

Meridian 880 Reference Music Server features MLP

Meridian Lossless Packing is to be used in the 880 Reference Music Server, one of the recent announcements by Cambridge-based Meridian Audio. MLP is the loss-less compression technology used by DVD-Audio, but its flexibility allows any audio source to be stored in compressed form without compromise, unlike MP3, the standard lossy format used by the majority of music servers.

The 880 will not be for the financially faint of heart, Meridian have suggested the retail price will be somewhere between \$17,000 and \$20,000 when the product makes its debut in January 2003.

The following is the preliminary data supplied by Meridian, but all specifications and features remain subject to change.

Meridian 800 Series

Meridian's 800 Series is the benchmark reference by which the highest quality disc playback is judged. The 800 CD/DVD player has taken the highest honours for its Class A+ playback of CD, DVD and DVD-Audio. It is no accident that Meridian's 800 is often found in studios where superior discs originate. Generally regarded as the ultimate system for music listening, the 800 Series uses advanced digital-audio techniques to extract every last nuance from the disc. Features like multiple FIFO buffering and upsampling reduce jitter to vanishingly low levels, providing exquisite imaging, detail and depth. Meridian's 800 Series has a card-based architecture: each machine can be individually specified to match your system and cards can be changed to keep each system at the leading edge as technology advances.

Meridian 880 Reference Music Server

First, imagine owning a CD player that provides the finest attainable sound quality... Now imagine that this player could store your entire music collection at this perfect sound quality. Interested? Now, imagine instant access to any song, any album, or to a genre or one of many play-lists at the touch of a button. Imagine a searchable database that catalogues your collection automatically; no more searching through piles of discs for that particular performance! Every music lover can grasp how wonderful this possibility would be, but when combined with Meridian's legendary sound quality the prospect is truly compelling. Finally, imagine that this player could play up to four different songs simultaneously and send the music to separate rooms.... Meridian's 880 Reference Music Server does all this and more!

Inside the Meridian 880

Meridian's 800 Series architecture bridges the worlds of computers and high-quality audio. The 880 exploits this through the addition of three hard drives and specialized processing hardware and software.

A selected high-quality CD-ROM reader is used to copy tracks from your CDs to the hard drives. Providing the Music Server is connected to a suitable network, detailed information such as album, artist and track names are automatically fetched from Internet databases. Each CD album (or individual songs) can then be accessed by name, genre, artist, or added to one of many custom play-lists.

Importantly, the copy which is made of the CD is bit-for-bit accurate; a 100% precise copy of the digital data archived in the 880. When playing back, the Meridian 880 uses classic 800 Series techniques to provide the very best sound; no fewer than 4 FIFO buffers smooth out all possible jitter, while proprietary resolution-enhancement DSP up-scales the audio to 88.2kHz/24bits. Audio comes out on one or more of the standard 800 Series output cards. Each card has two or four independent outputs and you can specify outputs to suit each of four zones as digital or analogue, balanced or unbalanced.

MLP: the Magic Ingredient

Meridian Lossless Packing (MLP) was developed by us to be the 'gold standard' for lossless compression of audio. Put simply, MLP compresses music data files so that they use less space on a disc. MLP provides significant robustness for the audio it stores and is unique in providing a real-time bit-for-bit check as the audio is played back. MLP is so good that it was selected as the mandatory lossless compression standard for the DVD-Audio format.

The Meridian 880 Music Server includes an MLP encoder and four decoders. By using MLP we increase the storage capacity of the Music Server to around 750 hours at maximum, legendary sound quality.

Music Server

The primary source for music stored in the 880 Music Server will be CDs from your collection. The goal is to significantly add value to your music library by providing simpler and improved access to the content. 880 can also store any other audio fed to one of its stereo inputs. The standard chassis provides digital inputs. Optionally you can fit analogue inputs and even a phono card for turntables. So, if you wish, the 880 can be used to archive radio broadcasts, LP records or even precious 78s! The 880 also offers MP3 lossy compression. Obviously with lossy compression the sound quality is lower, but the capacity of the Server is much greater (up to 4,000 hours). You can opt to store some albums,

songs or radio broadcasts in MP3 whilst maintaining the maximum quality of MLP for the bulk of stored audio. With a network connection to a PC, you can move MP3 files or downloads to the Music Server. The same connection can be used to manage the server and to backup its content.

System possibilities

The Meridian 880 can be used to feed up to four independent systems using analogue or digital connections. It can also be combined with other components as part of a stand-alone system. An ideal combination would include a Meridian 800 (to play back DVD and DVD-Audio) and an 861 to provide surround capability. Alternatively any zone can use a preamplifier or surround controller or simply a pair of Meridian DSP Loudspeakers.

User Interface Options

The Meridian 880 provides a number of interface choices. It can be operated from the front panel or with a Meridian System Remote (provided). In this mode the 880 behaves just like a CD player except it displays additional information such as song name on the front display.

A more advanced graphic interface is also available if you connect either an SVGA display (e.g. a flat-panel monitor) or a TV screen. Optional software is available for Palm-based PDAs. These devices can synchronise with the 880 and provide hand-held access to the database and control of the server. All the user-interfaces allow music selection by album, artist, genre or individual play-list. In addition the 880 is also compatible with a number of leading multi-room controllers using XiVA-Link protocol over RS232.

Product Highlights

- Bit-accurate Meridian Lossless Packing data format delivers music-server speed, power, and convenience with Meridian sonic excellence.
- Pro-grade CD-ROM-reader for disc archiving; CD playback.
- Meridian Reference Series 800 digital-audio quality with proprietary multiple "FIFO" buffers, up-sampling 88.2/24-bit data format.
- Interface with Meridian preamp or controller, or drive Meridian DSP speakers directly.
- Multiple-output (analogue and/or digital) options can serve music to up to four rooms/zones simultaneously.
- Card-based architecture empowers individual configuring and prevents any possibility of obsolescence.
- 3 HDD's yield 750 hours full-quality MLP playback w/ instant

access, and full searchability and virtually limitless play-list options.

- Automatic internet retrieval of artist, album, track data w/ flexible stored-database sorting, access features.
- Analogue inputs (a phono input card is optional) for archiving any audio sources.
- Includes Meridian System Remote tabletop wireless controller; advanced on-screen command available with SVGA or video-output monitor connected.
- Optional software available to enable Palm PDA, Philips Pronto to function as hand-held controller/database-access device.
- Full control, media-system integration via RS-232.
- Ethernet connection for network/database access.

Taken from High Fidelity Review.com

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