

# Rotel RSX-1065 Receiver

A different kind of receiver from a different kind of company.

by Mark Fleischmann

Dual front-panel heatsinks announce that this is no ordinary receiver. And the RSX-1065's rebel identity is more than skin-deep. Whereas other manufacturers are quick to pick up on the latest fad features, Rotel adopts a new



**A. Those front-panel heatsinks let you tuck the RSX-1065 into the middle of your rack without having to worry about excessive heat buildup.**

**B. This is one of the most logically laid-out backsides that Mark has ever seen.**



technology only when it's matured enough to qualify as a reliable long-term standard—hence the release of this 5.1-channel receiver into an increasingly 7.1-channel world. The other guys bring out new models just about every year, but, when a new Rotel makes its debut, it's likely to be around for several years. Cosmetic redesigns are, if anything, even rarer. Rotel has a long track record of doing business in their own triumphantly idiosyncratic way. The result is a line of products that stand the test of time and make a lot of consumers happy.

The RSX-1065 provides nearly 45 pounds of receiver in exchange for its \$1,999 price. It delivers 100 watts times five channels into 8 ohms, and Rotel claims that it provides up to 200 watts under dynamic conditions. Power output in stereo mode is 120 watts per channel. Total harmonic and intermodulation distortion are both on the low side, at 0.05 percent, although audiophiles generally

agree that it's the quality, not the quantity, of distortion that really matters to our ears.

Rotel hedges their 5.1-channel bet by providing 7.1-channel preamp outputs; so, if you've got an old stereo power amp sitting around, you can experiment with the proces-

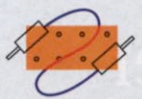
sor's Dolby EX, DTS ES (Matrix or Discrete), and DTS Neo:6 decoding. Although I used the RSX-1065 exclusively with a 5.1-speaker setup, it wins extra points on the feature meter because its preouts support a second center channel and subwoofer. Rotel sweetens the mix with Dolby Pro Logic II (rapidly becoming standard equipment), Rotel's own version of Cinema EQ (this is not a THX-certified product), and HDCD (now owned by, gulp, Microsoft).

The dual heatsinks monopolize eight of the front panel's 17 inches

of width. Although there are ventilation holes in the RSX-1065's top panel, the front-panel heatsinks will come in handy for people who prefer to install the receiver in the middle, rather than at the top, of their equipment rack. (A turntable occupies the top of my rack, and that isn't going to change any time soon.) The beefy power supply may have also had a hand in the unorthodox design. After running for three hours with 2 inches of clearance at the top, the receiver was very warm but not alarmingly hot.

Between the heat fins is a no-nonsense front panel with source-select buttons, numeric keys, and knobs for bass, treble, and volume, as well as about a dozen other miscellaneous controls. As with most receivers, the RSX-1065 defaults to Dolby Digital and DTS. Standby is a remote-only function. You cannot turn on the receiver by just hitting one of the source-select buttons.

I found that these small limitations were more than forgivable when I confronted the RSX-1065's back panel, easily the most logically arranged bunch of jacks I've ever seen on the back of a receiver. Speaker outputs are arranged in a single row at the bottom. Composite and S-video jacks are the next row up. Above them are the analog audio jacks, along with a seven-channel input and component video connections. The top row is devoted to digital ins, preamp outs, two RJ-45 jacks to accommodate PC and custom interfaces, and several remote interfaces. There's also a covered jack for software upgrading. I've never spent so little time plugging a new receiver



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into my system—it took less than five minutes from start to finish.

The setup menus took a bit longer. It took me a while to discover that they're only accessible from the learning remote's audio mode. Tim Wyatt of Rotel straightened me out on that. I set my Paradigm Studio/20 speakers to small to smooth out their upper-bass peak and selected an 80-hertz crossover—not because I'm a THX slave, but because that's what sounds best with my Paradigm PW-2200 12-inch sub.

As I calibrated the volume levels, I found that the Rotel's interface requires a button punch to move from speaker to speaker, and that's exactly how I prefer it. Don't you hate surround processors that jump around before you can get a fix on

**C. The RSX-1065's remote is a fairly basic learning model with an LCD.**

your SPL meter's wiggling needle? Finally, I set the delay times, which required some elementary arithmetic to determine the differences between speaker distances and select the correct amount of delay in milliseconds. (With most receivers, you key in the speaker distance, which is a lot simpler.) If you have any questions about the setup procedures, an unusually literate manual is there to help.

