

Analysis Plus Power Oval A/C Cords

Follow Up: The truth shall set you free

Alvester Garnett

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Specifications:

Six-foot Oval copper AC cable terminated with WattGate connectors

Price: \$299 (five foot), \$330 (six foot)

Analysis Plus

106 1/2 E. Main Street

Flushing, MI 48433 USA

Phone: 810.659.6448

Fax: 810.659.8101

Website: www.analysis-plus.com

Well, it's been a while since I've written for these esteemed web pages, so it was with great excitement when The Stereo Times editor Clement Perry handed me two Analysis Plus Oval Power cords. I had dropped by Perry's for another one of his always memorable listening sessions and just a plain old hello in the wake of the September 11th attack. After returning to NY on September 17th from a gig featuring the Regina Carter Quintet with the Milwaukee Symphony out in Wisconsin, my visit with Perry out in New Jersey was a welcomed relief from the stresses we were all going through. The prior week's 3 concerts, combined with that evening of listening to music, was a small reaffirmation of the beauty of our existence. Plain and simple music was and still is a healing force in my life.

Since receiving these cables, I have been out of town on 5 gigs and tours over the past 4 months. In the past, listening to my system after my return home usually meant "Cool, it's nice but it's got a way to go before it gets to doing that magic trick of keeping me involved." This was surely a result of being around so much live music. Yet I can honestly say that now, when I come home and press play on the transport or flip the preamp to the tuner input, I'm much happier now with the Analysis Plus Oval Power cords in the playback chain, and that means a LOT to me.

Perry gave me two of the Power Ovals and suggested that I would realize the most benefit by placing them on my amp and power conditioner, or alternatively on the preamp. After trying them on different components I realized he was right. Off came the Audio Power 313 from my PS Audio P300 with

Multiwave (if you don't have the Multiwave upgrade get it - I received mine in the spring and haven't looked back.) I immediately heard more of the ambience and detail surrounding the instruments that gives those oh so precious cues as to where an instrument is being played. Improvements were showing themselves very fast.

Then I removed a half-meter run of PS Audio's Mini Lab cable from my PS Audio Ultimate Outlet and I heard even more ambience. The Ultimate Outlet is a wonderful power conditioner that is non-current limiting, so for all of you owners of older Audio Research amps with fixed power cords like me, it is a must. At this point I was curious to hear what the system would sound like sans the TDS Passive Audiophile. Once it came out I lost a little bit of the weight but overall everything sounded considerably more natural and certainly more transparent. It seemed to me that the Power Ovals were doing everything I needed to return my system to a more "purist" state sonically and physically.

I tend to shoot for purity of sound over euphony. Of course this a subjective perception but I base my choices on what I hear on the bandstand and do a precarious balancing act of trying to find the most natural sounding equipment afforded by my jazz musician's budget, which is no small feat! For a preamp I've chosen Monolithic Sound's PA-1 Passive/Active Line Stage. Up until unity gain, which is at 12 o'clock its volume control, this little baby runs purely passive. After that straight up position, it is a Class A, dual-mono amplifier providing up to 6db of gain. It's a simple but extremely transparent Preamp that I'm quite happy with. To sweeten the deal I'm using Monolithic's upgraded HC-1 Dual Mono Power Supply for the PA-1. This is excellent bang for the buck and I think I've achieved the best I can get on my limited budget.

In went the AP's and, low and behold, 4 months later here I sit writing a review. My dilemma in this situation is to be able to base my perceptions on an older reference that at this point no longer exists. I had to compare what I've grown to be so happy and comfortable with to an older standard for me. In the course of doing so I realized that I had been shortchanging myself by mixing cables!

For example, after pulling out the Mini-Labs and Audio Power 313's again, I realized that my system sounded better with BOTH the Ultimate Outlet and the P300 being fed through the Mini Labs than with the Audio Power 313 on the P300. But for the sake of continuity I've decided to document my experience with mixing cables so I'll begin with my Audio

Power 313/Mini Lab configuration.

