

TWO LINE FILTERS

How important is line filtering? Important enough that each time we bypass our own line filters we find the quality drop surprising, not to say horrifying.

We use several models in our three reference systems, including an Inouye that is about 15 years old, and a couple of GutWire MaxCon Squared filters. Both cost a little over \$1000. The first of the two filters we received for review is actually more affordable.

AudioPrism Power Foundation III

You may recall AudioPrism as the maker of the Iso-bearing, a little ball-shaped anti-vibration device we used to offer in our *Audio-ophile Store*. The company made other products, including tube amps, an antenna, and a series of power filters. The company was bought and then dropped by Red Rose Music, and drifted for a while. Now at least a new generation of the Power Foundation has appeared.

It's massive, as filters tend to be, with four pairs of Hubbell outlets (the industrial version, not the hospital grade), each pair dedicated to individual functions. The box contains AudioPrism's "QuietLine" parallel filtration, and series filters on three of the four outlets (the fourth one is for power amplifiers). Because of its 20 ampere current rating, it has the appropriate 20 A IEC plug, with its blades horizontal rather than vertical. It comes with the appropriate matching power cable using 10-gauge silicone-insulated wire, and you can't substitute another unless you get one with a similar plug.

There are two aspects of the unit we found puzzling. First, despite the 20

ampere cord, the built-in circuit-breaker is rated at a mere 10 amperes. Second, the supplied cord is not shielded. Our experience with shielded and unshielded cords tells us that is a mistake.

For the comparison, we used three CDs, playing them on our Omega system, and then listening to them having substituted the Power Foundation and its cord for our MaxCon Squared and its BIS Maestro cord.

We began with the SACD version of *Now the Green Blade Riseth* (Proprius PRSACD9093), our all-time favorite choral recording. With

Once again our opinions diverged. Gerard's notes spoke of good clarity, with a top end that was more open. Albert agreed the sound was clear — as opposed to muddy or indistinct — but also thought that the guitars were less outgoing, with less impact. Reine also thought the impact was dulled, and that the interplay of the four guitars was less clear, though they did still seem to be playing together. "There are lots of fine details," conceded Albert, "but the overall tone is dull."

We ended with *The Night They Drove Old Dixie Down* from the European re-release of the Joan Baez album of the same title. Reine thought that this was the recording that came through best, finding it lyrical, with lots of presence. Albert agreed, admiring the clarity of

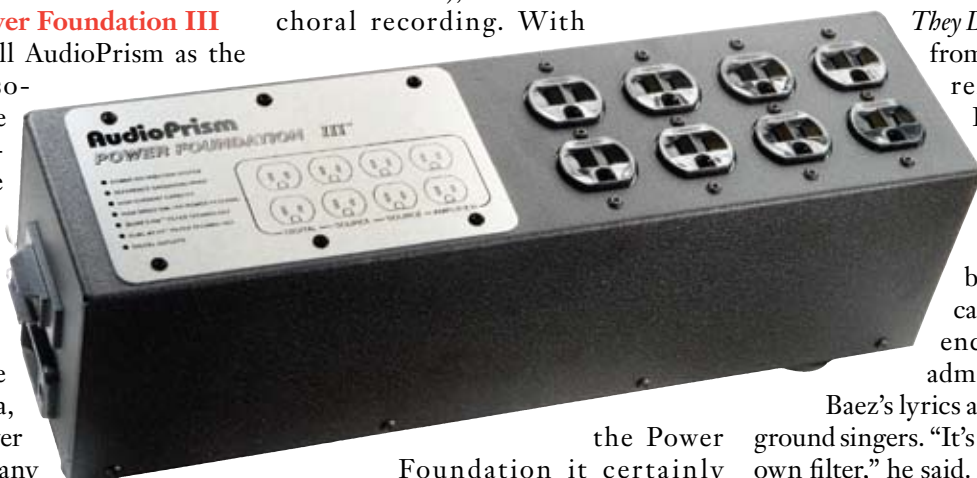
Baez's lyrics and even of the background singers. "It's better than with our own filter," he said.

But Gerard disagreed. "The highs are not as coherent," he said, "and they are more forward. The music seems louder, but it's because of the lack of coherence. It's a mess, and messes just take up more space."

The conclusion? As you can see it's going to be a little difficult. With the Power Foundation III the performance *was* good, because we know from experience that with no filter at all it would have been dreadful. The AudioPrism has the most features, and for its price (C\$899), it offers a lot of flexibility. But we're not happy with its power cord, and we will be working with it some more. Stay tuned to our next issue.

The PowerBIS

BIS Audio is a small but growing company in a suburb of Montreal. Though it first made its mark in equip-



the Power Foundation it certainly sounded different, but when we attempted to put what we heard into words, we disagreed.

