

2004 Product of the Year Awards!



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ISSUE 152

Meridian's Marvelous New G Series

**G08 CD Player, G02 Control Unit,
and G57 Amplifier**

Meridian's G Series: G08 CD Player, G02 Control Unit, and G57 Amplifier

Sue Kraft

A little over a year ago, back in Issue 144, I wrote favorably about Meridian's 588 CD player, 502 controller, and 559 power amplifier. I was particularly impressed with the performance of the 588 CD player—so impressed that, following the review, I asked about purchasing the sample unit. Norm Steinke, Vice President of Sales, Meridian, America, suggested that I might want to hold off for just a while longer, as a replacement for the 588 was in the works, along with an assortment of associated components comprising an all-new G Series model lineup. Since Meridian hadn't introduced an entirely new line in over a decade, this was exciting news indeed.

While the G Series components are first-rate stand-alone pieces, the best sound by far is achieved when partnering them as a system.

The long-awaited and much-anticipated G08 upsampling CD player finally found its way to my listening room a few months ago, as did a G02 control unit and G57 power amp. As much as I've truly enjoyed the 588—which has been my digital source of choice for some time now—after hearing the new G08 it took all of two seconds to have it packed and



ready to go back to the factory. Talk about good things coming to he (or she) who waits. The new Meridian G Series is, in a word, stunning.

The sound is unmistakably Meridian: exceptionally balanced from top to bottom and everywhere in-between. You won't hear a note out of place with this stuff. The music—or more precisely, the emotion of the performance—flows from the speakers with a grace, poise, and effortless sure to stir the soul of even the most dispassionate listener. I've not heard a more elegant sound emanate from a transistor-based system in quite some time.

In going back to the now discontinued 500 Series gear, I was more aware of speaker placement in the room, as the sound traveled on somewhat of a beam towards the listener. And as smooth as I once thought the 588 and related components were, they now seemed almost grainy in comparison. With the G Series, the sound emerged with exquisite ease in every direction, opening up into

a gloriously expansive soundspace, with no particular emphasis on any frequency range. My attention wasn't drawn to the deep powerful bass or extended highs or lusciously smooth midband; the music was just there, as if originating out of nowhere—and it was divine.

The late Ray Charles' voice may have been a bit frayed at the time from ill health, but his duets with Norah Jones, Bonnie Raitt, and Gladys Knight (among others) on his final album, *Genius Loves Company* [Concord], were absolute magic. I still didn't hear the "air" surrounding instruments traditionally associated with tube gear, but you couldn't ask for anything more gorgeously smooth and grainless.

And almost as gorgeous as the sound is the sleek new full-width look, featuring all-metal construction along with Meridian's traditional black glass accents. Available in pearly silver or all black, the G Series is highlighted with a new user interface, rotary volume controls, and easy-to-read fluorescent displays. These

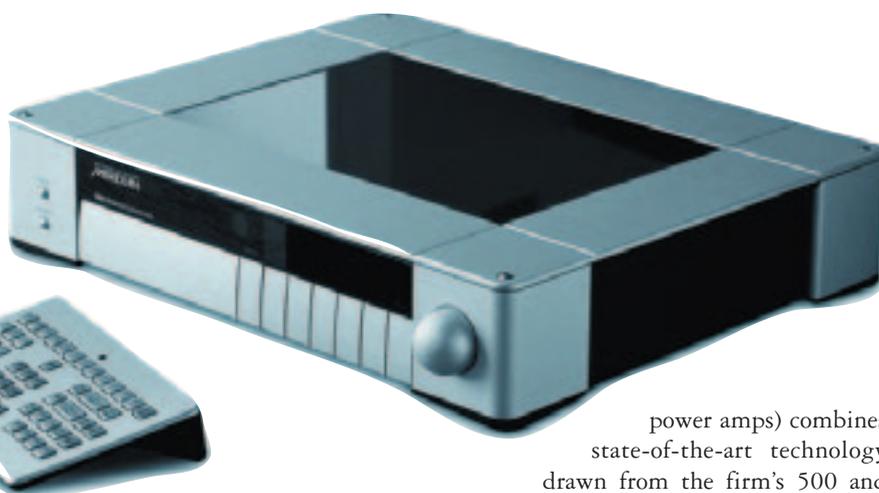
machines have class written in spades all over them. There's even a fresh take on the Meridian System Remote Plus, which is now backlit and fully programmable. I've never been a fan of remotes, but for those who are—I know people who have more remotes than pieces of gear to use them with—this one will undoubtedly prove to be an indispensable addition.

While the G Series components are first-rate stand-alone pieces, the best sound by far is achieved when partnering them as a system. All three are sonically cut from the same rich cloth, the full beauty of which isn't realized until they are heard as a whole. That's not to say you wouldn't be happy with any one of them. I'd take the G08 in a heartbeat, all by itself. But if you'd like to transform the grin of sonic satisfaction into a full fledged ear-to-ear smile, give a listen to the G08 paired with its analog siblings. And fortunately, because of Meridian's relatively affordable pricing (\$2995, \$3595, and \$3995 for the G02, G57, and G08 respectively), building a G Series system should be an attainable goal for most.

