

ESSENTIAL SOUND PRODUCTS MUSICCORD & MUSICCORD-PRO

BY JONATHAN HERRERA

MY POWER CABLE BEHAVIOR IS A BIT embarrassing. Rushed to get to a gig, I'll fish for one in a bin of tangled electronic bric-a-brac I have stuffed under my bed, giving no thought whatsoever to its quality. Sometimes I even forget, thus forcing me to plead with sound guys and club owners to borrow one from the back of an unused computer in their office. Michael Griffin, the engineer behind Essential Sound Products' MusicCord AC cables, would be appalled. As he sees it, the power cord has an enormous impact on sound, and this is particularly evident with the high-current, low-frequency signal in bass amps. To Griffin, a cord that eliminates phase distortion, shields against radio-frequency (RF) and electromagnetic (EM) interference, and allows for maximum current delivery will have an audible and substantial impact on tone. His new cables, the MusicCord (16-gauge equivalent) and MusicCord PRO (14-gauge equivalent) aim to solve these problems.

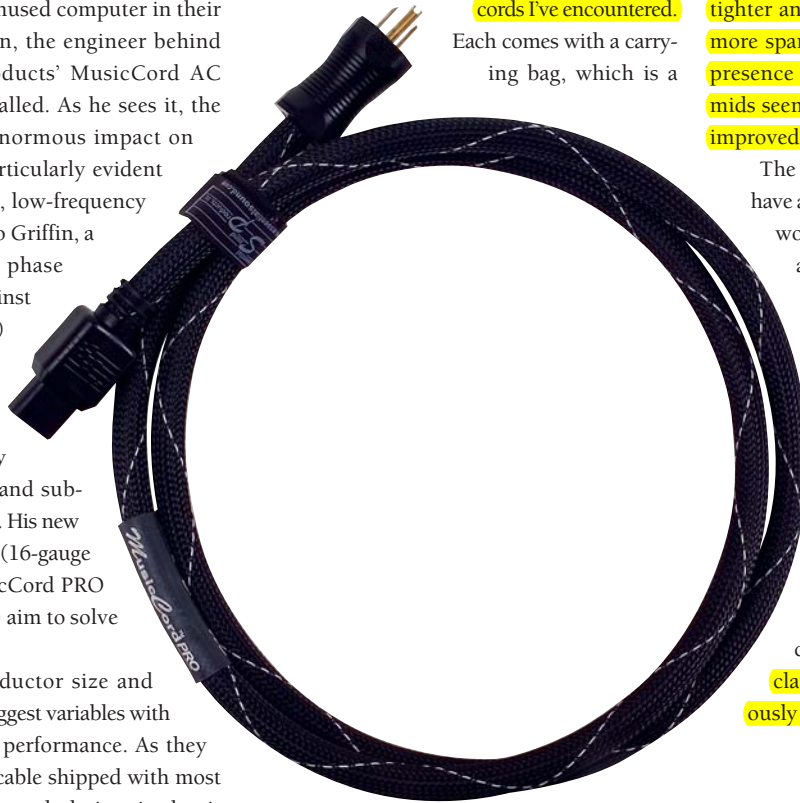
ESP believes conductor size and arrangement are the biggest variables with regard to power cord performance. As they see it, the typical AC cable shipped with most amps is an inherently weak design, in that it uses only three conductors (line, neutral, and ground) and minimal shielding. Plus, different gauge cables perform inconsistently, with smaller cable offering faster transient performance and larger cable more current delivery. Each adds phase distortion; signal content is temporally distorted with regard to frequency. ESP also claims that generic AC cords' utilitarian design gives little thought to RFI and EMI interference, which can cause hums, buzzes, and the occasional unwelcome radio broadcast.

Griffin and his team came up with a patented multi-conductor design that uses several small conductors for the line and neutral current. The conductors are made from

oxygen-free high-conductivity copper, which they say retains more natural warmth and detail. The cords' geometry is designed to minimize unwanted interactivity between the conductors and reject interference.

The ESP cables are definitely the most rugged and serious-feeling power cords I've encountered.

Each comes with a carrying bag, which is a



good thing, considering their thickness and stiffness make them almost impossible to slip into a gig bag's pocket. The cables' rigidity is due in part to their thick braided jacket, which ensure high crush resistance and durability. **ESP's molded connector interfaces are rugged, with reinforcement rings within the mold, solid brass pins, and connections from the conductors to the plug soldered and crimped.**

NO FABLE CABLE

To test the MusicCords, I A/B'd each with off-the-shelf cords in a few rigs, and I also recorded a short passage and routed it through a Millennium STT-1 Origin whiz-bang channel strip

preamp, switching cords on each pass. First off, I could barely tell the difference between the MusicCord and MusicCord-PRO—maybe the PRO was just a slightly bit more assertive in the lows than the other, but it was subtle.

Against the generic competition, though, the differences were clearly audible. The sound got tighter and more refined with the ESPs, with more sparkle in the upper register and more presence and power in the lows. The upper mids seemed to awaken, imparting a sense of improved clarity and spaciousness.

The Essential Sound Products cables did have a positive effect on tone. Now, are they worth it? If you are a sonic completist, and you simply must have the hippest rig ever, then yes, go buy some. If you do a lot of recording, too, I can see an argument for placing one behind your favorite preamp to maximize its potential. If you're like most working bass players, and you spend more than a few working nights on some whack-ass stage with apathetic club goers shouting requests, a three-figure power cord might be overkill. In any case, **the ESP cords do what ESP claims, plus, they are rugged and seriously boss-looking.**

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Pros Rugged; positively impacts tone

Cons Expensive

Bottom line The ESP cords make a substantive difference, so if you've got to have the best, this is it.

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