

# English Electric 8Switch

*An 'Audio Grade' switch for  
streaming networks*



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*The 8Switch is an 'audio grade' network switch, brought to market by English Electric. They are certainly not the first ones to do that, but the company behind the brand English Electric is The Chord Company, and that is a company that has proven extensively that it's able to produce great products for sensible prices. A short review of this new name in the ever-expanding landscape of audio grade switches.*



# Audio Grade Switches?



It was years ago that I had my first discussion with colleagues about the fact that it was strange that you could buy 'audio grade' cabling for home networks that were used for streaming audio, while for the rest of the hardware (routers and switches) you had no choice but to use 'of-the-shelf' products from computer stores. A number of manufacturers must have thought the same, because a number of 'audiophile' switches have hit the market over the last few years. Some of those are very pricey, making them accessible only to a small group of audiophiles that have already invested heavily in their hifi systems. Some, however, were a lot more affordable, putting them within reach of those who own great but less exotically priced hifi systems. The English Electric 8Switch belongs to that second category.

## English Electric?

As a name, 'English Electric' has a solid ring to it (compared to, for instance, iconic brands from hifi history like Western Electric or General Electric) but why would a company with a solid international reputation (The Chord Company) choose to market a new product under a completely unknown brand name? The answer to that is endearingly simple: because there is another British company called Chord Electronics, who have been selling hifi electronics for decades. So it was a kind of gentlemen's agreement between the two companies to avoid name confusion - or any perception of free-riding on someone else's fame. Typically British if you ask me, and very sympathetic at any rate.

## Looks and Accessories

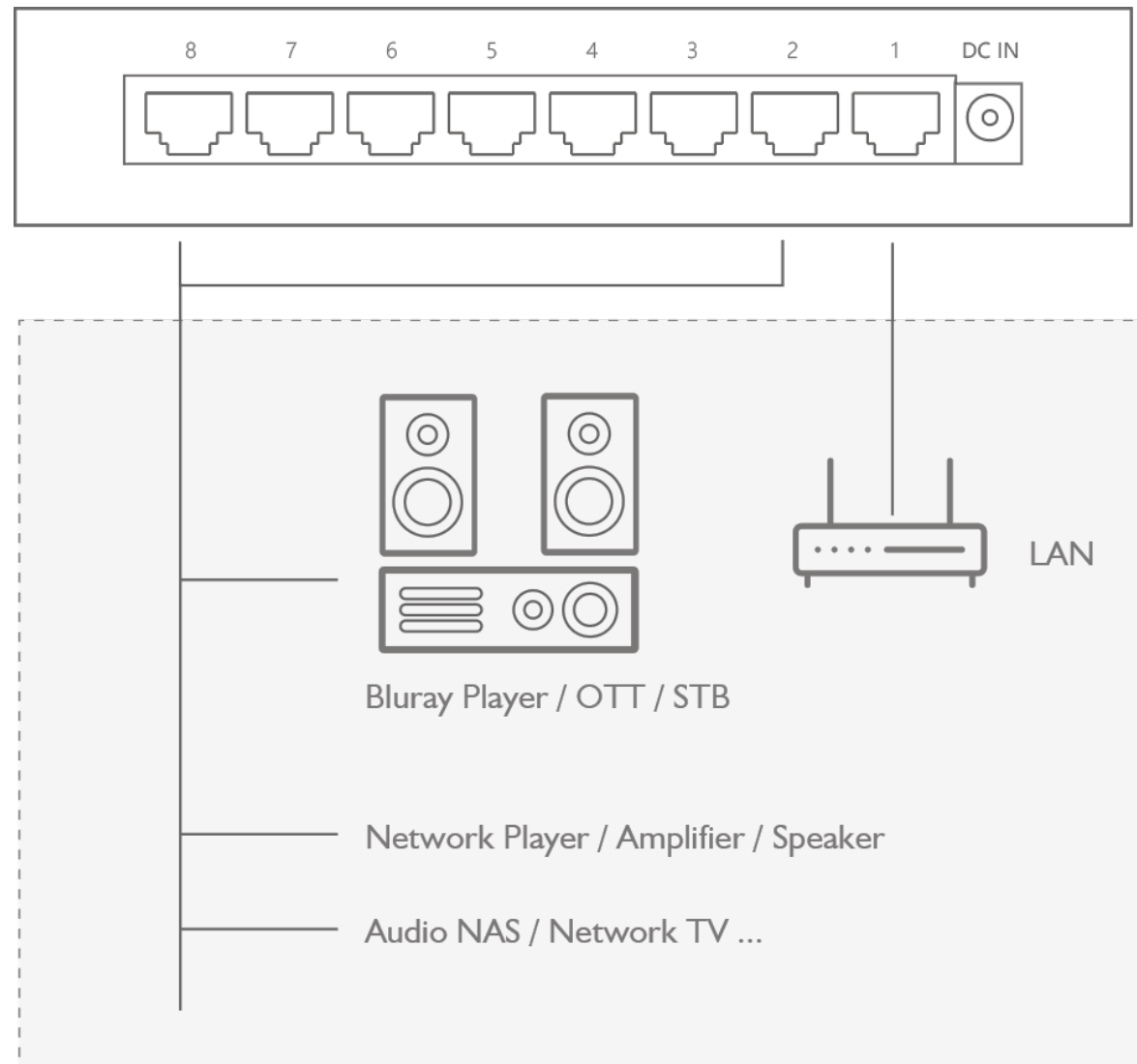
Like the name tells you, the English Electric 8Switch has 8 ports. That is more than sufficient for most AV systems, and it allows to build everything - but the power-supply - into a compact enclosure the size of a pocket-book. That enclosure is the first thing that puts the 8Switch ahead of the nearest competitor in its price-range, the Bonn N8 by Silent Angel. Unlike the Bonn, the housing of the 8Switch is milled from solid aluminum, which not only gives it more mechanical strength, but also provides additional shielding. The housing is has a classy looking black 'soft touch' lacquer finish and there are tiny holes in the front panel, barely showing the status LEDS. And in this case 'barely' is a good thing if you ask me. When you are not directly in front of the switch you can't even see the LED's. So there is no annoying flickering

