

Meridian G07

Trebles all round for an updated British classic

One of the UK's leading digital audio companies has a complete new range: Andrew Everard tests its entry-level CD player

When I first spotted the new Meridian G Series products at the 2003 International Funkausstellung show in Germany, I was immediately taken with the styling of the new line-up. In place of the slightly odd 500-series looks – very distinctive but, with its little 'fillet' controls, not the most pleasing to use – the new range had cosmetics clearly drawn from the company's flagship 800 products, and managed to look both purposeful and understated in the traditional Meridian black finish. I wasn't sold on the optional silver; I still feel that it makes them look overly glitzy. However, lifting the G07 CD player from its box for this test I was impressed by the feeling of solidity and the immaculate finish.

With industrial design by Meridian co-founder Allen Boothroyd, the player retains the familiar Meridian glass top-plate, but the new wider casework now carries larger buttons for the main transport controls, and the player comes complete with the company's new MSR+ 'table-top' remote control. This not only 'drives' an entire Meridian system, but can also learn the commands required for other companies' components as well as having an onboard library of codes for such products.

At £1595 this is the less expensive of two new Meridian players, and replaces the old 508 machine – for an extra £655 you can buy the G08, which adds an upsampling system and balanced outputs. And as I mentioned, it's part of an extensive new range from the Cambridgeshire company, encompassing two DVD players, a novel DVD player/tuner/pre-amp, stereo and home cinema controllers, a stereo receiver and no fewer than five power amplifiers – three stereo and two five-channel.

All these components can be used to create conventional stereo or multichannel systems, or used with the company's digital active loudspeakers. Meridian's own communications system is fitted alongside the standard phono audio outputs and optical/electrical digital feeds, and the company sells all the cabling needed to set up a complete active system. The software has been designed for discretion, so that most of such a system can be hidden away, using the display on, say, the CD player or even one of its digital speakers to show all the information the user could want. It really is a beautifully integrated set-up, maximising user-convenience without compromising performance.

This player may have a direct line of descent from the old Meridian 508, but inside the

Performance

Give the Meridian a couple of days to warm up and bed in – the main power switch is on the rear, with a standby control on the front – and it delivers a sound as cultured and controlled as it is open and informative. You may find it relaxed or even lazy to start with – it certainly doesn't call attention to the brightness or speed of its sound on initial audio – but the player reveals its finer qualities within a day or two of listening. The Meridian delivers an open, highly detailed treble without shrillness or excessive brightness. There is a fine sense of space and ambience, as well as the scale and weight appropriate for large-scale orchestral and organ music.

Precision is what this player is all about: from the finest detail



Striking new styling for the Meridian G series, and the player sounds fine, too

resemblance is now scant. The transport mechanism has a new laser assembly, optimised for CD and CD-R/RW discs, and the digital-to-analogue conversion is a 192KHz/24-bit system, although of course operating at the usual CD 44.1kHz sampling rate. Meridian has installed multilayer circuitboards and there are four separate power supplies to minimise interference. The digital outputs are reclocked, while the direct-coupled Class A output stage is there for maximum audio quality. Meanwhile, the flexibility of the player is maximised by an RS232 port allowing computerised control in custom-installed systems, along with other connections for external control.

of strings or woodwind to the power of brass attacks and decays, the Meridian delivers a really full-blooded sound without ever sounding like it's trying too hard to impress. Play Trevor Pinnock's acclaimed reading of Bach's Six Partitas, on Hänssler, and the precision with which the leading edges of notes power from the speakers is as glorious as the natural fade of notes into the recorded ambience. The overall effect is enchanting, with no lag or smearing to lessen the impression of fine playing, beautifully recorded and reproduced. I'm often asked what I mean when I write about the 'speed' of a system – either the music is played at the right rate or it isn't – and the Meridian provides a good demonstration of what

MERIDIAN G07

Type CD player

Price £1595

Disc formats CD, CD-R/RW

Digital to analogue

conversion 192kHz/

24-bit-capable delta/sigma

Outputs Stereo analogue,

on RCA phonos, plus

optical/electrical digital

Communications sockets

Meridian comms, plus RS232

Dimensions (W x H x D)

440 x 90 x 350mm

Made by

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I'm on about: the notes come across crisply and cleanly, without that sense one can sometimes have that the hardware is struggling to fit them all into the time it has available.

Large-scale orchestral works – such as the CD layer of DG's recent Super Audio CD release of Holst's *The Planets* and Grainger's *The Warriors* with the Philharmonia Orchestra conducted by Sir John Eliot Gardiner – show the same qualities in abundance, but also illustrate the power and drama with which the Meridian can convey the music. It may not match the potential of its SACD layer on good hardware – switching to my reference Sony machine opens things up to an appreciable degree – but by the standards of conventional CD playback there's little to fault in the Meridian's presentation.

As the G07 looks understated, so it sounds. Meridian have avoided the more cynical tricks which are sometimes used to make a player sound 'exciting'. And just as it feels built to last, its musical abilities should keep you entertained for many years. This is another fine machine from one of the pioneers of audiophile CD playback, and I can only hope the rest of the G series proves as impressive. 