



## GUTWIRE MAXCON

**P**roposition: the expensive electrical power that your local utility provides (at least when its Windows-based control system isn't choking on the SoBig virus or something) is inadequate for running high end audio equipment. Words to live by, some say; self-serving bunkum, according to others.

We've taken a position on this, and we will again. We'd love nothing better than to use the stringy cord that came free with our equipment, and plug it into the 57¢ outlet in the wall. We've spent enough on our amps and speakers. You think we *want* to drop another bundle on fancy power cords and filters?

But we have, because we've heard the difference. We like to put it in negative terms. It's not that an expensive power cord or an elaborate filter allows "fuller bass" or "silky highs" to come through. It's that we can hear the huge performance hit that results when we pay no attention to the food our system eats. As the class dunce is reported to have said, "Sugar is the stuff that makes your hot chocolate taste really bad when you don't put any in."

Ah, but what sugar to use?

Not all filters work equally well, or even at all. We've tried a lot of the things over the years. The Rotel and the YBA are (or were) marginal. The Quantum filters (there are several of them) appears to rely heavily on the purchaser's imagination. But we liked

the Enacom, because it does so much for so little money. We like the Chang Lightspeed. We like the Inouye, which we still use in one of our systems. And we also like the Foundation Research filters, three of which also use.

But this unit caught our eye right away. For one thing, we like some of GutWire's other products, notably its power cords, some of which we use ourselves. For another, the MaxCon is *so* well-built. It's in a gorgeous, heavy stainless steel case, heavily damped so that when you tap it you think you're hitting a brick. GutWire clearly agrees with our principle that everything is microphonic. We noticed the hospital-grade connectors too. We were almost prepared to give this one thumbs up without listening.

But that's not us, as you well know.

We did this review in our Alpha room. We left our YBA One power amplifier plugged into its Foundation Research LC-2 filter, which is also its power cord. Three other components, the Copland 306 preamplifier, the Parasound CD transport and the Counterpoint DAC are normally filtered by an

**Cleaning up the dreck from the power utility? We're for it.**

Inouye SPLF filter we bought years ago. We took a series of CD's and listened to them three times: with the Inouye, with no filter at all, and finally with the MaxCon.

After the initial session, intended to get our six ears used to those recordings again, we disconnected the Inouye and went to a conventional but excellent power bar, the GutWire Stingray. We listened to the first of the recordings again. It didn't sound as good as it had before, but it was still better than we had come to expect from earlier tests we had done with no filtering. "I think," said Albert, "that this is an awfully good power bar. It's *too* good, and it's not what potential clients for this filter will be using." Indeed, it sounded as though the Stingray's heavy shielding was doing some of its own filtering, a fact that is properly correct. After discussion, we pulled out a Noma power bar of the sort you can buy at the nearest shopping centre. That was much better...which is to say that the sound was much, *much* worse.

How much worse? In *The Little Notebook of Anna Magdalena Bach*, soprano Karina Gauvin seemed to have shrunk dramatically. Gerard heard as her as closer and Reine as farther away, but both agreed that there was nothing behind her. The large church whose acoustics are so gorgeously captured on this Analekta recording was gone. Luc Beauséjour's harpsichord sounded as though he had picked it up cheap on eBay.

By the time it was over we were frowning. Some unfortunate adjectives got trotted out: thin, shallow, dull, cooler, slow. Not good. True, Albert said that what he heard was better than he had feared, but it should be said he had expected the ceiling to collapse on us.

We moved on to one of our favorite choral recordings, *Now the Green Blade Riseth*. This too sounded a lot worse. "It's two-dimensional," complained Albert.

"Can you name the two?" inquired Gerard.

"Left-right, and height. Well, not even much height in fact."

There was worse. The male voices lacked body, and the women's became

harsh and strident, something we had noted in earlier no-filter tests. The harmonic link between them was obscured. The flute sounded fine, beyond the fact that it seemed to have been painted on the wall. And the finale...

Oh rats! Is it all right if we change the subject?

*Buddy Bolden's Blues* on Opus 3 was similarly demolished by whatever evil force was pouring in from the power line. Rhythm was poor, despite the fact that the exaggerated transients seemed to be marking the beat like a metronome. The overall sound had become thin and hard, and we were frankly relieved when it was over.

