

Posted by on :

ModWright Power Cord Shootout: 04.20.02

I would like to preface the following by saying that I have no desire nor intention of starting a firestorm with this post. I understand that power cords in particular are a subject of hot debate. I am not interested in entering arguments about objectivity, bias or personal taste. The following is quite simply what I found in my system with my music and my ears. Many people warned me about undertaking this process and I now understand why.

It is frustrating that I even have to preface this post with the previous statement, but my experiences since I have started this review process have encouraged me to do so. As you read this and before some of you rush to your keyboards to attack what is written, please understand that these are my opinions and my impressions.

First of all, following is a description of the system configuration as used for the power cord review:

Sony XA-777ES SACD/CD player with “Absolute Truth” mods, including tubed output stage and “Amp-Direct” mods, allowing the player to drive the amplifiers directly. Volume is controlled via a DACT CT-2 stepped attenuator installed in the player. No preamplifier was used in the audio signal path. NOS Tung-Sol 5687 tubes are used in the tubed output stage of the player. The outboard Tube power supply is fed with Mr. Cable’s “Performance 2” power cord. This cord was not changed during the review and was thus a constant.

Atma-Sphere M60-MKII monoblocks, highly modified, fed via a high-current power cable from Mr. Cable.

Jena Labs 8ft. Valkyre analog IC’s between source and amps.

3ft. Jena Labs Twin-11 speaker cables between amps and speakers.

Greybeard KB/2/2 speakers with Bybee filters installed at tweeters and woofers.

Line conditioning – all power cords reviewed are connected to Jon Risch AC line filter with cryo-treated Jena Labs outlets and a pair of Large Bybee filters filtering all power into Line Conditioner.

Tweaks and isolation: XA-777ES sitting on Aurio’s 1.1 isolation bearings. Shakti stone over power supply, on top of XA-777ES.

Some of the music used for the review included female vocals (Jenna Mamina) on Redbook CD, and Chinese instrumental SACD recording (River of Sorrow).

I had posted previously, indicating the cords that would be reviewed and this list has been modified. I found out that the cable from Bolder Cable had been burned in previous to being sent, so I did some additional listening and included this cable in the list. There were also some deletions to the list.

Following are the power cords that were reviewed and their retail cost. All samples were 6 ft. in length.

- 1) Bolder Cables – Type 2 AC power cable w/Wattgate AC connectors = \$200
- 2) LAT AC-2 = \$169
- 3) Zu Cable Birth = \$150
- 4) Synergistic Research AC Master Coupler = \$275
- 5) Harmonic Technologies AC-11 = \$199
- 6) Harmonic Technologies Fantasy AC-10 = \$399
- 7) Audience Power Chord = \$275

I was not able to employ any double-blind methods with regards to the comparisons, but I did keep factors

constant and only changed the power cord serving the SACD player. I listened to key tracks of which I was familiar. I played a track with a cord, listened and took notes and then switched the cord and listened and took notes again with the same track. I did this with a number of different tracks that represented the frequency extremes, vocals and instruments. Each cord was evaluated in as consistent a method as possible and then some final comparisons of specific cords were done to determine differences that I heard.

I also enlisted the ears of a couple of friends who I trust to give me objective input. In both cases, I kept my impressions to myself and let them listen. We then discussed what they heard and in 95% of the cases, they agreed. Not the most scientific method, but I offer this as a means of validating what I heard.

Okay, down to the Nitty Gritty:

Harmonic Tech. AC-11 and Fantasy AC-10 – Both of these cables performed exceptionally well and have a similar sonic character. The \$199 AC-11 performed very well in my system, offering both good bass response and good detail and extension, which proved to be a combination that many of the lesser-cost cables were not capable of delivering. The AC-10 definitely brings more performance to the table with its \$399 retail price and was ultimately one of my top picks. I found that the AC-10 provided good but not perfect bass. It was solid and present, but not quite as resolved as some of the others. It provided a clean sweet sound that was very neutral with little coloration, erring very slightly on the side of warmth and sweetness rather than being harsh or aggressive. Soundstage and micro-dynamics were very good, only a bit restricted compared to my personal favorite. I would without hesitation recommend either the AC-11 or Fantasy AC-10 for either tube or SS systems. I would say that they both have a very similar character, but with the AC-10 you do get what you pay for.

