

## The Power ARAY effect

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### Chord Company Power ARAY

The Power ARAY is the entry level component in the Chord Company's growing range of devices designed to reduce ground noise in a system. Following my review of Chord Co's Powerhaus M6 mains distributor it has become one of those items I live in fear of being asked to return. I attended a demonstration of various products featuring the Chord Company's ARAY grounding and filtering technology at the recent Bristol hi-fi show and was immediately impressed with the first item they introduced into the demo system, the Power ARAY high-frequency mains noise filter, reviewed here. The filtering process used in the Power ARAY is passive, the device is designed to be placed in a plug socket near the one that feeds your system or in the same mains block.

Having a price tag of £549, I was initially sceptical about something superficially resembling a posh-looking Russ Andrews Silencer. Such fears were allayed once the music started playing; the sonic effect was easy to hear in their Innuos, Naim and Bowers & Wilkins demo system. Notably improved was the music's definition and stereo imaging, along with a newfound sense of immediacy. The talk by Chord Co MD Alan Gibb explained more about the ARAY process, which began with experiments using grounding materials to find something that minimised noise but caused no harm to musical peaks and transients. The philosophy here is to prevent noise from entering the system's mains supply in the first place rather than filtering it out, which the Chord Company believe has a detrimental effect on your system's ability to produce a musical performance.

Rather inconveniently, many of the grounding materials used in the Power ARAY to filter this noise are significantly microphonic. Reducing this microphony involved a painstaking process of experimentation with different resins and bonding materials. The key here is finding bonding and setting products that themselves cause minimum harm to the grounding and subsequent musical performance. Naturally, any item that plugs into your household mains has

to pass CE regulations, which causes further design headaches. The Chord Company tell us that each Power ARAY unit takes a considerable amount of time to manufacture due to the delicate nature of the grounding materials and the bonding process employed. Suddenly the price of £549 started to make sense to me, and that was before I heard the uplift in performance it produced in the dem system.



### At Home with Power ARAY

The Power ARAY plug comes in a rather smart-looking cardboard box which, whilst I assume is not especially expensive to produce, is well designed and does add a premium feel to the product. The Power ARAY unit is solidly made and finished. I like the effect of the white Chord Company logo on top of the circular black plug. Using the Power ARAY in the PowerHAUS M6 mains distribution block the effect was immediately beneficial and in line with what I heard at the show. I found it surprising that such a product gives similar sonic benefits despite my mainly Moon and Totem system having a very different sonic balance to the one used by the Chord Company, but that proved to be the case.

I had the Power ARAY in my system for a couple of weeks before starting this review. I played a CD rip of *Lifeforms* by the Future Sound Of London and was reminded of just how good it is. Thanks is due to Rockdoc Matt McNulty who played this album to an enthralled audience in the Townshend room during a vinyl spinning session at the aforementioned Bristol show.

### Throbbing bass

Removing the Power ARAY from the system had me scratching my head, thinking the music had become less well defined and the presentation a little 'shut in'. Reintroducing the Power ARAY proved this was indeed the case. I confess to being pretty shocked at the magnitude of improvements brought about by the Power ARAY. *Lifeforms* contains many strange sound effects and often a deep, throbbing bass and many of these sound effects seem to leap from the speakers with the Power ARAY in the circuit. The bass is more defined and presented in its own acoustic space, giving the subjective impression of it being deeper. The piano in Nick



Cave's Lime Tree Arbour also took a leap forward in the soundstage and his voice was more focused. Percussion instruments were at once better defined and the drums moved slightly further back.

My eldest son is a fan of technical progressive metal, particularly within the Djent genre. One of the bands he recently introduced me to was Northlane from Australia. As Qobuz had priced some of their music temptingly low, I purchased downloads of their albums *Alien* and *Obsidian*. The Power ARAY had a great effect on this dense and dynamic music, allowing me to hear into the mix in an expanded soundstage. Speaking of the family, when I played Massive Attack's *Unfinished Sympathy*, firstly without and then with the Power ARAY in the circuit, my wife, who usually cringes when I try and convince her about any so called hi-fi tweaks, laughed at how easy it was to hear the effect of the Power ARAY. Her words, "It's like going from 2D to 3D and it sounds much more alive with the box plugged in". Clearly, the Chord Company are onto something here.

Any negative effects? Not in my system but, as a word of caution, the music is presented in a more spotlight fashion, which may not suit a system that already errs towards brightness. Products like the Power ARAY merely remove noise, which allows you to hear more of what your system sounds like. I can imagine some buyers needing to make adjustments elsewhere in systems that contain components or cables that sound brighter than neutral.

#### Power ARAY conclusion

I am sure the Chord Company will do very well with the Power ARAY. Whilst I am unsure how it would respond in a system that already contains alternative mains conditioning, regeneration or filtering products, I would advise all audiophiles to talk to their Chord Company dealer about trying one. I certainly have no plans to remove it from my system, and I think many audiophiles will feel the same.