

HI PERFECTION

Many of us are struggling to marry the new digital era of limitless music downloads with our old music collections and a love of truly high-fidelity sound. Meridian's new Sooloos system may just be the answer



To anyone familiar with the world of music (and let's face it, these days that's everyone), Meridian's new Sooloos system seems familiar enough. In the jargon, it's a home media server that digitally stores your music collection, and also employs a user-friendly interface as its primary control. But so is iTunes. Yet Sooloos is being billed as a revolution for the luxury music industry. I set out to find out why.

Having installed the system in my loft and turned the volume to a decent level, the first thing I noticed (and any audiophile would also remark upon) is that the sound quality is impeccable at all volume levels. Digitally stored music often trades high fidelity for convenience, much to the chagrin of those who like to spend as much on their sound systems as they do on their luxury cars. But here, Hallelujah, I heard the warmth in every detail Handel's Messiah, and every track besides.

Perhaps this was enhanced by my test system being paired with Meridian's own active DSP5200 loudspeakers, but as any music lover knows, speakers can only reproduce what's being played, and the clarity owes many thanks to the lossless digital transfer language Sooloos employs when storing your CDs on its system. To explain: most other digital



systems massively compress the musical data so more can fit onto a computer or MP3 player. Sooloos's large servers allows the music to breathe as the composers intended, and this is amply evident every time you use the system. As an added bonus, your local dealer will transfer all your CDs onto the system for you, a nice touch allowing the typically time-poor Meridian client to take delivery of a system full of their favourite tunes.

Meridian also offers clients a bespoke installation service where the digital components can be installed complete, or integrated into an existing set-up.

According to Meridian's Director of Business Development, Roland Morcom, "most clients already have multi-room audio at home - Meridian or otherwise - into which digital music is the next logical step".

The heart of the Sooloos system is its 17" touch-screen control pad which controls a series of modular data storage units - effectively huge hard drives that can be stored away in cupboards. The control pad looks like a portable LCD TV, and, spouses will be delighted to note, can be colour-co-ordinated to existing decor or furniture.

Browsing through your music collection is simple and pleasurable. You can see album artwork, as well as track listings, professional reviews,

and credits. It only needs the prod of a finger to navigate. All this is particularly useful if you choose to 'swim' through your collection. 'Swimming' allows you to select genres, styles, artists, moods or even producers' works, and plucks hidden treasures from the depths of your library. In my case, Handel's evangelical Messiah was followed by Faithless's thumping *Insomnia*.

The palindromic Sooloos division was acquired after recent investment in Meridian by the Richemont Group. This marriage of Meridian's expertise in high-end audio, Sooloos' US digital nous and Richemont's pedigree in the luxury market is a compelling blend, and Morcom claims that the best is yet to come. "These are future-proofed systems which evolve, automatically updating as users add CDs to their collections, and a global network of information develops. Software enhancements are added in system downtime, and due to the screen interface, music videos will become a logical next step."

Meridian Boutiques - one is due to open in London by the end of 2009 - will soon expose the audiophile's favourite to a new, brand-savvy global audience that appreciates the technical mastery of the company but likes the point-and-push simplicity of its controls.

Sooloos is the future in all its exquisite, digital glory - and little else will match its combination of sound quality, ease of use and electronic mastery. Sooloos is moved home audio into a new, far higher, plane.

- James Winkworth

meridian-audio.com