



## Chord Company Powerhaus S6

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As someone who has spent far too much time frequenting online hi-fi forums and groups, I can genuinely say that with the possible exception of network switches, nothing causes more arguments than audio-specific mains products. I have never understood the fight against an optimized mains supply. One of the most significant gains I have experienced in my thirty-five years as an audiophile was moving to a high-quality mains block and cables.

The Chord Company have been manufacturing mains blocks for their own use for several years but until recently such products have remained confined to their in-house R&D and demonstration systems. After much trial and error they now feel that with the Powerhaus (Hybrid Array Unfiltered Supply) they have developed a product that can offer customers the benefit of their experience.

There are two six-way blocks in the Powerhaus range, the S6 tested here, and the M6, which costs just under £2,000. Chord is coy about the exact differences between the two products, but reading through the literature one of them appears to be that the M6 incorporates three Hybrid Mains ARAYs, fitted in parallel to the circuit, rather than a SuperARAY system incorporated at mains level as is the case in the S6. I was a little confused as to exactly what was meant by the term ARAY and so had to ask Chord for more information. Without giving away too much, they provided the following information; 'It is essentially a range of tuning technologies, based around mechanical grounding of signal-carrying cables. The technology has evolved into grounding devices, where conductors are encased in resin, and now power products.' So basically a lot more attention to the grounding of the electrical system takes place within the M6. Both the S6 and M6 are available with either UK or Euro (schuko) sockets. They are specified for inputs and outputs of between 100V and 250V, the UK version is rated for 13amps, the Euro for 16amps at either 50 or 60hz. Heavy gauge wiring is said to be used throughout.

I was surprised to read that the Powerhaus range does not incorporate star

wiring which Chord claim is susceptible to RFI. All of the mains blocks I have previously used at home have this feature, instead the Powerhaus uses three isolated bus bars in parallel, which reportedly reduces high-frequency noise. The earth bus bar is separate from the live and neutral, which was found to produce better sonic results. Chord's research indicated that reducing microphony from the mains signal was another key ingredient to superior performance. Hence the Powerhaus is made of aluminium, which offers both rigidity and electrical isolation. The sockets are selected



for reliability and performance. There are no switches or LEDs fitted to the Powerhaus, again for performance reasons, and Chord believes mains filters negatively impact overall performance, so they contain no such filters. The input socket is a 16 amp affair which is larger than a standard IEC socket and a suitable power cable is supplied to make the connection to the wall, however Chord supplied one of their rather more fancy Epic ARAY power cables with the Powerhaus S6 for this review. The block also has a ground terminal but my set-up did not allow me to test this.

I am very impressed with the build and visual style of the Powerhaus S6. It is pretty imposing and perhaps not compatible with all domestic settings. Your fellow audiophile friends will undoubtedly be impressed however, even if your partner doesn't share the same enthusiasm.

#### Time To Listen

My system is usually powered by a Custom HiFi Cables Hydra distribution box, this is fed by a single mains socket with four cables exiting the box unused. For the purpose of this review Chord kindly supplied four assorted cables from their range. Usefully I had another high-quality mains block in the house and although this unit sells for a lower price than the Powerhaus S6, it served as a helpful reference.

My system comprises the following components; Melco NA1/2 server, Melco S100 switch, fed by a Nuprime LPSU, Moon 780D streaming DAC and Moon 600i amp. The speakers are Totem Forest Signatures. The excellent Network Audio ENO filter and cable are used between the Melco NA1/2 and Moon 780D, Tellurium Q Ultrablack II interconnect, and speaker cables.

I began by listening to some well-known tracks with my usual mains supply, then connected the Powerhaus S6 and Chord's mains cables. I noted some immediate changes to the sound which was a little brighter and more dynamic. As can often be the case with brand new cables and components, the balance of the system was upset a little, so I decided to leave things powered up for a week and then have a more serious listen.

Returning to the same familiar material, Radiohead's *A Moon Shaped Pool* (24/48 FLAC), the soundstage extended in all dimensions, seeming to break free from



the confines of the speakers more naturally than usual and vocals seemed to float effortlessly. Less bass bloom gave the initial impression of a lighter balance but this impression turned out to be false. On tracks that included deep bass, such as Decks Dark, the lows were deeper than before and easier to follow. Next up was Roger Waters' *Amused To Death*, I have four digital versions of this album but I prefer the DSD rip taken from SACD. Here I was taken aback by the increased sense of stereo depth and width of the sound, not having previously experienced such a holographic soundstage from my system. In addition to the improved spatial qualities, the dynamic impact on tracks such as What God Wants Pt.1 was greater than I have previously experienced.

At this point, it was hard to say how much of the positive changes I experienced were due to the Powerhaus S6, rather than the combination of the block and cables. I had concerns that this review would be rather challenging to write if I was to hear little or no difference when I substituted a rival mains block. Surprisingly such concerns proved unfounded. I had been listening to *Skinty Fia*, the latest album from Fontains DC via Qobuz (24/96) before swapping over the mains blocks. The first thing I noticed after changing to the reference block is that I had to turn up the volume to experience a satisfactory degree of dynamic impact. Swapping back to the Powerhaus S6 confirmed that I did not imagine this. The bass on the track How Cold Love Is had a notably more dynamic and open quality, studio effects were far more apparent and the kick drum possessed a greater sense of impact via the Chord block. On the track Roman Holiday I noted a better sense of decay on lead guitars, more sense of ambience, and the vocals were presented further forward in the soundstage.

Although I love this album it is not what you would describe as a hi-fi dem disc. So what better than the a hi-res version of a mono recording from 1957 to follow. Although I have a few of Charles Mingus' albums, I was new to *Mingus Three*. This

latest 24/96 remaster is being released in physical form on what would have been his 100th birthday, although it became available to stream a few days before. I must admit to finding it to be rather enjoyable. This very simple recording highlighted the benefits produced by the Powerhaus S6 rather effectively. As well as being able to enjoy the music at a lower volume via the Chord block, I noted a more realistic sounding piano on the track Yesterdays which had a more dynamic and lively presentation. As with previous tracks I had listened to, the bass was fuller and more



bouncy. The Mingus Trio's interpretation of Summertime sounded rather shut-in and muted via the competitor's block but seemingly sprang to life with the Powerhaus S6, more importantly the performance was more enjoyable, with the cheaper unit, it just sounded like an old compressed recording. The track Dizzy Moods again had a more dynamic presentation, with a really open top end, bringing a sense of air to the cymbals that was not present before.

### Conclusion

I confess that despite my opening gambit about a positive experience with my first audiophile-grade mains block I was somewhat surprised by the magnitude of improvement that the Powerhaus S6 brought to the party. Such an investment must be proportionate with the system concerned, but in my system I feel the £999 asking price for the Powerhaus S6 seems good value for the improvements I experienced. The build quality is first class and I think it looks terrific. I am not looking forward to giving it back.