

Ansuz Powerswitch X-TC audio network switch

by Jason Kennedy

When Melco announced a £2,000 ethernet switch in late 2019, everyone (including me) thought they had lost the plot. It's the sort of thing that makes the unenlightened think that we sound connoisseurs really are off our collective trolley. And yet when the Melco S100 came my way I had to admit that it made a significant difference to the sound quality of streamed audio, as big a difference in fact as a DAC or streamer at the same price. This must have become clear to Michael Børresen and Lars Kristensen, formerly of Raidho's engineering team who started Ansuz seven years ago as a sister brand for their Aavik electronics and Børresen speakers.

Ansuz was originally created as a cable and resonance control brand, it wasn't until 18 months ago that they started to make ethernet switches, but they picked up on the importance of this undervalued element and ran with it. The Ansuz Powerswitches are so called because there's a low voltage output beneath every RJ45 ethernet socket, these are

provided to power Ansuz's active ethernet cables. I should warn you that even though the X-TC costs £2,000 it is the entry level Powerswitch in the company's range, there are three others culminating in the D-TC Supreme at £12,000. All four inhabit the same large box, which is as big as many DACs and streamers and therefore bigger than any normal 10 port switch. It is also beautifully finished, using a 'natural based composite material' on a steel chassis with a very nice paint job.

The X-TC has an IEC mains inlet, there's no wall-wart power supply thankfully, but rather a resonant mode power supply. The RJ45 sockets have the flashing LEDs found on all mainstream switches but not on the Melco or English Electric models, presumably Ansuz don't think they are an issue. They identify the main problems to be resonance and noise on the network and combat the latter with a variety of 'Tesla coils', the more expensive the Powerswitch the more variety and quantity of these coils that are used. The X-TC has 12 active square Tesla coils, the D-TC Supreme has 90 plus two active ▶



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- ▶ cable Tesla coils and 60 active Tesla coils. Nikola Tesla's original coil was a transformer that produced high voltage, low current, high frequency AC, Ansz's version is a double inverted coil that's designed to cancel out voltage spikes and thus reduce noise; the more there are in parallel the greater the noise reduction.

This Powerswitch also has analogue dither circuitry which is designed to further reveal low level signals and derives from radar technology. All the Ansz Powerswitches have resonance control systems, mechanical grounding is one of the key tenets of the brand and this is achieved with Darkz Feet in the X-TC. These are a hard anodised aluminium and rather than damping provide a means for vibration to escape, which suggests that the nature of the supporting surface below is going to affect how well they work.

My network switch sits on a speaker stand, a wooden one from Hi-Fi Racks but it's not big enough for the Ansz so I put a board on top, hopefully this provided enough grounding for the X-TC. The English Electric 8Switch that's a hub for my network is attached to the router, the PC, an Innuos Zenith SE server, an Apple Airport Express access point and an Auralic Aries G1 bridge/streamer. Moving all five to the Ansz resulted in a big increase in image depth followed by a clear improvement across the board with pace and purity of tone being distinctly enhanced alongside a beautiful sense of ease. Notes and chords seemed to have more space and time to unfurl and it became clear that going back to the norm will be a painful process. From memory the Ansz has a more neutral less tonally rich sound than the Melco S100 but shares the effortlessness that it brings to streamed audio.

Radiohead's 'Decks Dark' [*A Moon Shaped Pool*, XL] delivered lovely bass weight and superbly resolved backing vocals that soared above the instruments and lead, the Powerswitch making the reverb changes on this finely nuanced production much clearer than usual. Going back to the English Electric (at a quarter the price) is a rude awakening, the presentation being perceptibly louder, brighter and cruder with a drier balance. Making the change back to the Ansz and using Qobuz rather than my local server to play Jeremy Cunningham's *The Weather Up There* [Northern Spy], you can feel the sound open up and relax, the instruments sounding totally real, especially the drums on this drummer's record, all

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Streaming audio network switch
 LAN Ethernet ports: 10 (via RJ45)
 Fibre optic ports: none
 Clock: not specified
 Packet data buffer: not specified
 Features: Resonance control, analogue dither,
 Finish: Silk black
 Dimensions (HxWxD): 69 × 261.5 × 377.6mm
 Weight: 3.7kg
 Price: £2,000

Manufacturer: Ansz Acoustics
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of which means that the groove is placed front and centre just where one imagines it's meant to be.

This switch brings a depth of sound; a roundness and body to voices and instruments that is obvious without comparison, Joni Mitchell's 'All I Want' [*Blue*, A&M] is a bit of a thin recording but the Ansz gives it a presence in the room that can only usually achieved with vinyl. All the quieter elements in 'Natural Mystic' [Bob Marley And The Wailers, *Natural Mystic (The Legend Lives On)*, Island] are clear, the overdubbed guitar, the hi-hat and the fabulous, muscular bass line. They coalesce perfectly too.

I also compared the X-TC to an old but well-regarded Cisco Catalyst 2960, which sounded hard and flat after the Ansz but did a good job with timing, it's coarse but musical. The Ansz managed to outgun it in every respect, delivering a genuinely three dimensional sound that was more involving and boogied even harder. You get all the energy without the noise that is the bane of digital systems. Playing the Grateful Dead's 'Cumberland Blues' (*Europe '72*, Warner Bros) you get the distortion from the guitars and the recording without the distortions of the network and this is not subtle, it's thrilling.

The network switch really is as important as the server, streamer and DAC in a streaming audio system, it's the fourth element and the Ansz X-TC makes this abundantly clear. You really don't know what streaming audio is capable of until you hear it with a network switch of this calibre. +