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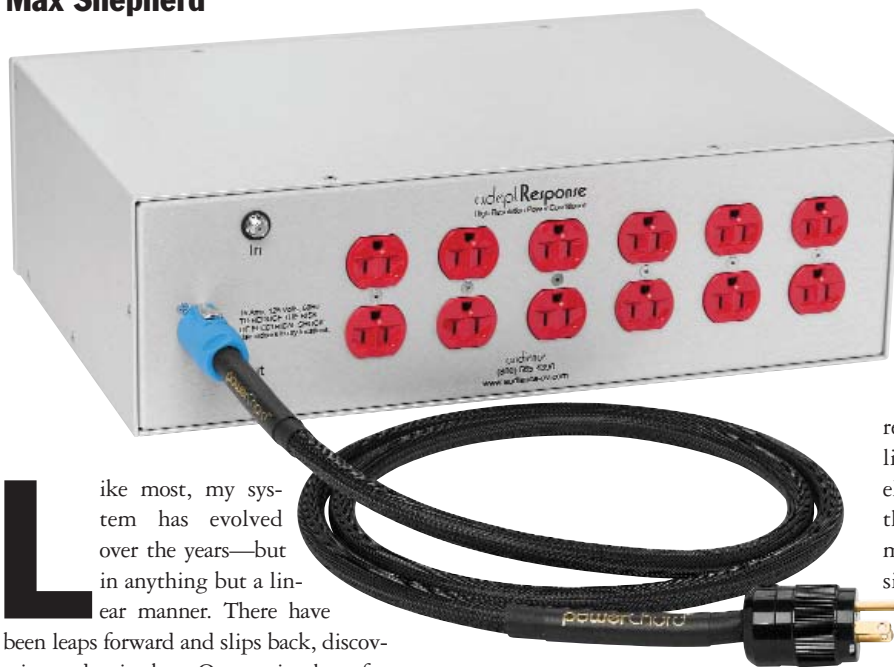
Issue 162

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## Audience Adept Response AC Power Conditioner

One reviewer asks the question, “Isn’t a dedicated line enough?”

Max Shepherd



**L**ike most, my system has evolved over the years—but in anything but a linear manner. There have been leaps forward and slips back, discoveries and mistakes. One major leap forward came when I installed a dedicated 20-amp line. I suspected my A/C current source was pretty ragged based on the age of my house and the look of the old, pre-Romex wires, but I honestly did not imagine what a difference a dedicated line would make. Even my Significant Other,

resolved. I mean what could go wrong? With nothing else on that circuit there was no other source of contamination. I continued to think this way until fairly recently when I began reading reviews and comments about line conditioners. Then I began to wonder.

### The Adept Response revealed the timbre of the brass in the horn, and let me sense not just its sound but also its heft and resonance

who had always been supportive yet skeptical of my quest for the audio Holy Grail, admitted the difference was not the sort that you had to strain to hear. The music just sounded better. Once the dedicated line was in, I thought my A/C current problems were pretty much

After two months of listening to my system with and without Audience's Adept Response, I realized I was in danger of sounding like a person claiming he had found a sure-fire product to cure warts, baldness, and the common cold, because in my system the Adept

Response was that good—across the full range of music from treble to bass—regardless of what type of music I listened to. Essentially, what the Adept Response did was eliminate something in my A/C current that prevented my system from presenting the finer details of the music, like the timbre of an instrument, the decay of a note, the air around a performer, or the tautness of a bass drum. In this regard the Adept Response functioned like a lens that sharply focused an image, eliminating any blur. And by doing so the Adept Response also revealed how much more musical my system could be, since much of the magic of the music is in these very details.

The first thing I noticed was how much more definition and information was available in the treble, without any increase in brightness. With the Adept Response, violin notes were transformed from slightly blurred, or smeared together, into distinct (if blended) notes from individual strings. The Adept Response had the same effect on snare drum brushes. Instead of sounding slightly dull, like broom straws, the snare drum brushes became distinct clusters of steel wires tapping on or grazing taut drum heads. The same was true of cymbals, where even the most delicate shimmer became audible.

