

THE ESSENTIAL SOUND PRODUCTS POWER CORDS

BY MICHAEL GINDI

I fought the urge for nearly a decade: "I don't need one. It's just another thing to worry about. I'm fine and dandy the way I am, thank you." But one day, about seven years ago, I gave in and bought my first computer. Now, of course, I can't live without the thing-when it crashes, so does my entire life! With high-end power cords, it's almost the same story. I skeptically fiddled with a few over the years-most of them hurt more than helped-and settled on a serviceable set that did a "good-enough" job. But now, with the ESPs, if I ever take them out of my system, well, you get the point.

To say that one should take manufacturer's claims with a grain of salt is an understatement; if you were to dump the Sodium Chloride I take with most such "miraculous" claims into a fresh water lake, you'd find yourself floating on the Dead Sea! In this case however-and rather reluctantly given the cost of the things-I find myself in complete agreement with the advertising that came with the ESPs. Point for point.

After the 48 hour break-in period, the first and most obvious thing you're going to experience is this: Imagine that, without telling you, someone magically doubled the horse-power of your car engine. When you move into the passing lane and put the pedal to the floor, you're unexpectedly pinned against your seat-back with a crushing G force. Somehow or other (and don't ask me how or why-I haven't a clue) the ESPs make your system sound as if you've doubled your amplifier output-particularly during loud dynamic swings. It's as if some sonic dam has broken and the rush of water is overpowering. Where a momentary orchestral crescendo or percussive punctuation point might have startled, or grabbed for your attention, it now pops your eyelids wide open and rivets you.

Where Jessye Norman might have stirred you when she sings the last phrases of the Gospel tune "Great Day" on Jessye Norman Live [Phillips CD 422 235-2], you'll now find the top of your head unscrewing when the full power of those last notes reaches you.

The manufacturer claims that your equipment-whatever equipment you use at the business end of these cords-will have to go through a re-break-in period because of them. Use of the ESPs will "place demands on your equipment's power supply. The capacitors reform to store additional energy and respond to the higher musical peaks." I used the cords with the Convergent Signature Preamp, the Convergent Power Amps, the Altis Pro Reference and the Altis Transport, and found this to be precisely true. For a time, dynamic peaks were harsher, though louder than before, until the equipment "got used" to it.

The sense of increased musical muscle you hear may or may not merit the cord's high price for you. But if you like to listen to recordings of live performances versus studio sessions, as I do, you're in for another treat that just might float the financial boat. The manufacturer claims that the ESPs eliminate musically destructive phase shifts and frequency timing errors. On LP's and, very surprisingly, live CD's, you'll not only hear a truer musical timbre, but you'll hear the entire quality of a given performer's movement about the stage change, and change in a goose-bump raising way.

No matter how good the recording, or how good the system, when a performer turns his/her head from the microphone, or walks about the stage, the astute listener with acute ears will probably have noticed the lack of fluidity in such movement. It's sonic herky-jerky that usually sounds to me like a "stop-action" video looks; there are dozens of tiny, discrete and choppy breaks as the placement and image focus shifts. The phase correct ESPs allow for a fluidity of movement, a continuity of change, if you

will, that no longer wakes the musical mind from its trance of enjoyment. Going back to the Jessye Norman CD I mentioned above, it's as if her movements on stage were now riding on sonic roller-blades. If you have that wonderful old direct-to-disc LP For Duke [M&K RT101] in your collection, listen to "I've Got It Bad (And That Ain't Good)." Marshal Royal is all over the place with his saxophone as he plays his heart out. A "before and after" ESP comparison in my system was revealing. Before, you'll hear the saxophone appear, suddenly disappear, and reappear again in different spots-much the way the Cheshire Cat's smile surprisingly appears and reappears disembodied of the feline itself. After, you'll never lose "sight" of the horn as it moves through space. At one point, in a fluid motion, you'll watch Royal throw his head back as he raises that sax skyward and wails. Very moving. For me, that kind of thing is worth the steep price of admission.

Obviously, I can't know if the ESPs will work as well with your specific components and your specific system as they do with mine. And neither can you until you get a hold of a broken-in set, and give your equipment the time it needs to "learn" how to deal with them. Therefore, you must doggedly insist that your dealer loan these cords to you for a week or so to try them out. I suspect that you may be loathe to go back to whatever you were using, and will just as doggedly want to hold on to them after the trial time has elapsed. Last month, for the fun of it, I tried writing an essay using an old typewriter instead of my Pentium-powered PC. Well, you get the point...

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