

MERIDIAN M6 ACTIVE SPEAKERS

READY, SET, GO!

By Jeff Dorgay



When was the last time you set up an entire music system in under five minutes? I'm guessing never.

In case haven't had the opportunity to use one, the Meridian Sooloos digital music server, now called Meridian Digital Media System, it is by far the worlds easiest to use – and I've used them all. The larger and more diverse your music collection, the more manageable it is, with all your music right at your fingertips, allowing you to sort through it and ultimately *listen* to it on multiple levels.

For those in the choir that I'm already preaching to, have you tried a pair of Meridian active speakers?

Listening to the M6 speakers connected to a Meridian Media Core 200, which holds up to 2000 CDs in a small box, barely larger than a Mac Mini, I ponder just how far the British hifi industry has come in the 55 years since my trusty Quad 57's hit the scene.

In the time it took my next door neighbor to grab refreshments from the refrigerator, the M6s were set up and playing music, in this case "Egypt by Air," courtesy of the Bombay Dub Orchestra. While there are multiple connection options, depending on which Meridian front end you care to use, all that is needed between the Media Core 200 and the right speaker is a length of RJ-45 cable. Home Depot cable will do, but I suggest the Meridan SpeakerLink cable, because it's not that much more, is expertly terminated and is very thin, fitting into your décor very unobtrusively. It is available from your Meridian dealer in lengths from .5m to 15m. String one more length from the right speaker to the left and plug the two power cords into the wall. Done. Those using the Audio Core will connect left and right channels separately, as in a standard hifi system.

Always curious to what those not of the audiophile brotherhood think about the latest hifi gear, I made it a point to have a few extra guests over to peruse the M6/Media Core 200 system while it was here. It was precisely the hit I anticipated – and then some. Most of my friends know I'm a bit off the deep end, but the combination of these speakers and 2,000 CD's, all controllable by an iPad proved too much for even the most anti hifi person to resist. Not a single wife or girlfriend uttered the four word death knell to all things audio, "not in my house."

Beautifully Built

These speakers epitomize high style and high quality. Barely a foot in diameter at the bottom, gently taper to about four inches at the top, their cylindrical shape covered in a tight black fabric, with a brushed aluminum top cap. While the 5-½ inch woofer faces downward, the full range driver (crossed over at 200 Hz) does face forward, so this is not an omnidirectional speaker, though it does have very wide dispersion. The small Meridian logo on the base indicates the front of the speaker and which way you should aim it. A slight bit of toe in worked well in room two, with the speakers about 8 feet apart. The cabinet is made from a strong yet lightweight composite material, very similar to what Meridian uses for their F80 and M80 compact audio systems. The M6s are built at Meridian's facility in Cambridgeshire.

The M6 utilizes Class D amplification rather than the Class A, discrete amplification in the other models, making the compact shape possible. The M6s tip the scale at just under 40 pounds, so they are easy to set up and move about your listening space. These speakers also lack the Meridian System Remote of the larger speakers, and separate SPDIF digital input. Speaker Link is the only option for the M6, limiting source components to other Meridian products.



Quick and easy, yet highly versatile

Once plugged into the wall, and wired thusly, the band at the top of the M6s glows with a medium blue tone, indicating they are powered up and in standby mode. Upon pushing play, the glow turns to a soft white. With nary a fancy wire product in sight, the M6s delight. The traditional audiophile might suspect heresy, but the music lover will be delighted.

A number of system options await you. One of Meridian's Media Cores or their new Audio Core 200, that looks like a compact stereo receiver, adding DSP speaker control, bass and treble level controls and the ability to add analog sources, like the output of your television or even a turntable. (Via outboard phono stage) Like the larger DSP series of Meridian speakers, the Audio Core 200 lets you optimize LF output in accordance with where you have the speakers placed in the room, however, the Media Core 200 does not offer this functionality. For those with a Meridian Digital Media System system already installed, the M6s can be connected in another location with network access via the Media Source 200, which allows complete access to your music library, yet running a separate data stream.

This makes it a snap to indulge your musical tastes in one part of the house, while the rest of the family is enjoying something else in the living room. All controllable via iPod, iPhone or a networked computer, though maximum functionality is only available with the Control 15, or an iPod, via a free app on the App Store. This lets you scroll through your music by album cover, as you no doubt remember it best.



Serious ability

Meridian's DSP speakers have always offered phenomenal bass response and these slender cabinets do not disappoint. Cranking up the volume control as Rory Gallagher's "Brute Force and Ignorance" hits the play queue reveals that the M6s ability to rock the house. A series of heavy tracks

leaves the M6s unfettered and prove that they can play at considerable volume without listener fatigue. The dense bass line on David Byrne and St. Vincent's latest *Love This Giant* gives pause that these diminutive speakers can offer so much heft.

Sampling the Bad Plus' *For All I Care* reveals how well the M6 provides room filling sound at low to modest volume. This mixture of piano and acoustic bass is rendered across the soundstage convincingly, reinforcing the way the M6 paints an acoustic landscape – this is not a “pinpoint imaging” experience, but somewhat more diffuse. More like a pair of Magnepans than a pair of mini monitors in this sense. The more reflective your room is, the more the presentation extends beyond the speaker boundaries.

The low crossover point lets the Meridian full range driver do much of the work, so the critical midrange frequencies are not split up. This adds to the effortless character the M6 provides, highly noticeable with vocal recordings. Whether listening to Joni Mitchell or Frank Sinatra, the lack of midrange grain and phase anomalies usually caused by a crossover network in this range is a treat. It helps with acoustic instruments as well – both piano and violin shine played through the M6.

Thanks to their wide dispersion and powerful LF output, a pair of M6s is easy to place in the listening room and is not as position specific as many other speakers we have auditioned. If you're looking a pair of high performance speakers that go with the couch, these are the ones.



Practically a complete system

At first blush, \$9,000 for a pair of speakers is more than a casual expense, but remember, the M6s are much more than a pair of speakers; they include a *pair* of stereo power amplifiers (150 x 2 for the woofers 100 x 2 for the full range drivers), an active DSP crossover network, a DAC, and a preamplifier. Not to mention all of the ancillary cables that you don't have to purchase to make it go. Perhaps best of all, you won't have to look at all of that stuff in your room. You could easily spend a healthy percentage of the M6 price tag on three pairs of interconnects, a pair of speaker cables, a few mains cables and an equipment rack, perhaps more – and you'd still need to buy a system!

If you are a traditional audiophile that relishes an altar consisting of a large rack full of gear, a massive loom of cables, and all the anxiety that surrounds this affair, the Meridian M6 speakers will not fulfill your requirements. In the past, "lifestyle" has always been a risqué word when applied to audio, suggesting B & O at best and Bose at worst, yet Meridian produces a winner here, proving sculptural beauty and cutting edge audio performance can indeed coexist. However, if the concept of a music system that doesn't intrude upon your environment is appealing, look no further.

I urge you to visit your Meridian dealer and avail yourself to just how effortless this system can be.

The Meridian M6 Active DSP Loudspeakers

MSRP: \$9,000

www.meridian-audio.com

Associated Components: Sooloos Media Core 200, Sooloos Control 15

Taken from Tone Audio