



Meridian G91

Meridian's DVD-Audio player/controller/tuner is both unusual... and utterly brilliant!

PRICE: £3,985 CONTACT: Meridian Audio, Latham Road, Huntingdon, Cambridgeshire PE29 6YE ☎ 01480 445678 🌐 www.meridian-audio.com

The £3,985 Meridian G91 is no ordinary DVD-Audio player. It's actually a CD and DVD-Audio player/controller/tuner, as it includes a built-in Meridian digital processor, together with an AM/FM radio tuner of a very high quality. But, instead of the regular six-channel analogue outputs found in most DVD-Audio/Video players, the player downmixes to stereo analogue audio, or delivers the audio digitally through a series of three digital links.

These links are designed specifically for connecting the Meridian G91 to Meridian Digital Active speakers, although these links can also be used with a Meridian G68 room-correcting surround sound controller. This means the G91 cannot deliver conventional analogue multichannel DVD-Audio to non-Meridian systems, where it's limited to acting as a CD/DVD-Video player through its conventional single S/PDIF connection (DVD-Audio signals cannot pass along the standard S/PDIF) or as a downmixing stereo preamp for the DVD-Audio/Video, CD and tuner sources. Those who want a more conventional DVD-Audio multichannel player, complete with 5.1-channel analogue outputs, should look at the equally excellent Meridian G98AH instead.

“It has an intrinsic sense of balance that draws the listener into the music beautifully.”

The player resolves data at 48-bit precision, which means up-scaling CD to 88.2kHz or 176.4kHz – or delivering 96kHz or 192kHz sampling rates for DVD-Audio – at 24-bit resolution is a doddle. Likewise, the player has a proper video scaler, which can convert humble analogue video pictures into high-density multimedia interface (HDMI) digital pictures, coping with current and high-definition formats. There is no Scart socket, but it will likely be used in systems where Scart is just too primitive.

With such a complex product, installing and fine-tuning the G91 is best left to the professionals. This leaves you with the MSR+ handset and the front panel to play with. The on-screen and especially front panel displays are complex, but need to be, because of the configurability of the player. This means overkill on the front panel (do you need to know the sampling rate of a disc when playing?) but

at least there's a human-friendly volume knob. Of course, this being a Meridian product, it's actually a fully digital, precision rotary shaft encoder which translates the rotational position of the knob into a specific digital signal that attenuates the volume.

SOUND QUALITY

For once, here's a DVD-Audio/Video player with the sort of sonic authority that's usually the preserve of high-quality dedicated CD players – few video-capable players manage it, even when playing a hi-res music format like DVD-A. Factor in stereo imaging that's extremely focused, and possessed of the sort of wide, deep and even forward-projecting soundstage that cries out for the best speakers and the sort of detail that makes you able to hear into the recording, and you get some idea of what the player is doing right. It's not musically metronomic or charmingly unforced in its delivery of a beat, but it has an intrinsic sense of balance that draws the listener into the music beautifully. In essence, DVD-Audio 'simply' increases that balance, adding extension, detail... and eventually three and a bit more channels. That 'simply' is, in fact, crushingly difficult and no player we've encountered so seamlessly integrates CD and DVD-Audio.

No passage in particular highlights what the G91 does well, because it's uniformly good at all genres and all formats it can cope with. Damien Rice on CD sounded so real, so in the room, that you could almost reach out and hand the man some Prozac. While, on DVD-Audio, the moody *Riders on the Storm* (in stereo, remember) sounded so broody and malevolent, you might think you're in a flood.

In picture terms, this is one of those rare players that raises the performance bar so high that its performance on S-Video is better than many cheaper players playing RGB. It has exceptional colour depth and focus, with the sort of precise detail that makes every disc look more like film. Move to one of the more upmarket output formats like HDMI and the picture is even more staggeringly real – state of the art, in fact.

What's not to like about the G91? It looks great, performs well and does about ten jobs at once. There's an aura of confidence surrounding this player/processor/thingy that is all too rare in hi-fi and practically non-existent in home cinema. It's a great CD player, a class-leading DVD-Video player and an exceptional DVD-Audio player – in stereo, or (with the help of other Meridian gear) in multichannel too. **HFC**

Alan Sircom

See HFC 260 (November 2004) for our original review of this product