Changing out the Audio power 313 cord on the p300 to the Power Oval

For this stage of my listening I used the latest 16/44 version of Miles' "So What" from *Kind of Blue* [Columbia CK 64935]. The most immediately noticeable effect I heard was the removal of subtle grain. Bill Evans opening statement sounded richer and more "wooden" in a good way. I'm not talking stiff. No, I mean I could hear more of the wood of the piano and in my book this is a good thing. Certainly, I had been happy before but the Power Ovals had raised the bar. There was definitely more bass and in fact almost too much. This opening piano and bass passage has been tricky for the mastering of the various reissues this recording has seen and it is just as tricky to reproduce on audio systems. Up until the latest CD reissue I've found this section to be murky (I'm not in any way referring to the vinyl version), but finally we have a better view of all those gorgeous colors being displayed. At 34 seconds in the bass fingers "scrape" was the more natural than with the 313 on the power conditioner. However the bass was a bit ripe and this was bothering me.

Once the horns entered in response to Paul Chamber's call of the melody they sounded more natural and engaging. It seemed like there were more harmonics of each horn to be heard which in turn gave more distinguishing character to each instrument. I heard sweeter more relaxed highs and this showed on Jimmy Cobb's cymbal work, particularly at the point where the band kicks into Miles' solo.

Changing out the Mini Lab from both the P300 and Ultimate Outlet on the amp

Now we were getting somewhere! The bass ripeness that I was hearing was somewhat ameliorated, but everything else about the sound improved even more. The whole soundstage became more three-dimensional. The instruments grew in vividness even more. Within seconds I could tell it was a case of "the more the merrier" with this cable. Two were definitely better than one. The cymbals became wonderful in comparison to what I was hearing before using the Mini Labs cable. Articulation and sustain took a strong step forward in quality. With an improvement in harmonics and body, the music became more involving and seemed a tad louder.

Switching out the Power Oval and returning to the original cord on the Ultimate Outlet resulted in less bass, while being a bit more polite and offering a clearly less involving presentation. As for grain, I decided to try a more modern

recording without tape hiss, but at that point, it sounded like there was less.

Before moving on to different selections I decided to back up a bit and try an extra run of Mini Lab on the P300 that I had cannibalized from my Fanfare FT-1A tuner. At this point I realized I had been shortchanging the competition. Substituting the Oval for the Audio Power 313 in the chain yielded a more natural presentation. The sound wasn't as sweet and rich as with the two Power Ovals, but the micro dynamics and articulations of Miles', Coltrane's and Adderley's solo lines were very clear and initially bettered the AP in this regard. (Keep reading) However there was just a bit of harshness on strong attacks relative to what I had heard from the Power Ovals. At this point I decided the two Power Ovals would have to face off against the two Mini Labs.

The ML and AP comparison

The first thing I chose to listen for comparing both sets cables back to back was Cyrus Chestnut's "Grandma's Blues" from his *Earth Stories* release [Atlantic 82876] that I had played drums on. The piano sound is particularly wonderful and Joe Ferla, the engineer, has done a wonderful job of capturing the weight of the 2-week-old, 9-foot Hamburg Steinway that Cyrus performed on for the session. (Cyrus was only the second person to sign the instrument. Andre Previn had signed it the week before. Yes I know it sounds heretical but it is a tradition for some rental pianos to be signed.) I still get goose bumps whenever I hear this played back on a system that captures the weight of the piano. I'm not particularly impressed with the drum and bass sound on this CD - the sound staging and presence of these two instruments where not recorded at the level I would have preferred, but Cyrus' piano is the focus here. At the same time, the overall representation of the tonal quality of my drums and cymbals give me an indication of a system's capabilities.

Initially, on Cyrus' "Grandma's Blues," the Power Oval's won out in every area except one. The AP's brought the instruments more into the room with me. Not that it was in an "all up in yo' face" kind of way that can be so exciting initially but then grows fatiguing with continued listening. No, this was definitely more of the real deal when it comes to getting closer to what all the instruments are supposed to sound like. Once again I heard that wonderful wood sound that is so often missed in stereo playback. The Mini Labs just didn't get this aspect of the performance nearly as well as the Power Ovals. The scale of both the soundstage and the

ability of my system to resolve macrodynamics grew with the Ovals in place. The best way that I can describe what the AP's were doing in just a few words is to say that the performance seemed to be "more on my skin." I simply felt more presence from the instruments and was able to better distinguish the different environments that each instrument was recorded in.

I don't feel that being able to distinguish whether instruments are recorded in different spaces within a studio recorded performance as being necessarily a bad thing. Most modern studio acoustic jazz records are engineered to create the illusion of performers performing together in one space when in reality isolation booths are virtually standard for the drums and bass. Some of the results are better than others. In this case, Earth Stories was recorded live to two-track DAT. Cyrus was placed in a HUGE room while I was placed in a rather small room. The ceilings in Cyrus' recording space were well over 20 feet tall. I can't remember visually the exact dimensions, but I would think it fair to say that it was probably 30 feet long buy 20 feet wide. The floor was a hard wood, most likely maple, and the walls had a minimal amount of acoustic tiles. In short, the room had a pleasant and warm decay.

