

Two-box splendour that makes use of advanced technology brings finesse to the sound



Meridian's latest puts performance before price

Meridian 500/563
CD transport/DAC: £1670

For Lucid, sweet yet powerful sound; detail well integrated

Against Remote costs £50 extra

Verdict ★★★★★☆
 More accomplished than Meridian's 200/263ΔΣ combination, this new partnership also represents a step-up from the already excellent 506 one-box player. But we can't help feeling that, with all but the very best systems, the 506 offers better value
Meridian 0480 434334

Hot on the heels of the 506 one-box CD player comes Meridian's 500 series transport and DAC. Yet this combination is more than a 506 seen in half and fitted with two sets of power supplies – the £695 563 also uses a more advanced converter system than that found in the integrated 506.

Hook the 500 transport and 563 DAC together and it soon becomes clear that the sound is different, too. There's still that big-boned, powerful rendition you get with the 506, but the 500/563

delivers considerably more than that. What immediately strikes you is the scale and warmth of the sound – not a cloying, muddling low-end richness that slows rock music, but rather a sense of effortlessness and utmost control.

Load up Kate Bush's *The Red Shoes* and you very quickly realise what the 500/563 can do. The soundstage is big, airy and detailed, with an almost valve-like sweetness and warmth. Every element of the music is perfectly proportioned and deliciously realistic but, more than that, the Meridians get inside the passion of the music, capturing Kate Bush's slightly fragile voice perfectly and setting it against the backing vocalists.

That's not to say the 500/563 is only at home with tinkly acoustic music. Switch to the Bush/Prince/Lenny Henry collaboration *Why Should I Love You?* and the two-box is at ease with the mix of slightly ethereal backing and close-focus lead vocals at the beginning as it is when the track explodes into a more typically

Prince-like rocker. True, the brass and percussion can get a bit glassy when the track's busy, but experience suggests this is a deficiency of the recording not the hardware.

Listening to a recently released, and impeccable, recording of the Rachmaninov *Symphonic Dances*, it was hard not to get swept up in the flow of the music, so luminously does the Meridian partnership convey the playing.

Never having been in the St Petersburg Philharmonic Hall (the venue of this recording) we can't judge the accuracy of the soundstage created, but it's certainly very appealing. As is the ability of the Meridian to place the orchestra convincingly in that soundstage, its effortless delivery of instrumental timbre and orchestral scale, and its big, warm, agile bass.

A striking combination, the 500/563 is worthy of extended audition. However, users who don't necessarily want a two-box player might find the excellent £795 506, at a little over half the price, offers the better value.

INSIDE STORY

At the heart of the 563 DAC is Meridian's new high-definition dual-differential version of the conversion technology of the moment, claimed in this application to give 19-bit precision. The 500 transport has a new high power digital output amplifier for low jitter. This potential source of distortion is also reduced by the reclocking of the signal in both the transport and DAC, for smoother transfer of digits.

Such advanced technology must at least partly explain the rare and skilled balancing act this two-boxer manages to pull off – bass weight perfectly integrated with a highly detailed midband and treble.

Up to four digital inputs (including one optical) can be accommodated, and the output is via either conventional phono sockets (used for this test) or balanced XLRs.