Synergistic Research AC Master Coupler – The master coupler is a solid performer and did a very nice job for its price point. My only complaint with the Master Coupler was that it very rigid and unwieldy in terms of fitting it in a rack. I found that the Master Coupler provided very good performance, similar to the Harmonic Tech AC-11, with a slightly darker characteristic sound. I found these two cables to be similar in terms of performance in my system. I gave the AC-11 the slight nod, but my friend Kevin preferred the Master Coupler of the two.

Zu Cable Birth – The Birth is another cable that is very well made, extremely flexible and easy to work with. I found that the Zu Birth excelled in terms of detail and resolution, lacking only slightly in terms of bass and weight. If the Zu Birth could provide good solid bass to match its resolution and detail, it would be a serious giant killer. At \$150 for a 6ft. cable, I found it to be one of the best buys of the group and in fact I bought it. This cable is a great solution for a system that is not lacking in bass response, which could benefit from good detail and resolution. I found it to outperform similarly priced samples in the group in terms of its lack of distortion and open sound.

LAT AC-2 - The LAT AC-2 is another very good value cable, featuring excellent build quality, ease of installation and relative flexibility and would be a good choice in most any system. The LAT AC-2 does nothing poorly, and in fact excels in bass response and weight. I found that extension and detail were not as open as the Zu Birth or some of the other cables in the group, but it was a very good all around performer and could be an excellent choice in a system that tends to be overly bright.

Bolder Type 2 – This cable did a good job of everything without overwhelming me in any one area. Bass response is good but not outrageous and detail and resolution is good, but not as resolved as many of the others. It is certainly an upgrade over stock power cords and is reasonably priced.

Audience Power Chord – The Audience product was a latecomer to the shootout and was a bit of a ‘Dark

Horse' in terms of the review. Physically unassuming and very flexible, the cable appears to be very well made. I had no preconceived notions about this cord to begin, having not really heard anything about it prior to the review. Because of this, its performance was a pleasant surprise.

I won't beat around the bush here folks, this cable was my favorite. I felt that it did everything well and succeeded in providing more information, more resolution and was simply more musical to my ears.

The cords that I found to rise to the top included the Harmonic Tech AC-10, AC-11 and the Audience Power Chord. They all simply did everything well. The Audience Power Chord had the edge in terms of absolute delicacy, sweetness (not to be confused with warmth), and refinement. When bass string was pluck or struck, I heard the bass note as WELL as the reverberation of the string and the resulting harmonics, all distinctly separate and defined. Listening to River of Sorrow – Immortal Chinese Instruments (FIM SACD), every detail and nuance of the music flowed freely to the listener without sounding harsh, overly warm or lacking any resolution. This degree of detail and micro dynamics naturally improved soundstage and presence, drawing the listener into the music.

Well, that about sums it up. I am sorry that this has taken me so long to complete, but we have been VERY busy lately. I am grateful to all of the manufacturers who sent me samples to review. I will be promptly returning those that I did not decide to purchase, this week.

In a previous post, I indicated that I would not include the Audience Power Chord in the review due to a "conflict of interest". The fact is, after reviewing all of the cables, I not only bought the sample that Audience sent me, but also agreed to be a dealer for the Power Chord through my company ModWright LLC. I agreed to become a dealer for the product prior to actually writing this review. I try to respect the rules of The Asylum and thus hesitated. I decided to include the results of my findings and include the Audience product however, as the actual review was done prior the decision to represent the product. I trust that if the moderators feel that this post is inappropriate, that they will remove it.

In closing, I would like to reiterate that the above review is based on MY impressions, in MY system and with MY ears J. I tried to be as objective as possible, but this review as all reviews, is to some degree subjective. I can only hope that for those who know me and my work that the above "review" will be of value. This quest was undertaken out of selfish interest as I simply wanted to see what power cords could really do in my system and to determine if they really made a difference. I obviously decided that they do and the journey was interesting.

I have shared my experiences here because I said I would. If you don't agree with them, that is your right ;). If you feel the need to argue my methods or the degree of objectivity used in the review, please don't bother as I won't reply. On the other hand, if you have constructive comments to add or questions of a constructive nature, I will attempt to answer as my schedule will allow.

Thanks,

Dan W.