I was placed in a booth that probably had a 7-foot ceiling. It couldn't have been any longer than 15 feet and no wider than 10 feet. To top it all off, the room was heavily damped with various carpets on the floor and a very liberal amount of acoustic foam on the walls. It is just impossible to have the drums and piano sound like they are in the same room without employing a hefty dose of artificial reverb on the drums or overly close-mic'ing the piano, neither of which was used for this record. I am able to detect a small bit of reverb being employed on my drums on one of the other tracks on the record, but not on this track.

With this in mind, the Analysis Plus came out on top with flying colors. The entirety of the ambience that was being reproduced so beautifully gave me more room cues than ever before while at the same time not sounding lifeless or overly analytical. My cymbals sounded the best I've ever heard them on this recording, yet the dryness of the drum's recording booth versus the openness of the space in which the piano was recorded was still evident. I was reminded about how the antique Zildjian K cymbal I was playing at that time had more rivets in it than now. I was also able to enjoy the sustain of my cymbal in it's pre-cracked and "surgically repaired" state. Since it was damaged several years ago, I will never hear that cymbal the same way again. Though I've always been able to enjoy it's original sustain in my "minds ear " now I'm a good deal closer to hearing it with the Power

Ovals in my system. (Trust me that cymbal still sounds great in person, it just doesn't have as much sustain.) I was simply able to enjoy the music more while being more informed (well... reminded) of how this performance was recorded.

Without making the necessary adjustments in my system, the one initial area where the AP's suffered was in clarity going towards the nether regions. This was due to what seemed to be a slight blurring in the lower midrange and upper bass. It also seemed that the Mini Labs initially beat the Ovals in the area of microdynamics, which I think might have been a result of their dryer sound. It was just a bit easier using the ML's to extract the detail of Cyrus' virtuosi lines once he delved into the tenor to baritone range of the instrument. This was confusing and I started to grow suspicious. I'm glad I pursued my suspicions because I would later come to realize why I had failed to achieve the synergy needed to give a fair review. How could the AP's be performing so well in all other areas but be coming up short in this one? I figured I would move on to some other music to see if this would reoccur.

Next I listened to the Vermeer Quartet's, performance of the Allegro from Beethoven's *String Quartet no. 7 in F Major, op. 59,1* [Teldec, 4509-91495-2]. The carrying theme on this record is a Russian folk song and is first stated by the cello. Here the ML won out by a hair with its ability to delineate the various parts. As the lines were passed between instruments I found it easier to follow them using the Mini Labs, which contributed to more enjoyment of the musical event. It definitely sounded a bit grainier than with the Power Ovals, but the clarity of the lines was spectacular. The Power Ovals were still more tangible in a visceral and three-dimensional sense, but their sweetness became a slight liability since those parts were blurred; most noticeably, the Cello which is 1st to state theme and crucial to the meaning of this lovely movement. Initially, the cello also sounded slightly harmonically inaccurate compared to using the Mini Labs, yet still seemed to exist in more of a believable space. At this point I began to wonder if the Power Ovals' sweetness might be a result of a roll-off in the highs or perhaps it was merely that my amp was being presented with more juice and a more resolved signal and it wasn't capable of faithfully passing the signal. This seemed like a contradiction since the cymbals on the previous recordings were reproduced with wonderful decay.

That's when it hit me. I thought to myself maybe the room, or I should say, my ears, where not used to hearing this much bass in THIS room with these speakers this CLOSE to the rear wall. It was obvious to me that I was getting more of everything and possibly more wasn't a good thing if

handled with kid gloves. I decided to ever so slightly toe in my Thiel 2.2's. They had been firing directly forward. By pivoting the outward most rear corner of each speaker a bit forward and away from the wall, I was effectively moving the woofer on each speaker a bit away from the rear wall.

Boom! That did it! The problems that I heard earlier virtually disappeared. The Allegro of Beethoven's *String Quartet in F Major* was now spectacular. I had everything. The resolution, ambience, imaging, accuracy of timbre, and naturalness of decay were in place plus the cello no longer had the problem of sounding blurred.

