



Turn on

As a famous brand is resurrected to help improve your network audio, **Ed Selley** is convinced to make the switch

Though dramatically different to its traditional area of expertise, The Chord Company felt the opportunity to snap up the English Electric brand and make it a subsidiary was just too good to resist. Considering the company is more synonymous with jet fighters, it was initially difficult to understand the attraction.

The 8Switch is one of the first results and, as the name suggests, provides eight 100/1000 Base-T gigabit-capable Ethernet connections. In layman's terms, this means it should be capable of handling any demands that network audio is likely to make of it.

The basic underpinnings are taken from existing equipment but are beefed up for more effective performance in an audio context. It is controlled by a customised TCXO (Temperature Compensation Crystal Oscillator) offering a superior performance than the oscillators usually specified for the task. This is combined with upgraded isolation, both for the sockets and from the power supply – which is significant because it means the 8Switch can use a relatively conventional (albeit high

quality) wall-wart PSU rather than needing a more ornate linear type.

The chassis is made from metal and feels considerably more substantial than most mainstream switches. It's supported on four sturdy feet, each with their own rubber damper. There is a row of small indicators on the front that denote the status of the ports and give a useful overview of the network status itself. It would be a stretch to call the 8Switch attractive, but it generally feels worth the asking price.

Performance

Installation is straightforward. When I introduce it to my network by disconnecting the Melco N1A (HFC 397), SOTM SMS-200 Neo (HFC 449) and Roon Nucleus (HFC 449) from the standard router and attaching them to the 8Switch, it doesn't result in there being any changes to the addresses in the network. Unless you have a very unusual configuration, introducing it should be painless.

The single most important aspect of the 8Switch's performance is that it passes every test of network stability I can throw at it. If it comes to pass that you need to attach a printer to it as well, that will continue to work

normally. Happily, there are some sonic advantages too. In keeping with all ancillary hardware of this nature, the English Electric is not capable of altering the fundamental tonal balance of a hi-fi setup. If you are unhappy with the basic overall performance of your system, this is not a device that will do much to change its overall presentation.

What it does do, very effectively is eke a little more performance from any equipment that's attached to it. Listening to the beautifully recorded *Bonde* from Ali Farka Touré and Ry Cooder's *Talking Timbuktu*, the effect is a subtle but consistent drop in any appreciable perception of processing. This is most pronounced if you happen to be using your system at a point where considerable demand is being placed on the main router – such as video streaming being used in another part of the house. Frequent reference has been made over the years to systems doing their best work when everyone else is in bed, and this is like a localised manifestation of this theory. By keeping your equipment one stage removed from the main network traffic, the benefits really are considerable.

Conclusion

There are some other advantages too. Comparing the performance of my Melco N1A with the SOTM connected directly to the 'Player out' Ethernet and using a Western Digital NAS drive with the SOTM connected to another output on the 8Switch sees the performance gap between the audiophile storage and the more prosaic NAS drive narrow, which could make it very strong value for users running their library on a conventional 'bay' drive. As it is, this is a cost effective and well-made piece of network hardware that combines welcome sonic improvements with real-world practicality at a reasonable price ●

DETAILS

PRODUCT
English Electric
8Switch

ORIGIN
UK/China

TYPE
Audiophile
network switch

WEIGHT
410g

DIMENSIONS
(WxHxD)
155 x 35 x 26mm

FEATURES
● 8 shielded
Ethernet ports
● Medical-grade PSU
● High-performance
oscillator

DISTRIBUTOR
The Chord Company

TELEPHONE
01980 625700

WEBSITE
englishelectric.uk

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Consistently improves network performance; well made and easy to use

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Not a system fixing type of device

BUILD QUALITY



WESAY: A well-engineered product that can both boost network audio devices and add convenience

FEATURES



OVERALL

