



Arc Light

Meridian's new G08.2 CD player brings serious style, sound and sonics for substantially less money than their acclaimed high end players, says David Price...

The MCD was Meridian's first ever Compact Disc player, audaciously launched as the world's first such specialist hi-fi machine back in 1984. I'm not sure if Philips and/or Marantz would agree, given that it was a lightly tuned CD100/CD63 (which was certainly no bad thing), but it nevertheless set the blueprint for CD player design during the eighties, and showed how careful attention to detail over a silver disc spinner's various subsystems (power supply, passive componentry, vibration damping, etc.) could yield real sonic rewards. Oh, and it looked great too...

It was, along with the subsequent MCD Pro, a compact and swish piece of kit with gently 'breathed on' styling from Meridian's Allen Boothroyd,

design director of Meridian and MD of Cambridge Product Design. He'd had a good few years, with everything from the bold Lecson range to the striking yet tiny 100 series of Meridian separates to the BBC Microcomputer, as arrows in his design bow. It was this striking industrial design, plus simple ergonomics and serious attention to sonics, that defined Meridian. And lo and behold, here we see it again, over a quarter of a century later with the G08.2...

By any standards, I think this is a beautiful product. Whereas I think Meridian rather lost their way for some of the last decade, with too much reliance on black plastic as a case material, here the company is back to its brilliant best. The 440x350x90mm 8.2 is hewn

largely from aluminium, smoothly but unfussily surfaced, with the company's trademark glass top. It's a solid piece of equipment, and weighs 8.5kg to prove it. The fascia is interesting, with a large multi-character dot-matrix vacuum fluorescent display. By today's standards – beautiful fine pitch OLED and all that – the Meridian's display looks a tad dated, but still it blends in nicely with the overall fascia design so it's not distractingly old hat; tech obsessed sixteen year old boys would doubtless call it 'old school' and believe it to be deliberately retro...

I like the way the control keys get their legends from the display *a la* F80, and also the soft blue backlighting behind the keys. I'm also a big fan of the slot loading drive, which is becoming increasingly



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popular of late; it's much nicer than having an (inevitably cheap) CD-ROM disc tray wobbling and grinding its way out to greet you. In use, the player as a whole feels slick and svelte, far more so than many similarly priced machines. As far as I'm concerned, the company is back at the front of the 'feel good' queue with the GO8.2. Round the back it's also pretty slick, the Meridian is a veritable festival of socketry; optical and TOSLINK digital output, RCA phono and balanced XLR analogue outputs, an RS232 port (remember them, microcomputer fans?), Meridian Comms socketry and an IEC mains input.

Inside, the CD mechanism itself is securely mounted, and as per all ROM drives, is capable of spinning up to many times 'real time' speed to perform multiple high speed re-reads to ensure the best data capture; it's said to provide ten times the error correction of a conventional CD player. Then the onboard digital signal processor (said to work at up to 150 million instructions per second) upsamples the signal to 24bit, 176.4kHz for the onboard DACs and 88.2kHz for the digital outputs. The digital filter is a custom Meridian design with 'apodising-like'

qualities; this first appeared in the 808.2, the company says, and there's also a triple buffering system said to minimise jitter, plus a new design of high-stability clock. Multiple power supplies ensure that digital and analogue circuitry are kept apart and properly aspirated, and multi-layer boards are said to reduce system noise.

SOUND QUALITY

Every inch a modern, high quality CD player, the Meridian delivered a grand, spacious and poised performance with every disc it span. Central to its character is a very powerful bass, which doesn't sound overblown yet is not that far from it; there's absolutely no sensation that the Meridian is a thin, lightweight, weak-kneed contraption. Instead, it announces the GO8.2's presence in the room and in the system in no uncertain terms. Fragile State's 'Every Day a Different Story' was a case in point, the washes and swirls of analogue synthesisers fluttering behind an extremely voluminous acoustic (as opposed to electronic) bass guitar which might as well have been a real instrument plugged into the auxiliary input of my amplifier, so strong was it! This underpinned a wide, capacious

soundstage that doesn't get much bigger via 16bit digital disc, and a busy upper mid and treble, bristling with detail. Happily, the Meridian managed to set all the various items in the mix neatly together with one another, all in their right places, in an utterly unforced way. It was this particular aspect of its sound – along with that vast bass – that really sets it apart from other similarly priced machines I've heard.

Staying with techno and moving to 4hero's 'Planetaria (Hefner Remix)', and it was again a chance to sample some beautiful bass, this time courtesy of real double bass, counterpointed by some deft snare drum work and cascading strings. The Meridian again showed itself as a major player, sounding suitably



fulsome and confident, utterly in control and unfazed by the sinewy rhythm part. This, rather better recorded and less electronically processed track (with largely acoustic instruments, recorded back in 1997 on analogue tape) gave me a chance to get a handle on the GO8.2's tonality. I have to say I've found some Meridian electronics a little dry sounding at times, and it's certainly true that this machine doesn't give an overly rosy rendition of the recording, but if anything I'd say the 8.2 is slightly on the smooth side; without doubt it's not as clinical and thin as some Meridians we've heard in the previous decade. The superb detail rendition across the board means it's actually very good at capturing the unique tonal 'texture' of different instruments, going way beyond a perfunctory reading of what's on the disc. Again, this is the sort of thing that marks it out as a serious machine.