Gerard thought the music seemed louder with the AudioPrism, whereas Albert thought that, on the contrary, it was softer. Gerard and Reine found the voices a little shriller, whereas Albert said the filter was smoothing them out, though it was also taking out some of the dynamics. If we diverged so much, was the difference truly significant? Perhaps not, but we decided to push on, hoping a consensus might emerge.

We turned to another SACD, Opus 3's *Unique Classical Guitar Collection* (CD22062), with the Stockholm Guitar Quartet playing the *Allegro* from Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3*. We had used the original LP in reviews many years ago, and we were pleased to run across it again.

SBT / SBM Tube linestage preamp & monoblock poweramps.

"Truly great audio components encourage you to keep listening to one album after another, and with the *SBT* and *SBM* in my system, I didn't want to leave my listening chair. I can pay no higher compliment than that." John Acton PF-Online Issue 34

BmPH Integrated Amplifier.

"While my listening bias tends to pull me more towards more palpable texture and natural flow as usually offered by tubes, I quite enjoyed the *BmPH* and thought it was as musically capable as my valve gear. After long listening sessions with the *BmPH*, I stopped thinking that I was missing anything as it always managed to engage me. Paul Candy Six Moons November 2007"

BC6000 powerline conditioner and filter.

".....keeping in mind its build quality, flexibility, cost and sonic performance, I have to say that in my opinion, over all, the *BC6000* is one of the best AC line conditioners that I have heard to date."

Michael Wright, Stereo Times, October, 2007



our doubts evaporated. The sound was magnificent, the music filled with joy and life. The image was well defined, and we could easily distinguish the four instruments (which, we recalled, sometimes ran together even in the days when we listened to them on vinyl). Albert thought the dynamic contrasts were nothing less than remarkable. "You can hear it all," he said.

That led to a natural — if somewhat premature — discussion: did the PowerBIS actually sound *better* than our own filter?

The answer may have been a qualified yes. On the third recording, *The Night They Drive Old Dixie Down*, we could tell from the very first notes that this was going to be a superior performance. The stereo image was larger, the depth considerably enhanced. Joan Baez's voice was at its best, as were the accompanying instruments and the background singers, and once again Albert said

he could *see* the music.

"The ensemble sound is just filled with music," he said.

We were of course pleased, but hold on — we're not through.

We had used the

PowerBIS with the company's own \$700 power cable. Our own filter, you may recall, was connected through another BIS power cable costing a whopping \$1200. What would happen if we tried the PowerBIS with the Maestro? We made the necessary connections and listened to the Baez song again.

We don't know what it means, but we were disappointed. Though the sound remained very good, it lacked a little of the zip we could hear with the other cable. It seems BIS sent us that cable for a reason.

But we could find ourselves testing a nearly infinite variety of mix'n'match filters and power cables. It seems predictable that some combinations will work better than others, but even we can't try them all.

That said, we could conclude that the PowerBIS was a quality product and a really good value. Albert wondered how it would sound at his place...



ment modifications, like a lot of high end companies, it is now specialized in cables. We have included BIS products in other reviews. The company did well in a test of interconnect cables, and *spectacularly* well in a comparison of power cables. Its top-of-the-line Maestro cable now connects our MaxCon Square filter to the wall.

The PowerBIS is at once a power bar and a line filter. It seems feather-light in comparison with the others, but the fit and finish are first rate. The six outlets are from Hubbell, and the IEC connector an audio-grade unit from Furutech. The filtering is entirely of the parallel sort. Rather than blocking the passage of undesirable noise (and, inevitably, some current as well), it attempts to short it out. That is clearly friendlier to large power amplifiers.

The list price is surprisingly low for a filter, just C\$450 (we're not supplying a US dollar equivalent, because the two currencies are virtually at par). A slightly more expensive version, at \$495, has eight outlets instead of six. Both versions are optionally available with the IEC connector on top rather than at the end. If the unit will be placed on the floor behind an equipment rack,

that is likely to be the more convenient configuration.

However like the MaxCon and unlike the AudioPrism, the PowerBIS doesn't come with a



power cord. Since the IEC connector is standard you can of course choose the cable you like. BIS sent us what it considers a matching cable, the AC 20 WG, which, at \$700, costs far more than the PowerBIS itself. Initially we used them together.

We moved our gear over to the PowerBIS and listened again to *Now the Green Blade Riset*. It certainly sounded very good, with excellent articulation by the singers, and strong rhythm. Both Reine and Albert judged the performance equal to that of our own filter. "You can *see* the music," said Albert.

Gerard thought the bottom end might be a little lighter, and the top not quite as smooth, but none of us thought the differences were major. Score one for the PowerBIS.

With the second recording, that of Bach transcribed for four guitars,