NEW FROM SOOLOOS: ADD A

ZONE TO YOUR SOOLOOS SYSTEM

By Jeff Dorgay

In the beginning, the Sooloos featured a Control (which held the system core and the touch screen), giving you access to the Source (which provided analogue and digital outputs in either one or five zones) and the Stores (the physical location of all of your music files), all connected via Ethernet to link the system together. But computer years are like dog years; things move quickly.

After Meridian purchased Sooloos, the next-generation hardware introduced the Control 10, which incorporated the Source and Control into the same box and added the option of Meridian's Speaker Link system. All of which meant that the Sooloos could be used directly with a pair of powered Meridian speakers to make for a complete system.

These changes represented a quantum leap in Sooloos audio performance and build quality, but users requiring a number of zones had no choice but to purchase the somewhat expensive Control 10. No longer. The Media Source 600 includes this functionality, allowing for a pair of analogue outputs (one balanced XLR and one balanced RCA), an SPDIF digital output, and an RJ-45 Meridian SpeakerLink output essentially equating to the addition of three more zones to your Sooloos system.

Each can be controlled by a Sooloos Control, iPhone/iPad, or via another computer that shares the same network as the Sooloos system.

I found this set-up very handy, as it allowed me to move the Control 15 closer to my listening position and the Media Source 600 to my equipment rack. Now, the extra analogue outputs drive System Two and the SpeakerLink outputs are available to drive the DSP3200 powered speakers. Indeed, any of Meridian's powered speakers make for an ideal solution for someone who wants high-performance audio without all the boxes, cables, and associated components.

A Model of Simplicity

The Meridian Sooloos Music Server redefines the often-overused phrase "plug and play." And after using practically everything else on the market, nothing else gets me to play quicker. While the manual speaks of advanced functions that can be accessed from a Web browser, I didn't bother investigating them. All I needed to do to integrate the Media Source 600 into my existing system was simply plug in an Ethernet cable from my router and power it up. Within about 2 minutes, the Control 15 recognized the additional zone.

In my main reference system, and for the bulk of my listening tests, I utilized the Media Source 600 in place of my Control 15 as the connection between my music library and dCS Paganini stack via the SPDIF output.

Of course, the only drawback to using an iPad/iPhone as a Sooloos controller is that Apple devices do not offer the same interface touted by the Control 10/15—specifically, the placement all of the album art at your disposal, thus allowing you to peruse your music collection much faster than doing so alphabetically.

To avoid any potential confusion, please note that the Media Source 600 does not have an internal hard drive and hence, does not have the "system core" that's required from a standalone Sooloos device. A Media Core 200, Media Core 600, or Control 15 is needed on the network to drive the system. So think of the Media Source 600 as an "expansion port."

Functionality and Sound

The Sooloos system accesses high-resolution audio files, so you can keep all of your music in one place. If you are like most Sooloos owners and possess a fairly large collection of standard 16bit/44.1khz CDs, you'll be happy to know that the Media Source 600 utilizes Meridian s current upsampling and apodising filter. CD files emerge from the SPDIF output upsampled to a 24bit/88.2khz bitstream, while high-resolution files pass through in their native formats.

Meridian founder Bob Stuart told me that the DAC and analogue sections of the Media Source 600 are very close to what's available in their current G08 CD player. Since there's no digital input on the Media Source 600, the system reads all the audio data that goes to and from the Sooloos components via the Ethernet network. For home automation, there's a remote 12v. trigger as well as the option to connect a Meridian IR receiver so that basic functions can be controlled with a standard

Meridian remote.

Playback through the analogue outputs was excellent, possessing all the refinement I expect from a $4,000-$6,000 player. Having spent a good deal of time with the 800 series players and the G08, I can authoritatively state that if there is one hallmark of Meridian players, it s tonal correctness. The company bridges the gap of providing a digital player with high resolution that does not cross the line and become overly analytical or digital sounding.

When listening to recent Audio Wave XRCD24 discs from Horace Silver and Donald Byrd, I was repeatedly impressed with the lack of grain present in the upper registers. Cymbals took on a three-dimensional shape and the soundstage was fleshed out, especially when the discs were compared to their analogue counterparts from Music Matters. Most importantly, when contrasting the sound from the digital output of the Media Source 600 to that of the Control 15 (both fed through the four-box dCS Paganini stack), the Media Source 600 definitely came out on top.

A Winner Either Way

If you need to expand your current Sooloos system beyond one zone and do not require the six-zone support provided by the new Media Core 600, the Media Source 600 is a highly cost-effective solution. Or, if you are considering adding a Sooloos Control 15 to an audio system that doesn't currently possess an excellent DAC (and you aren't quite ready to step up to the $18k Meridian 808.3), again, here's your answer.

Meridian continues to refine the Sooloos Music Server system by adding features, increasing flexibility, and most importantly, improving the sound quality with every new bit of hardware released. The Control 15 represented a definite step forward in resolution and lack of grain from the Control 10, and the Media Source 600 takes the whole presentation a step further. So even if you don't yet require an extra zone yet, I highly suggest adding the Media Source 600 to your Sooloos system.

Meridian Media Source 600