We plugged the gear into the MaxCon and tried again.

That was *much* better! Most of the depth was back, and both Gauvin's pure voice and Beauséjour's harpsichord sounded lovely. The rhythm was much improved. That the MaxCon was immensely better than the Noma bar went pretty much without saying, but was it as good as our reference filter? We weren't yet certain, though we were determined to find out.

The choral recording was immensely improved as well. The depth was back, and the fine voices of the singers melded together in satisfying fashion. There

was clear delineation of instruments and voices, but at the same time they all came together into a musical whole. Were textures slightly grainier? Possibly.

As for *Buddy Bolden's Blues*, it was...well, magnificent. The depth and clarity allowed the counterpoint among clarinet, saxophone and sousaphone to emerge in realistic fashion. The rhythm was contagious. "They're playing with a smile," said Albert. "You can tell."

This is, then, a good filter. But was it better than our Inouye filter, which is well over a decade old? We returned to it, and then we played the jazz recording again.

The Inouye did in fact sound better, and there could be no doubt about it.

### SUMMING IT UP...

**Brand/model:** Gutwire MaxCon

**Price:** C\$1098/US\$859 without cord

**Dimensions:** 30.5 x 7.5 x 7.2 cm

**Most liked:** Gorgeous workmanship, much better current flowing out than in

**Least liked:** A little short of top rank

**Verdict:** Looking as though it could beat all its competitors, it *can* actually beat most of them

There was as much detail, but everything sounded smoother, and all the rough edges were filed off. The clarinet, the sax and the sousaphone were warm and articulate.

We made ourselves a note to call Brian Inouye and check to see what his filter (which he still makes) costs today. It wasn't cheap when we bought it all those years ago, and today it actually costs ever so slightly more than the MaxCon. We had expected that.

This session brought home again a fact we have known for a while: the electricity in the wall contains everything short of salmonella. And that's despite the fact that our local electrical substation is not shared with heavy industries. If you're not as fortunate as we are, your system is having an even tougher time, and may be suffering from acute indigestion. A good filter is the cure.

One more thing needs to be said. Audio components may be sensitive to power line noise, but they are also *producers* of power line noise, and they affect each other. Good shielded power cords can keep them from transmitting this garbage into the ether, and a well-designed filter can keep them from whizzing into the drinking water. You don't need a degree in public health to figure out the benefit.



## CROSTALK

This is an excellent accessory, which can make listening to music a lot more satisfactory. Like any good AC filter, it lets music reach our ears with much more clarity and better focus, with lots of detail. I noted delightful textures, lots of depth, catchy rhythm, a solid lower midrange, and superb coherence.

Without matching the performance of our own filter, which continues to delight us, it promises hours of musical pleasure. And it keeps its promise.

—Reine Lessard

The illusion is amazing. Whenever I compare music with and without a good conditioner, it always seems that with the conditioner some things are added to the sound. It gains in body and roundness,

filling a larger volume in space. Sounds are more defined, cleaner, natural. And I noticed it without making an effort, with the MaxCon — nothing was actually added, yet the music was transformed into *more*.

Think of it as filtering your regular drinking water and discovering that fresh, crystal clear sensation. For a more accurate analogy, think of making your favorite coffee or tea with it, and how much more flavour you'd have. You'll understand what the GutWire unit does.

—Albert Simon

What comes out of the electrical outlet is not suitable for music and other living things...that's a given, or it has been for a long time. I've heard good filters before, but why are so many of them built with parts

that appear to have come from war surplus outlets?

The first thing I can say about the MaxCon is that it's not like that. This is an astonishingly well-built product, and that's almost enough to recommend it right there.

Well...almost. It does a major job of making the electricity shine as brightly as its own alloy case. Is it as good as the Inouye filter? In fact no. Not in our system at any rate.

My rule for power filters is the same as that of Hippocrates for physicians: *first, do no harm*. The MaxCon does no harm, because it's so well made. That's half the battle. And it does a pretty good job on the other half too.

—Gerard Rejskind