

Review of Chord GroundARRAY 8th February 2022

There has been a lot of “noise” on HiFi social platforms lately, a lot of it about digital cables, how can a USB or an ethernet cable carrying just zero’s and ones have any influence on sound?

There has also been heated discussions on whether ethernet switches can influence what we hear when we are listening to our music via a network arrangement.

I remember years ago; the same discussions were raging in the HiFi press about power cables analogue interconnects and SP/DIF coaxial cables. None, or very few such arguments exist today as reviewers, audiophiles and manufacturers alike have embraced the view that audiophile quality cables can and do improve our listening pleasure.

After a recent visit to the HIFI Lounge in Biggleswade, Paul Clark asked me if I wanted to try out the Chord GroundARRAY system and of course I agreed.

So, what are they? In short, the GroundARRAY is Chord Company's latest innovation to combat high-frequency noise in HiFi and AV equipment. By providing a low-impedance path for high-frequency noise to take, the GroundARRAY effectively siphons noise out of the signal ground of its 'host'.

My own system, network based, is very enjoyable, displaying all the features associated with high resolution of inner detail and above all is eminently musical.

When I review any new equipment that comes my way, I use the same tracks that I know:

Artist	Album	Track	Source
Cat Stevens	Tea For The Tillerman	<i>Into White</i>	TIDAL FLAC 48kHz 24bit 2ch MQA 192kHz
Nils Lofgren	Acoustic Live	<i>Keith Don't Go</i>	TIDAL FLAC 44.1kHz 16bit 2ch
Nick Warren	La Fabrica (EP)	<i>La Fabrica (Club Mix)</i>	TIDAL FLAC 44.1kHz 16bit 2ch
The Staves	Mexico	<i>Mexico</i>	TIDAL FLAC 44.1kHz 16bit 2ch MQA 44.1kHz

I know these albums well and chose them for their fine recording quality but also for musical enjoyment and the ability to draw the listener in. I had a really good listen to each track then installed the GroundARRAYs. One in an unused phono socket on my amplifier, another in an unused socket in my Roon core server and lastly in an unused RJ45 socket in my EE8.

Before I go any further, I have taken a great deal of interest in noise and vibration reduction. I use a power regenerator on the power side, the Chord EE8 on the data side, an LPSU on my Innuos Zenmini III plus I use seismic podiums under my speakers. My speaker cable is designed to reduce vibration and cut out RF interference, so my expectations of the GroundARRAYs were not high.

First impressions of the GroundARRAYs were favourable, the guitar intros into the Cat Stevens song were a tad more focused and had a little more body, his voice was to my ears more relaxed and in the room.

The Nils Lofgren song is a fabulous live recording, nowhere to hide for a musician. The sheer energy in his playing for a few minutes mid-way through the song is breath-taking. With the GroundARRAYs I was aware of the audience interaction more, his guitar had more body, his playing was just as thrilling without them but maybe just a tad more articulation with them.

The Nick Warren track is a club/dance electronic powerhouse of a track. As with many artists in this genre the tune builds from a driving drum to a full on deep low bass driven piece full of sounds back

and front of the mix. With the GroundARRAYs the small sounds in the mix were more easily heard, I knew they were there as I said before I have a system capable of excellent low-level detail, with the GroundARRAYs these important sounds were more easily heard allowing me to better enjoy the music flow.

With the Staves, an EP that I had only discovered in the past year, I use this song as it highlights the harmonies between the sisters plus the timbre of the guitars and the accompanying bass drums and keyboards. With the GroundARRAYs the harmonies seemed a little tighter, the bass and drum a little more forward in the mix.

In all cases with the GroundARRAYs I was aware that the presentation was more relaxed. It felt like I was able to hear things, even though I knew they were there, with less effort. There was what I can only describe as some smoothing out of the top end, for example revealing more of Cat Stevens' intonations and the timbre of his voice by reducing some sibilance.

I was reminded of the January 2022 edition of the renowned HIFI magazine The Absolute Sound the other day during the writing of this review. I always read this magazine from cover to cover and I especially like to read the comments in editor Robert Harley's "*From the Editor*" column on page 14 of my digital copy. In his column Harley talks about what he calls "Noise, The Final Frontier".

In this column he mentions a few accessories, from Wilson Audio, Chord GroundARRAY and others. A seasoned reviewer, Harley found real benefits to his listening experience when using the accessories in his system.

The GroundARRAY system, especially when used as described in my system certainly made listening easier for me. But when I took them out, and listened to the tracks, and then put them back in, I remembered what Robert Harley had said in his column:

"The GroundARRAYs render improvements that I've now come to associate with reducing noise: a more vivid impression of instruments existing independently of the loudspeakers, a larger stage, more liquid and realistic timbre and more resolution of fine detail".

Harley's experience mirrors my own, attributes that clearly contributed to my listening pleasure and reinforced my experience with other noise reducing kit already in my system.

Best heard with one in each item of kit (for me, amp, server and EE8) the experience was much more than I had expected. At £550.00 for each type, and as I have said for me 3 to obtain maximum benefit. They are certainly on my wish list and will be the next upgrade to my system.

My system:

Equipment -

Sky Broadband hub
Innuos Zenmini III plus Innuos LPSU
NAD M10 streaming amplifier (Dirac pro in use)
PS Audio Stellar P3 power regenerator
Usher Mini Dancer 2 loudspeakers
Townshend Audio Seismic Podiums
Three tier Atacama Vogue bamboo equipment stand
English Electric EE8 ethernet switch

Cables:

Route	Manufacturer/Model	Termination
ADSL to Sky Hub	High Speed generic (non directional)	RJ11
Sky Hub to EE8 switch	Audioquest Vodka (directional)	RJ45
EE8 to Innuos Zenmini III	Audioquest Vodka (directional)	RJ45
EE8 to NAD M10	Curious Ethernet Cable (directional)	RJ45
Speaker cables – main single wire	Black Rhodium Proto 3200 complete with ferrite RF reduction	Locking bananas
Speaker cables – jumpers	Black Rhodium Proto 3200	Locking bananas/spade
Power cables	Nanotec Strada 309 (custom made)	Furutech gold plated both ends with gold plated fuses