is a winner. The big macro-capable remote takes a little getting used to, but the switching and functionality is superb, if let down by a lack of discrete access to each soundfield and a slightly undersize display.

Under the hood it looks like this: - 96/24 dacs; 6.1 sound formats (DD/DTS/ES/EX/Prologic II) auto detection; software upgradeable; can be controlled via serial port; 5 digital in; 5 video in , inc 3 VCR loops; 6 audio in; tape loop; zone 2; MP3 decoding; HDCD decoding; component video switching (non-progressive capable).

The unit's processing is based around AKM DAC's and ADC's and while the analogue pass through does remain analogue throughout, there is a strange twist in that the bass crossover \*is\* done digitally. Sonic sensibilities

At the end of all of this is the sonics. After all, for the same money very capable all-in-one box amp-processors can be enjoyed offering many of the same facilities. So the question really is: does the Rotel separates combo offer a significant step up in quality over a one box solution?

On paper at least you have the best of both worlds: or in the current World Cup parlance, a Brazilian offence with an Italian defence!

And in practice that's how it is. The immediate impression is that everything sounds fast and clear. The leading edge of dialogue and effects is captured without any sense of lag. There is a fine line to walk to sonics like this: too much and you have sibilance; too little and you have sludge.

That fine sonic balance is what separates the big boys from the also rans. And the Rotel can claim to be running with the big boys. Remember this combination is running 200 watts across five channels with the clean accurate dedicated processing power on top. This is precision, power and pristine audio that provides plenty of evidence that home theatre audio can easily outperform the movie theatre in terms of detail, surround imaging and intelligibility.

It is the tiny background details that come out of soundtracks that make you aware of what you've been missing. And that detail can be put fairly and squarely down to the power and control of the 1095 and the great 'service delivery' of the 1066 processing.

Music too is formidable, although I do wish Rotel had omitted the gimmicky 'echo-heavy' soundfields and left the 1066 as a dedicated two channel music or mutli-channel film processor.

Bottom line? Some minor ergonomic quibbles aside, this is home theatre audio at the edge of the performance envelope. This is the standard that one-box units aspire to.

And at the time of writing, I'm not sure they have yet been able to match it.

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