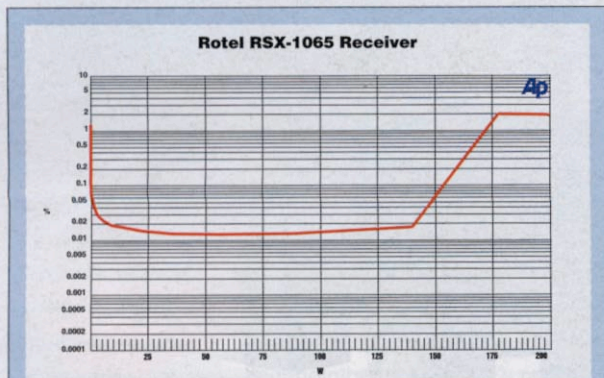
I used the RSX-1065 with the Pioneer DV-37 DVD player, a Marantz DR6050 two-drawer CD recorder, a Rega/Shure combo for vinyl, and an Archos Jukebox Recorder for MP3, as well as my beloved two-year-old Zenith DSV-110 DLP projector, of course. Regrettably, I didn't have a source component on hand that was compatible with my small SACD and DVD-Audio collection, although the RSX-1065's rated frequency response of 10 Hz to 95 kilohertz via the line inputs makes it a good match for these high-resolution formats.

Before I began my critical listening, I warmed up the receiver with some FM. Rotel's top end was polite enough to roll off some of the FM hiss that I usually hear from chip-based tuners. The sacrifice in detail was minimal, though. I could still hear a subtle timbral change—along with the telltale clicks and pops—when the DJ switched from CD to vinyl.

I started my CD listening with Eric Dolphy's *Out to Lunch*, and pleasant surprises were in store. First was the way the music seemed to rear up out of a backdrop of

inky silence. Timbre reproduction (a critical factor when the band-leader is switching between alto sax, bass clarinet, and flute) was excellent, even in low-level unison passages when the layered sound gently undulated like the breathing of a sleeping puppy. I could hear Tony Williams' cymbals occasionally oversaturating the original analog tape. A short, sharp, sudden note from Bobby Hutcherson's vibes was startling in its attack. It actually made me twitch. I was hooked.

Dolby Pro Logic II allowed the flat, clean recording to fill the room without allowing the surrounds to become intrusive. As usual, I set up the music mode with the panorama control on and adjusted the side-to-side and front-to-back balances to middling values. To compare DPLII with other modes, I turned to Radiohead's *Kid A*, which is full of phasey information that sends matrixed surround processors into overdrive. In DPLII, Thom



### HT Labs Measures: Rotel RSX-1065 Receiver

This graph shows that the Rotel RSX-1065's left channel, from CD input to speaker output with two channels driving 8-ohm loads, reaches 0.1% distortion at 153.6 watts and 1% distortion at 171.7 watts. Into 4 ohms, the amplifier reaches 0.1% distortion at 198.5 watts and 1% distortion at 237.9 watts. With five channels driving 8-ohm loads, the amplifier reaches 0.1% distortion at 106.8 watts and 1% distortion at 135.4 watts.

The analog frequency response measures +0.08 decibels at 20 hertz and -0.20 dB at 20 kilohertz. Looking at a broader bandwidth, the response measures -0.12 dB at 10 Hz and -0.93 dB at 50 kHz. THD+N from the amplifier was less than 0.031% at 1 kHz when driving 2.83 volts into an 8-ohm load. Crosstalk at 1 kHz driving 2.83 volts into an 8-ohm load was -70.56 dB left to right and -71.49 dB right to left. The signal-to-noise ratio with 2.83 volts driving an 8-ohm load from 10 Hz to 24 kHz with "A" weighting was -90.94 dB.