I spent hours sifting through old favorite recordings, many of which were easy to identify by the multitude of CD enhancements that have been applied to them over the years. With remnants of contact paper still visible on the top side, green ink and a CD

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condom around the outside edge, and a Finyl sticker on the jewel case, the Pat Metheny Group's *Still Life (talkin')* [Geffen] proved that not only was the Meridian G Series a wonderfully soothing and relaxing listen but,



when called for, had plenty of spunk and enthusiasm as well. Again, the soundstage was impressively broad, tall, and deep, with well-formed images and a sense of overall refinement that just isn't typical of mid-priced gear. Truth be told, the very first words that popped into my head upon hearing these components were "sounds expensive." And the more I listen, the more I think my first impression was exactly right.

Although I'm sure there are any number of cables out there that would work well with the Meridian gear, I'd like to briefly note the Audio Magic Trinium ribbon interconnects as I feel they were at least a contributing factor to the seductively smooth and delicately detailed nature of the sound. My long-time favorite Harmonic Tech cables had a bit more impact, but not nearly the same level of sophistication as the Triniums.

For the technically minded, Meridian's G Series (comprised of a dozen new components including CD and DVD-Audio/Video players, analog preamp/controllers, surround controllers, a receiver, and a selection of

power amps) combines state-of-the-art technology drawn from the firm's 500 and flagship 800 Series with the latest innovations from the Meridian research and development teams. The G02 controller replaces its predecessor, the 502, and features true balanced dual-mono construction as well as a unique dual-differential volume control. The G57 follows in the footsteps of the company's flagship DSP8000 digital loudspeaker amplifiers, sharing many common design parameters such as ultra-low feedback and capacitor-free signal paths. Rated at 200Wpc into 8 ohms, the G57 is capable of delivering a full kilowatt, when bridged, into 4 ohms. And as mentioned earlier, the G08 replaces the popular 588 and is built around a computer style CD/DVD-ROM drive capable of spinning the disc much faster than needed for standard CD operation. According to Meridian,

ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Meridian 588 compact disc player; Edge G1, Atma-Sphere MP-3, and Meridian 502 preamps; Edge NL-10, Atma-Sphere MA-1, and Meridian 559 amps; Tube Audio Design TA-30 integrated amp; B&W 704, Von Schweikert VR4jr, and Coincident Total Eclipse speakers; Coincident TRS and TAD Joe-Zen speaker cable; Harmonic Technology, Audio Magic Trinium, and Purist Audio Design interconnects; JPS Kaptovator, TG Audio 688, EPS Statement, Signature 2 and Signature 3 power cords; PS Audio Ultimate Outlet; Symposium Svelte Shelves and Rollerblocks

SPECIFICATIONS

G02 control unit

Inputs: Four unbalanced/three balanced

Outputs: One unbalanced/one balanced

Dimensions: 17.38" x 3.54" x 13.78"

Weight: 18.7 lbs.

G08 upsampling CD player

Analog outputs: One unbalanced RCA, one balanced XLR

Digital outputs: S/PDIF, coax, TosLink optical

Dimensions: 17.38" x 3.54" x 13.78"

Weight: 18.7 lbs.

G57 stereo power amplifier

Power output: 200Wpc

Dimensions: 17.32" x 5.20" x 13.78"

Weight: 44 lbs.

this allows for multiple high-speed re-reads, providing ten times the error correction ability of a conventional CD player. Once the data are recov-

I'm still taken aback every time I sit down to listen by just how effortless, refined, and absolutely gorgeous this stuff is.

ered, Delta-Sigma converters upsample the digital signal to 24-bit/176.4kHz.

Although Meridian has been doing analog for over a quarter century, I'll confess to being one of those who considered the British firm's forte to be on the digital side of the tracks. The 500 Series components I reviewed last year certainly began to sway my thinking and now the G Series has compellingly dispelled that notion altogether. Even after living with the G08, G02, and G57 for well over two months, I'm still

taken aback every time I sit down to listen by just how effortless, refined, and absolutely gorgeous this stuff is. All I can say is excellent, excellent, and excellent. 

MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

MERIDIAN AMERICA, INC

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Prices: G02: \$2995; G08: \$3995;

G57: \$3595

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2004
product
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awards

Welcome to our third annual Product of the Year Awards, in which our editorial team picks the most outstanding components from among the scores reviewed over the past year. Our Product of the Year Awards go not just to the most expensive items but to those that best combine sonic performance, technical innovation, value, and significance in the marketplace (such as redefining the performance available at a particular price point). We also award an Overall Product of the Year to the one component we consider the single most impressive.



Meridian G08 CD Player

\$3995

www.meridian-audio.com

Meridian deserves its reputation for excellent work with digital technologies, and the new G08 CD player—a standard Red Book machine with no DVD-A or SACD capability—continues the company's streak of excellence. Part of the all-new G Series, the 08 substantially better the unit it directly replaces, the 588. Its sound is unusually smooth and free of grain, with a beautiful overall tonal balance, and, rare for all but the very best digital, the ability to deliver the emotion in the music. And with the G08, the music flows effort-

lessly from your speakers, creating an impressive and convincing sound space. As reviewer Sue Kraft summed it up, "I've not heard a more elegant sound emanate from a transistor-based system in quite some time." WAYNE GARCIA (Reviewed by Sue Kraft in this issue)