whatsoever, enabling you to place this beautiful looking switch in full sight. Besides the 8Switch, the good looking box contains 4 dampening rubber feet that you can stick to the underside of the switch, a 'medical grade' power supply - I will talk about that later - and a 75 cm Chord Company C-Stream ethernet cable. The inclusion of this cable is another significant plus over the competition. Well, inclusion...you do pay a little extra for it, but as far as I'm concerned it is an indication that The Chord Company/English Electric takes better quality streaming very serious. You can use this cable between the 8Switch and your streamer, but if you already use a better ethernet cable there, you can use it for your smart-TV or your media-box. There is improvement in there anyway.

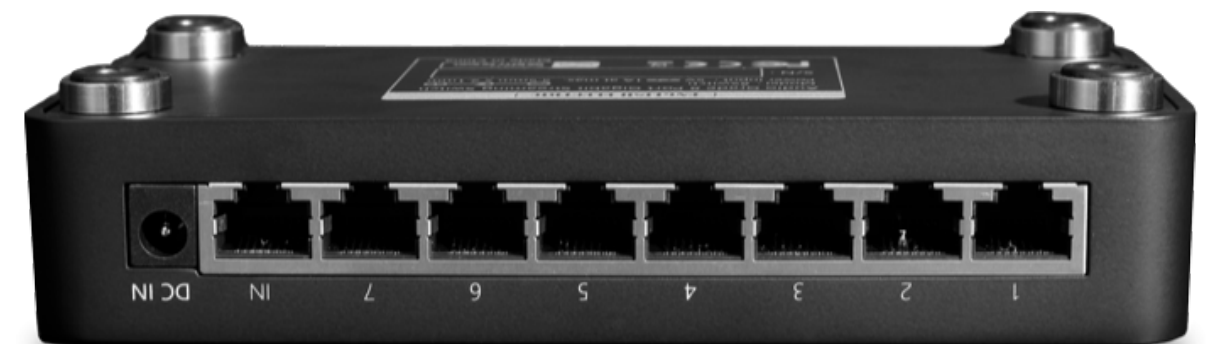




# Under the Hood



The English Electric 8Switch is based upon a sturdy, existing circuit that has been modified in several crucial places. First of all they have added very high quality TCXO (Temperature Compensation Crystal Oscillator) that is used to reclock the signal with the highest accuracy, thereby preventing the introduction of additional jitter. It is a well-established fact that jitter is one of the main causes of differences in sound quality between digital devices. Besides that, both the power supply and the clock circuit have two electrical noise isolation circuits which ensure a stable network signal. And finally, EMI absorbing material has been added in carefully selected places, to reduce the influence of noise on the digital circuit even more. All these measures add up to a specified 90% reduction of jitter compared to general network switches. I did not measure that myself, but it is not difficult to check so I'll assume that English Electric are not telling porkies about it.



# Listening to the 8Switch



To rule out any variable influence of other equipment and give the 8Switch an honest comparison, I removed all ethernet cables - except the AudioQuest Forest coming in from my utility cabinet and the AudioQuest Vodka connected to my Bluesound Node2 streamer - from my iFi iPower-fed D-Link DGS-108 switch. The 8Switch would be connected in the same 'one in/one out' manner. I chose two tracks that would give great insight into things like tone and timbre, spaciousness and placement and dynamics, speed and timing. The first one was Bested Bones from the beautiful album Book of Romance and Dust by Exit North, and the brooding Sa Talai from the album Linkwood & Foat by Linkwood and Greg Foat.

After several times of highly concentrated listening to both tracks I hooked up the English Electric 8Switch and repeated the process at exactly the same volume level. Hmm, that did sound different, but it was hard to tell in what way. So back to the D-Link and some more deep-listening. Yes, things started to become clear now... Back to the 8Switch again and that's when the penny dropped. When the 8Switch was in the chain, there was more spaciousness, especially depth, the music flowed from the loudspeakers more effortlessly and timbres appeared to be brighter. So no hyperbole like 'half an octave of added bass' but a clear yet subtle increase in musical enjoyability.

# Alternative Power

The English Electric 8Switch comes with a 'medical grade' wall-wart, also known by its formal name 'switch mode power supply' or SMPS. In audiophile circles there is a growing preference for expensive aftermarket linear power supplies, and SMPS's are frowned upon 'because they generate lots of high frequency electrical noise'. That is not untrue, when you're talking about the dirt-cheap sh\*tty power supplies that come with phones and lights and whatnots. But it is absolutely possible to build a very quiet SMPS. Among others, iFi proves that with their 'more quiet than a battery' iPower adapters, and the SMPS that comes with the 8Switch is of comparably high quality. In the manual of the 8Switch, English Electric