I was equally impressed with the Adept's way with other instruments. Eric Marienthal's alto sax on *The Oxnard Sessions, Volume Two* [Reference Recordings] pulled up and away from a flat background to become a three-



dimensional horn playing in space. The change was that dramatic. Another difference I heard consistently was with the timbre of instruments. Listening to that alto sax again, the Adept Response revealed the color of the brass in the horn, and let me sense not just its sound but also its heft and resonance. This was equally true with other instruments such as stand-up bass or clarinet. I came to believe that the Adept Response's ability to reveal the timbres of instruments explained, at least in part, the increased three-dimensionality of the presentation.

As pleased as I had been with my system's bass response, with Adept Response it was simply better. On Massive Attack's *Mezzanine* [Virgin], the bass beats sounded like clean, tight thumps—rather than dull thuds. I had not been aware that I was hearing the bass beats as thuds until I ran an A/B comparison with and without the Adept Response. The improvement in the sound and feel of the stand-up bass in Madeleine Peyroux's *Careless Love* [Rounder] is also worth mentioning. With the Adept Response, the resonance and physicality of the strings became much more palatable—thicker without becoming blurred. What was also more

discernable was the sound of fingers plucking those thick metal strings.


The ability of the Adept Response to increase clarity was equally apparent with female vocalists. Peyroux's wonderful articulation of the lyrics in "Careless Love," her slurs and slides and undulations, subtle as they are, are part of why she sounds the way she does. I could now hear how she plays with her pronunciation, and enjoyed her all the more. Peyroux's voice also sounded slightly less nasal with the Adept Response. Norah Jones' *Come Away With Me* [Blue Note] illustrated how the Adept Response consistently clarified the position of each performer on the stage and increased the sense of the air around them.

Finally, an attribute of the Adept Response that I commented on repeatedly in my notes was its ability to reveal the natural decay of instruments. Of course, this quality had been somewhat audible before, but what became apparent with the Adept Response was that the decay had been truncated, cut off by or lost to a lack of clarity in my system. The ability of the Adept Response to reveal the natural decay of notes, which is admittedly a subtle attribute of performance, nonetheless contributed enormously to the realism and my

enjoyment of the music.

As one would imagine with players and instruments cleanly placed in three-dimensional space, the depth and width—but particularly the depth—of the soundstage increased significantly along with the blackness of the background.

If all of this were not enough, the Adept Response eliminated a slight, upper-midrange glare that had been present in my system and that was particularly apparent with piano music.

The Adept Response made a phenomenal difference in my system. Fundamentally, it improved the clarity of recordings by eliminating a previously undetected lack of definition, without introducing any brightness or most importantly any coloration. That is worth repeating. I did not hear any coloration from the Adept Response or any obscuring of the rhythm of the music. The Adept Response just made every recording I listened to more natural and in turn more musically engaging. Will the Adept Response make the same difference in other systems? I do not know. I suspect that, to a certain extent, the improvements experienced will directly relate to how corrupted your A/C supply is. But without question, this line conditioner is worth a listen. 

#### SPECIFICATIONS

AC outlets: 12  
Dimensions: 19" x 5" x 9"  
Weight: 16.4 lbs.

#### ASSOCIATED EQUIPMENT

Esoteric DV-50s CD player; Aesthetix Calypso preamp with Mullard Long Plate 12AX7 and Amperex White 6922 NOS tubes; McIntosh MC 402 power amplifier; DALI Euphonia MS-5 loudspeakers; Shunyata Aires interconnects; Shunyata Gemini bi-wired speaker cables; Shunyata Diamondback power cables

## The Details

**A**udience's Adept Response is available in either a 15A or 20A versions. The faceplate is grained and satin anodized with a swirl design reminiscent of Jeff Rowland's faceplates, but without the same jewel-like quality that Rowland achieves through a laser-cutting technique. The faceplate has an on/off switch and a digital LED display that provides a readout of the incoming voltage. The rear panel has 12 high-conductivity Hubbell power receptacles. The unit also comes with an impressive 6-foot 10AWG Audience power cord with Neutrik 20A PowerCon and Maringo power connectors.

Audience does not discuss—either on its Web site or the sheet that comes with the unit (there is no owner's manual)—exactly how the Adept Response does what it does. What Audience does say is that it designed the Adept Response to "present a low impedance power path that does not impede dynamics, while providing wide-bandwidth noise reduction and high voltage surge protection."

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#### MANUFACTURER INFORMATION

##### AUDIENCE

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Price: \$3800