From the Dolby Digital input to the loudspeaker output, the left channel measures +0.45 dB at 20 Hz and -0.01 dB at 20 kHz. The center channel measures +0.03 dB at 20 Hz and -0.07 dB at 20 kHz, and the left surround channel measures -0.07 dB at 20 Hz and -0.21 dB at 20 kHz. From the Dolby Digital input to the line-level output, the LFE channel is -0.02 dB at 20 Hz when referenced to the level at 40 Hz and reaches the upper 3-dB down point at 111 Hz and the upper 6-dB down point at 118 Hz.—AJ

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Heatsinks on front serve both form and function
- 5.1 channels times 100 watts
- 7.1 preamp outputs
- Swooningly rich, clean, multi-layered sound

Yorke's delicate, reedy tenor (along with the rhythm section) provides an emotional anchor front and center, while the keyboards and effects tend to slip back and forth between the front and rear speakers. In Rotel's 5-channel-stereo mode, which spreads two-channel sources across all speakers at all

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times, the surround effects were far too omnipresent for my taste. None of the four DSP modes sounded completely natural—only DPLII maintained the stereo mix's tonal balance.

The HDCD indicator lit up when I put in Joni Mitchell's *Court and Spark*. To defuse any surround-related issues, I switched to stereo. On the title track, I could easily hear the difference between the close-miked vocals to the right and the more-distantly miked piano to the left. Even with the center speaker silent, there was no hole in the middle on the more-luxuriantly arranged tracks—this receiver images like a pro—and I could hear instruments arranged a few feet ahead of or behind the speakers. I was still in a magically altered state as I headed out into the rain to pick up a few DVD rentals.

With the *Sopranos* DVD, I wanted to hear how the RSX-1065 rendered the opening theme's pounding bass line with the Studio/20s run full-range and no subwoofer. Could it power a quintet of slightly aggressive 6.6-inch woofers without starving the tweeters? Yes, it could, and with virtually no congestion. After one episode, I switched the sub back on and reverted to the 80-Hz crossover.

The sound of Steinway grand pianos filled my home theater the night I rented *The Cliburn: Playing on the Edge*, a documentary about the Van Cliburn piano competition. Director/producer Peter Rosen

chose not to use surround sound for the first half of this 160-minute documentary. Respecting his decision, I decided to keep both the dialogue and the piano-playing in the front of the room and opted for the Dolby 3 Stereo mode. The second side of the DVD features James Conlon conducting the Fort Worth Symphony Orchestra in full-length Dolby Digital 5.1 performances of Tchaikovsky's first and Rachmaninoff's third piano concertos. Needless to say, the performances by pianists Stanislav Ioudenitch and Olga Kern lit up the hall. Surround effects were wisps of hall ambience. I felt as though I were sitting in the middle of the concert hall, right where I wanted to be—not onstage, not inside the piano, and not in the back row of the balcony. The sound was so natural that it triggered memories that normally come back to me only in concert halls—very personal stuff. When it was over, I realized that I had been playing the system at concert-hall volumes. The Rotel was up to the volcanic Russian passions of Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff, with effortless peak control and a strong sense of low-level dynamic shading. It's not every day that a home theater system brings me to the place where I was that night.

Contrasting DVD rentals of *Gun Shy*, a comedy with Liam Neeson, and *Captain Corelli's Mandolin*, a World War II drama with Nicolas Cage, showed that a rural Greek-island village can

have more-interesting surround effects than a sterile depiction of Manhattan. *Captain Corelli's* opening scene features church bells, the clip-clop of horses, and the shuffling of a human procession

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on dirt roads. But the most meaningful surround effect came from the buzzing insects that flooded the soundfield, a symbol of the village's robust organic life. They abruptly disappeared during the battle scene, only to return when normal life resumed at the film's end. Normally, I'd say something about the war interlude's busy surround effects, but, after the soothing idyll of the movie's first half, the battle scene left me so shaken that all I could write in my notebook was "the horror of war."

Has this been an unusually emotional receiver review? Have I been affected more by my choice of programming than by the receiver? I think it was a combination of the two. I chose the piano competition and the rural drama precisely because I wanted to be dazzled, to be enveloped in a womb of sound. And so I was. This smooth, powerful receiver freed me from any need to fixate on technical shortcomings and let me watch and listen in the moment, following the artists' emotions wherever they took me. And they took me places I won't soon forget.

\* Mark Fleischmann is the author of *Practical Home Theater*, which is now available through [www.practicalhometheater.com](http://www.practicalhometheater.com) (or 800/839-8640).

