



Ansuz A2 Powerswitch, Digitalz, Mainz

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It has taken a few years for streaming audio enthusiasts to wake up to the importance of the network switch but ever since Melco released the S100 in 2019 this fact has begun to seep out and is gaining momentum. Last year Innuos unveiled their entry in this market the PhoenixNet yet before then a company in Denmark which specialises in power conditioners and cables had released not one but four very serious switches. I reviewed their entry level X-TC model in February and said at the time that I would be intrigued to hear the bigger models, that seemed to do the trick with the next model up, the A2 finding its way into the system at the end of March.

The A2 Powerswitch looks identical to the X-TC, it has eight ethernet ports accompanied by as many DC outputs for Ansuz's active digital cables. The large case is made of a composite material that's designed not to damp vibration but to channel it out through aluminium Darkz feet using mechanical grounding. Resonance control is a big thing at Ansuz, they state that: "Every component in an audio/video system vibrates and is sensitive to vibration... [which] comes from even the smallest transistor on a circuit board to the biggest bass drivers in loudspeakers." There is logic in this philosophy that a few others in this business seem to understand. But it does mean that the choice of support surface is more important than usual.

Unlike most network switches the power supply is onboard, it's a switched mode supply but such things are well suited to this application and when done well can be very good too. Ansuz say that theirs "boasts a particularly stable resonance mode" which has to be a good thing.

The Ansuz Powerswitches look pretty much identical to one another, what differentiates them is inside and this boils down to devices that the company call Tesla Coils. These are essentially filters and come in three varieties, the higher up the Powerswitch range you go the more you get both in terms of quantity and type. The A2 has two active cable Tesla coils and 90 active square Tesla coils, by contrast the X-TC has 12 of the latter and no active cable coils. The active square coils are printed onto a PCB while the active cable coils wrap around the power cable prior to the power supply, therefore reducing the amount of noise getting into the supply. The A2 also has twice as much dither circuitry as the X-TC, this is analogue dither and based on radar technology so not the same as the dither used in digital circuits.

Sound quality

The Ansuz A2 took its place in a system consisting of a Melco N1A EX music server, Auralic Aries G2.1 streamer and Vega G2.1 DAC, the router is a standard BT Smart Hub 2 with

its own nasty power supply (the router has such an unusual power inlet that I can't find an adaptor for something better). The switch is also connected to a PC and an Airport Express access point, so there is plenty of potential for incoming noise. I listened to a mix of material from the Melco and both Tidal and Qobuz streaming services with the feed to the streamer going from the Powerswitch rather than the music server. It normally runs from the Melco's 'player' output but this approach emphasises the quality of the streamer.



As the Ansuz X-TC was to hand a lot of comparisons were made with that switch, a device that made a very good impression and has become a benchmark. Moving over to the A2 brought significant gains in openness, image focus and projection, and perceived speed. The power and immediacy of the drums on Patricia Barber's *Company* was clearly enhanced to the point where the listener was inclined to join in with the flailing of arms, it's a physical sound, what are you going to do. With Sufjan Stevens' beautiful *Barcarola (You must be a Christmas Tree)* the timing is spot on, its restraint adds to the soft clarity of the song which in turn makes the lyrics easier to follow. On another track there was a clear increase in three dimensionality of image accompanied by better timing and a general increase in fine detail which made *The Dry Cleaner from Des Moines (Joni Mitchell)* sound that much more sophisticated. This switch seems to make the sound both more precise and fluent, qualities that are hard to achieve with digital audio. Jaco Pastorius' bass is taut and slick, propulsive and swinging.

On Laurie Anderson's *Gravity's Angel* the character of the instruments is stronger as a result of a clear increase in low level detail, which results from a lowering of the noise floor. That's how this Powerswitch works, it eats away at the noise, pushing it down so that the quietest notes are easier to hear and make sense of.



Ansuz also sent one of their power cables to try with the A2 Powerswitch, appropriately enough this was also an A2 Mainz model (the second tier up in the hierarchy). Replacing an Isotek Premier with this cable caused the vocal image to seemingly snap into place and the bass to increase in solidity, in fact imaging all over jumped up by several degrees. The whole sonic picture gains shape and definition as well as dynamics and precision. Encouraged by this I dropped in two Ansuz A2 Digitalz Ethernet cables between switch and server and switch and streamer. Here they replaced a Melco to the server and an Audioquest Cinnamon to the streamer. The result of this not insignificant increase in cable value was a dramatic opening up of the soundstage, one that seems to pull the performance out of the darkness into light. The image scale expanding in all three dimensions and brightening the dark corners of the recording in quite uncanny fashion. The combination of A2 cables and Powerswitch meant that everything played had far more depth and scale than usual, not unlike like changing speakers to something with significantly better dispersion but with fine detail that you don't necessarily get with a speaker change.



Going back to the switch I made a comparison with a real world network switch in the Cisco 2960, which has many appealing qualities especially when you use high end cables like the Ansuz ones on it. However the A2 Powerswitch made it sound very grubby indeed, removing a veil of hash and bringing out the character of voices and instruments, making them sound more realistic and even rather better played because it's possible to hear exactly what the musicians were doing rather than a vague approximation thereof. The Cisco is good at timing but this noise reduction improved even that key quality quite markedly. Finally I did the X-TC to A2 comparison on a different cable and speaker system, LA Sound Corium cables with Vivid Kaya S12 speakers, just to make sure the benefits were still clear. They were, in fact this time around there was a distinct sense of relaxation with the A2 alongside the qualities noted earlier.

The Ansuz X-TC is an excellent network switch, the A2 is a clear step better with higher resolution, better timing and an ability to open up the soundstage that's very appealing. The need to keep noise at bay means that the switch is as important a part of a streaming system as the streamer and DAC, the lower the noise the more natural and revealing the system. Adding Ansuz's matching A2 power and ethernet cables allow it to do an even better job and bring clear benefits in a revealing system, if you want to hear as much music as possible they are a key part of the package.