Returning to Cyrus "Grandma's Blues," I realized that the blurring I had heard earlier was gone. The clarity and naturalness of the lines completely outdid the Mini Labs. Don't get me wrong; the Mini Labs are a fine cable for the money, especially since they are only \$199 for 5.5 feet versus the Analysis Plus Power Oval's cost of \$330 for 6 feet. Prices aside, the Analysis Plus simply sounded better.

One of my favorite ways to evaluate a system's midrange is to use one of the two records that I played on with Abbey Lincoln. I've spent over 4 years of my professional career touring playing with this queen of song throughout Europe, Japan, and the U.S. and I've come to know her voice almost as well as my own. She, like a very special few, has an immediately recognizable sound. Charlie Haden said that she possessed the mark of a true original and great singer in that she sang in just the same way she talked. This lady puts on no airs so if you hear her singing it's like she is talking to you and you directly.

Abbey Lincoln's *Who Used to Dance* [Verve, 314 533 559-2], features, believe it or not, Savion Glover tap dancing to a steady sailing, gentle ballad that speaks of a people's losses in history and their own forgetfulness of their greatness. In my mind's eye I can still see the floor that Savion had specially constructed in the studio for him to tap on and my system was finally doing this recording justice.

There she was! Abbey's voice was rendered superbly and a layer of grain was lifted. I wish you could have seen the smile on my face when I put the Power Ovals back in my system. Unfortunately I hadn't had a chance to sit down and listen to this recording since I had placed the Power Ovals in my system, but this simply served to illuminate even more why I liked the Analysis Plus. I literally took for granted how good they sounded and had yet to finish my audiophile listening rounds. I was just thankful to be hearing her voice again played back at such a superb level of naturalness

Once again the piano sounded more holographic and it was obvious that I was using even more rivets on my cymbal than the Cyrus Chestnut CD that I had listened to earlier. I find this delineation of a jazz cymbal's character to be one of the hardest things to capture using the 16/44 medium, but obviously the Ovals helped the P300 coax the highest level of performance I had ever attained in my system.

It was clearly evident that Savion's tapping wasn't close mic'ed, which was exactly as it was recorded. As he moves around from side to side and front to back on the 10 × 12-foot surface, the listener is treated to a wonderful display of soundstaging. Each move he made was tracked beautifully! The engineer placed two mics on the long edge of the board spread about 6 feet apart. I could see Savion moving from side to side and back and forth in display of another virtuoso performance. Once again the ability of my system to resolve the sound of wood was heightened. The floor sounded much more believable than ever before.

That floor had been assembled with 3 inch slats all the way across. If a tap dancer knows their stuff they can use the seams between each of these slats for great effect, which Savion did! I could clearly distinguish the points where he drags his feet across the slats and creates a "washboard-like" sound.

Savion taps as accompaniment, duettist, and soloist throughout this track. There really isn't a point where he isn't tapping. On both the bass and piano solos, the musical line between whether Savion or the instrumentalist is soloing is so blurred, (for the lack of better words - not in terms of soundstaging!) I would call it a duet. At 4:17 into the track, Marc Cary initiates a trill in the upper register of the piano that Savion immediately jumps on after a few seconds. This cat rattles off some of the most ridiculously fast single footed rolls that I've ever heard. I can plainly hear that he is standing on the right side of the soundstage with the trilling foot towards the rear of the board. He finishes off several trills with a strong tap with his other foot that clearly sounds towards the front of the board, which is closer to the mic. For all of you soundstaging freaks, this is a great test track, which the Analysis Plus rendered it beautifully.

The role I chose in my drum performance on this track was to be simple in light of that fact that Savion's tapping already contained a tremendous amount of activity. You can hear that I am primarily creating a sweeping sound achieved by moving my brushes in a circular motion around the head of my snare drum. At several points I accent and delineate section changes in the song with gentle cymbal crashes

and/or accents in the bass drum. Leading up to the 3:45 point in the song, there is a swell felt from the entire band during Cary's piano solo with a resolution accented by my cymbal crash. The rivets on that cymbal rang for a good ten seconds and naturally decayed back into the sound of the band. The Analysis Plus, once again, rendered this superbly. My former reference couldn't pull me into the music in the same way. I felt much more immersed in the moment while the crescendo and subsequent diminuendo were most effective while listening with the Analysis Plus.

