

hardware review

Powerhaus M6 raises the sound barrier

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Chord Company Powerhaus M6 distribution block

Regular readers may remember me being very impressed with Chord Company's Powerhaus S6, which I reviewed last May. It was one of those products that left a void, making it difficult to enjoy my system for a few weeks after it departed. Since my review, I have spoken to people equally impressed by Chord Company's demos at audio shows last year. Although far from cheap at £1,000, the Powerhaus S6 (studio) power distribution block represents Chord Co's entry-level unit, with the Powerhaus M6 (master) reviewed here retailing for £2,000.

At first acquaintance, £2,000 seems a lot of money to spend on such a product, but one can spend amounts approaching five-figure with certain competitors, it seems reasonable as long as the performance is up to scratch. In my review of the Powerhaus S6, I explained that development of the range dates back decades, with prototypes being used in Chord Co's demo suite over the last 20 years. Neither model comes with an input cable, so buyers must budget for one. Chord Co supplied a 1.5m Epic ARAY power cable, as they had done with the Powerhaus S6 last year.

Powerhaus M6 design and build

The M6 is a six-way block without mains filtering. The M6 looks very similar to the entry-level S6 but the keen-eyed will spot that the casing of the former extends several centimetres beyond the row of output sockets, forming a plain area between them and the 16 amp input socket. Under here are three Hybrid Mains ARAYs fitted in parallel with the circuit. The same high-quality input and output sockets appear to be used in both the S6 and M6. They were chosen for performance and reliability. In both Powerhaus models, buyers can choose between UK or Euro (schuko) output sockets, but a 16 amp input socket is the only available option. My review sample of the Powerhaus M6 came with UK output sockets. As with the S6, an earth terminal is

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fitted next to the 16 amp input socket. Both of the Powerhaus blocks are made from black, brushed aluminium. This material was chosen for both its rigidity and RFI rejection qualities. The quality of the finish is exemplary and goes some way to justify the price of the blocks.

Powerhaus M6 performance

The fallibility of sonic memory can make comparisons difficult but I clearly remember the impact that the Powerhaus S6 had on my system last year. A few things have changed since then, I



am now using Townshend Isolda analogue signal cables throughout and support is by an excellent SVT rack from Quadraspire. Thankfully, I still had the same 6-way block from one of Chord Co's competitors available and I used the same mains cables I originally used in my review of the Powerhaus S6.

One of the main things that the S6 brought to the party was the sense of the music floating in free space rather than being confined to the speakers themselves. I noted the same from the M6 but the effect was even more pronounced, additionally the M6 made a greater impact on the perceived timing qualities of the system than the S6 did. Subjectively music appears more brightly lit but not bright in the negative sense. For sure, cymbals are reproduced in a crisp and impactful fashion, but the resolution is such that the effect is natural and beneficial to the music. I also feel the soundstage is more open, and the instrumental placement within it is more precise. Music now flows from the speakers in a natural, unforced manner.

I have been playing more live recordings since installing the Powerhaus M6. *Wheels Turn Beneath My Feet* from Fink (24/44.1 FLAC) was thrilling. The sense of acoustic was palpable, bringing the live performance into my living room. I could appreciate the musicians being rhythmically in-synch to an extent I had not enjoyed on previous occasions. The bass guitar always sounds good, but now it starts and stops with greater precision and appears deeper, subjectively at least. As well as being a great song, the penultimate track *A Sort Of Revolution* is one I often use to evaluate the effect of system tweaks and component changes. Although it is a fairly simple recording, it tests several aspects of a system's performance. The opening

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bassline is recorded in a way that gives it both precision and depth. A system, as well as presenting these qualities, must reproduce the instrument without overhang. Fink starts by strumming a gentle riff, which builds to a loud crescendo. As well as being a great test of dynamics, it should be presented precisely but not harshly. The intro to the track is punctuated by solid bass drum strikes that should hit you hard in the chest. With the Powerhaus M6 the system has improved the way it reproduced all the aspects mentioned above, however, Fink's vocals are now much further forward in the soundstage, and the reverb effects far clearer, making the track even more compelling.

One of my favourite live albums is *4 Way Street* by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young. A CD rip of this sounded more immediate and was reproduced with an even clearer sense of the recorded acoustic. The increased dynamic range that the Powerhaus M6 allowed my system to produce provided a startling moment at the end of one of the tracks when the audience roared and shrieked into my room.

One of the claimed benefits of audiophile mains products is that they can lower the noise floor. I do not have the equipment required to measure noise levels with and without the Powerhaus M6 installed, but musical results suggest the M6 does indeed do this. Most telling was that I could listen to music at a lower volume than with my usual mains setup with no loss of involvement. Despite the lower volume settings dynamics were delivered with greater impact. I recall this being a benefit of the Powerhaus S6, but to a lesser extent.

Sonic holography with Powerhaus M6

Herbie Hancock's *Headhunters* (24/96) reinforced how the Powerhaus M6 allowed the system to reproduce a truly holographic soundstage, impactful dynamics, and magical timing abilities. Although recorded in 1973, it is a marvellous production. The soundstage projected further into my room than I had previously experienced, yet the drums remained as far back as before, perhaps slightly further back. Forgive me if I use a reviewing cliché but I intended only to play the first track from the album, yet it proved too captivating for me to do anything other than let it play to the end.

For the latter part of my review of the Powerhaus S6 I installed a set of high-end mains cables from Chord Co that were returned some time ago. As you can read in the subsequent review, these cables provided a significant upgrade over my own, but I am convinced that the Powerhaus M6, combined with my much more modest mains cables, significantly outperforms the Powerhaus S6, with the high-end cables. Whilst I would love to have both the M6 and the expensive cables, I feel confident in recommending that potential customers buy the M6 first, then upgrade the mains output cables as their budget allows.

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Powerhaus M6 conclusion

The Powerhaus M6 has raised the bar of my system's performance. The M6 is supplied with a basic power cable but I highly recommend the Epic ARAY mains cable used for this review, it's not inexpensive at £750 for the 1.5m length provided (1m is £500), but I consider that a fair price for the improvements it brought to my fairly high-end setup. In low to mid-price systems, the S6 may make more sense. I would advise trying both Powerhaus models from Chord, then deciding if the additional delights the M6 delivers are worth the not inconsiderable £1,000 required. Would I purchase the Powerhaus M6 over the S6? Emphatically Yes.