Stanley Clarke's 'I, 2, to the Bass' was a visceral delight; I heard this 2003 masterpiece in all its glory, the Meridian supplying a wonderful groove inside which the great man's low frequency histrionics were delivered with real authority. At the same time, Q-Tip's great vocal work was carried with excellent timing; all the things that people used to say about CD (and indeed still do) seemed to recede into irrelevance as this player let the music sing. Importantly, this isn't a player that itself sings; it doesn't euphonise, embellish or augment the original recording; rather I got the feeling of it very carefully, systematically and purposefully unlocking it; letting out for the wider world to hear. Thus the GO8.2 displays excellent timing, deep and brooding inter-transient silences and wonderful attack when the next snare hit is delivered. Dynamically too it was a complete success; unlike some higher end machines it doesn't assault you and try to take your head off, by emphasising rhythmic accents as if to make a point. Rather it just lets the proceedings flow, according things an appropriate volume in a calm and unforced yet musically expressive way.

Moving to some classic, slickly recorded late seventies rock music from Supertramp, and 'Take the Long Way Home' assuaged any doubts I had about the Meridian's top end. Earlier in the audition period I'd felt it just a tiny bit lively, shining slightly too bright a light on the proceedings. It turned out that running in and warming up was all it needed to smooth out; the mix on this album is quite topky (presumably mixed for

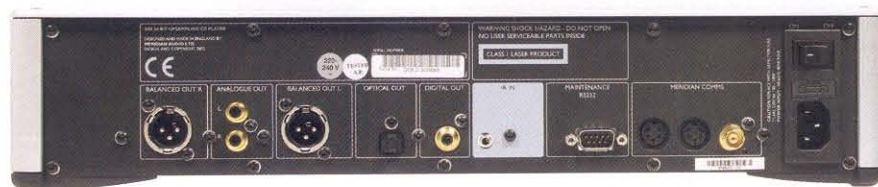
seventies Stateside FM radio) and yet the 8.2 wasn't falling over its feet. Rather, it remained smooth and clear, with vivid detailing to, and a pleasing atmosphere around, the soaring hi hat and harmonica work. I also enjoyed the richly resonant piano sound, dripping with harmonics (well, as much as it possible with 16bit) and coming over with real finesse.

Highly accomplished with electronic dance, jazz fusion and rock, I was intrigued to see how well the Meridian would perform with classical and it was here I got my biggest surprised. The superb Linn recording of Mozart's 'Symphony 29 in A major' (Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Sir Charles Mackerras) showed how this player can really lock into what's going on deep down in the recording, and as such it responds brilliantly to this flawless production. The 8.2 was breathtaking here, providing an incredibly lifelike string tone, devoid of screech yet getting deep into the grain of the massed violins; you could hear the bows on the wires as easily as the players themselves, yet there was a massive, cavernous recorded acoustic inside which the vast physical presence of the orchestra was set. Superb in transcription terms, the Meridian didn't just stop there; it made the music flow with gusto, holding the listener a captive to the musical event before them. Again, this combination of being terribly assured and calm yet passionate with it, proved a winning one, making well recorded classical music a pleasure.

CONCLUSION

An excellent all round performer, the Meridian GO8.2 is largely agnostic about the type of music you feed

it; it rejoices in pretty much every genre from techno to classical. It's very powerful and commanding by nature, yet incisive too, so listeners soon find how high it can fly with especially well recorded discs. Tonally it's excellent, with real finesse and delicacy, but it won't smother harsh recordings in a comfort blanket and isn't the machine you buy to calm a hard sounding system. Put it on the end of a well balanced set of mid or high price hi-fi separates though, and it's an unalloyed pleasure. So, with top-notch sonics, lovely build, fine ergonomics and superlative styling, this machine seems a veritable bargain even at its not inconsiderable price.



VERDICT

Everyman's modern high end CD player; this stylish, well made Meridian has an extremely enjoyable yet refined and incisive sound.

MERIDIAN GO8.2 £2,400

Meridian Audio Limited

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www.meridian-audio.co.uk

FOR

- commanding sound
- midband clarity and ease
- expansive soundstaging
- design, ergonomics, build

AGAINST

- nothing at the price

REFERENCE SYSTEM:

Marantz CD72 CD player
dCS Debussy DAC
Musical Fidelity AMS35i integrated amplifier
Yamaha NS1000M loudspeakers

MEASURED PERFORMANCE

Frequency response of this player was perfectly flat to 20.2kHz our convolved impulse response shows. This will give the Meridian absolutely accurate subjective tonal balance, but it will not soften out the sound of older CDs as some players do.

The balanced outputs give a high 5V output and the unbalanced phono sockets 2.5V, also quite high against the Philips standard of 2V. Distortion from both outputs was the same, measuring a low 0.018% at -60dB, a very low value. This resulted in a good EIAJ Dynamic Range value of 98dB.

Jitter was extremely low all round, with signal related jitter induced by a -60dB 1kHz tone measuring a miniscule 12pS, the random jitter noise floor just 5pS and low rate clock drift 25pS. These are all class leading figures.

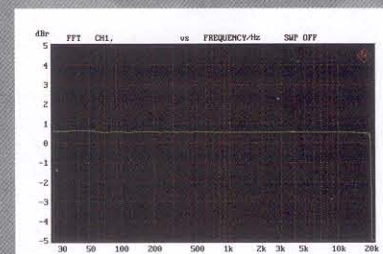
The Meridian GO8.2 measured very well in every area and should give fine sound quality. NK

Frequency response (-1dB)
CD 2Hz - 20.2kHz

Distortion
0dB 0.001
-6dB 0.0007
-60dB 0.18
-80dB 2.8

Separation (1kHz) 110dB
Noise (IEC A) -114dB
Dynamic range 98dB
Output 5V / 2.5V

FREQUENCY RESPONSE



DISTORTION