After noticing how natural the relative dynamics sounded, I decided to listen to some larger scale stuff. I chose from Reference Recordings the Minnesota Orchestra performing Ravel's "*Alborada del gracioso*" under the direction of Eiji Oue from the *Pictures at an Exhibition* disc [Reference Recordings RR 79CD]. In the latter part of October 2001, I performed for a couple of nights with the Regina Carter Quintet along with this orchestra in the same hall that this was recorded. Luckily for me this also gave me a chance to become more intimate with this orchestra's sound, meet the wonderful percussion section, and actually tap on the custom made snare that has been used on most of their recordings for Keith Johnson's label.

Of course, anyone who has listened to any Reference Recordings CDs of large-scale works will know that they have a tremendous dynamic range and the Analysis Plus did not fail to deliver. The "*Alborada del gracioso*" is a treasure trove of color, mood, energy and dynamics courtesy of the constantly shifting perspective of Ravel's orchestration of this piece that was originally composed for piano. After making the necessary adjustments with the volume knob to get the system to the point of being at a believable volume level I was swept away by the music. It was actually a bit of a struggle making notes while listening because I kept being drawn into the music. I had a hard time shifting into to "reviewer mode" so I just gave into the music and chose to just enjoy listened to this piece in its entirety several times before starting to write down notes.

Once again the immersion presented by the Power Ovals was a notch above that of the Mini Labs. That snare drum sounded more like the one I remembered hearing in the concert hall. On this recording, they used the same distinctive drumhead as I use on my entire drum set so I've come to be very familiar with this particular sound. In addition to the removal of grain, the Analysis Plus presented a deeper soundstage allowing the front row soloists (i.e. the woodwinds) to come a bit more forward. This resulted in a perceived lengthening of the soundstage. I also heard more body from all the instruments, bringing them closer to what

they sound like in real life. This might also have contributed to the perceived lengthening of the soundstage.

After performing with this orchestra as well as the Milwaukee symphony in September, I was surprised how far apart the orchestra members sit from one another and I was happy to hear that my system was more accurately portraying that same space between the instruments.

The final crescendo of the piece, leading up to the bass drum stroke followed by the resolving chord featuring a healthy dose of brass, never failed to give me spine tingling goose bumps. With the Analysis Plus in my system, each time I heard it -- even though I knew it was coming -- I couldn't help but be struck by the power and immediacy I was hearing and feeling. What made it even better was that I was getting all of this without it ever sounding overblown or out of perspective. This confirmed for me that these cables were not just being gimmicky and doing "circus tricks," but actually getting to the core of what this was all about - the music.

Beware of the bass the Analysis Plus has the potential to allow your components to reproduce. What may sound like a sloppy sounding bottom end just might be a room interaction that you've never noted before. Since it is all a matter of synergy, I can certainly say that in my system, the Analysis Plus Power Oval gave me remarkable improvements in musicality and in creating the illusion that I was in the musical venue and that the musicians were there in the room with me.

Granted that my former reference is a slightly less costly cable, it was a product of one of the most well known and respected audiophile companies in the business noted for producing extremely strong products for a reasonable price. I am aware that this same company produces a higher-level cable that might be a more matched contender against the superb Analysis Plus Power Oval, but until I hear it in my system I'm going to have to call the Power Ovals my new reference power cable.

I've shot for neutrality and naturalness (naturalness being the better word,) and I think that the Power Oval brings me considerably closer to my goal. As a matter of fact, I must admit with the Analysis Plus in and the TDS Passive Audiophile out, I can say this is the longest time I've enjoyed my system without the desire to upgrade. It's obvious to me that I'm hearing the music and not the system. This is a thoroughly enjoyable product and is now my reference power cord for the P300 feeding my front end and the Ultimate Outlet feeding my amp. I thoroughly recommend them for

anyone that loves music for music's sake and not just as an audiophile hobby.

Associated Equipment

Analog Front End

None

Digital Front End

Audio Alchemy DDS Pro Transport
Perpetual Technology P-1A/P-3A combo

Amplification

Monolithic Sound PA-1 Line Stage/HC-1 Power Supply
Audio Research D200 Amp

Loudspeakers

Thiel 2.2

Cabling

Straightwire Virtuoso and Crescendo Interconnects
Straightwire Black Silc Speaker Cables
Electra Glide Power Cords
PS Audio Mini Lab Power Cables
Audio Magic Mystic Reference I2S

Power Conditioning

PS Audio P300/Multiwave Upgrade
PS Audio Ultimate Outlet (15 Amp Standard)

Accessories

Townshend Seismic Sink
Bright Star Big Rock Three
Room Tunes Junior Justarack
Golden Sound DH cones (medium and small)
Vibrapods
DIY line filters