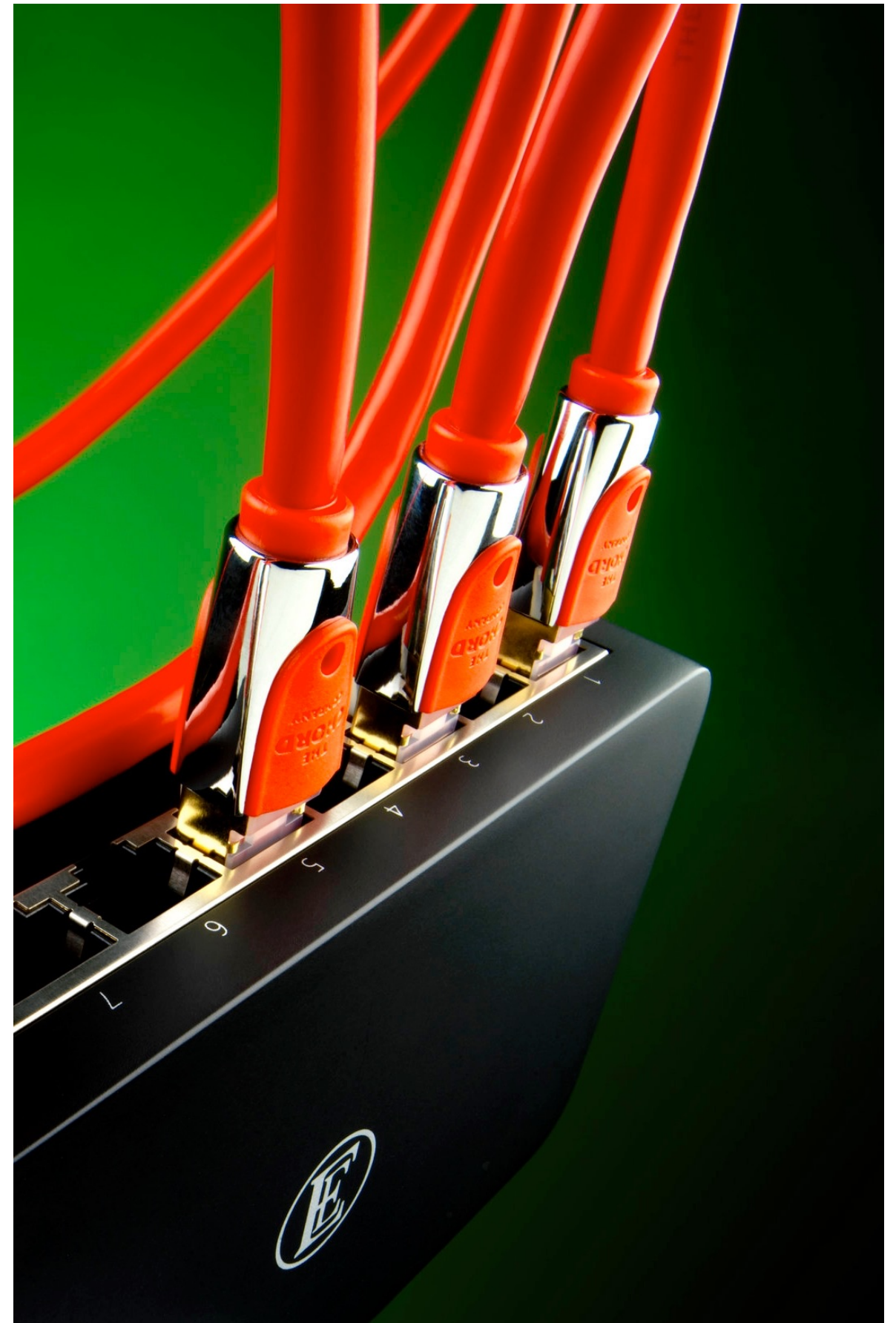
actually advise against using a linear power supply on their switch. While they may yield great results with certain hifi equipment all linear power supplies are simply too slow for switches when gigabit speeds need to be achieved, and definitely for the very high frequency TXCO clock oscillator in the 8Switch. For the same reason, an increasing number of cleverly designed high end digital devices such as streamers have an SMPS power supply for the digital circuit and a linear power supply for the analog part of the circuit. Of course I tried the iFi iPower on the 8Switch as well, instead of the one that came with it, and that gave no additional improvement. No decrease either, by the way, so as far as I'm concerned these power supplies are completely on par with each other.





# So, what of it?

As far as I'm concerned, there needs to be no discussion about the question whether the English Electric 8Switch does what it says in the brochure. Because the simple answer is: 'Yes'. But it should be noted that this is a product that 'dots the i's' and it will not perform miracles in a poorly conceived streaming setup. The achieved improvement is simply too small for that. But in a well laid out streaming setup with good cabling, the English Electric 8Switch could be worth the effort. Depending on system specifics the effect may be bigger than I have established, or smaller. You have to try for yourself, but I'm willing to go out on a limb here and predict that in most cases hearing will be believing.





# Music and Information

More information and prices about the English Electric 8Switch can be found in our webshop:

[English Electric 8Switch](#)

## **Qobuz**

[Linkwood en Greg Foat - Linkwood & Foat](#)

## **Bandcamp**

[Exit North - Book of Romance and Dust](#)

## **Tidal**

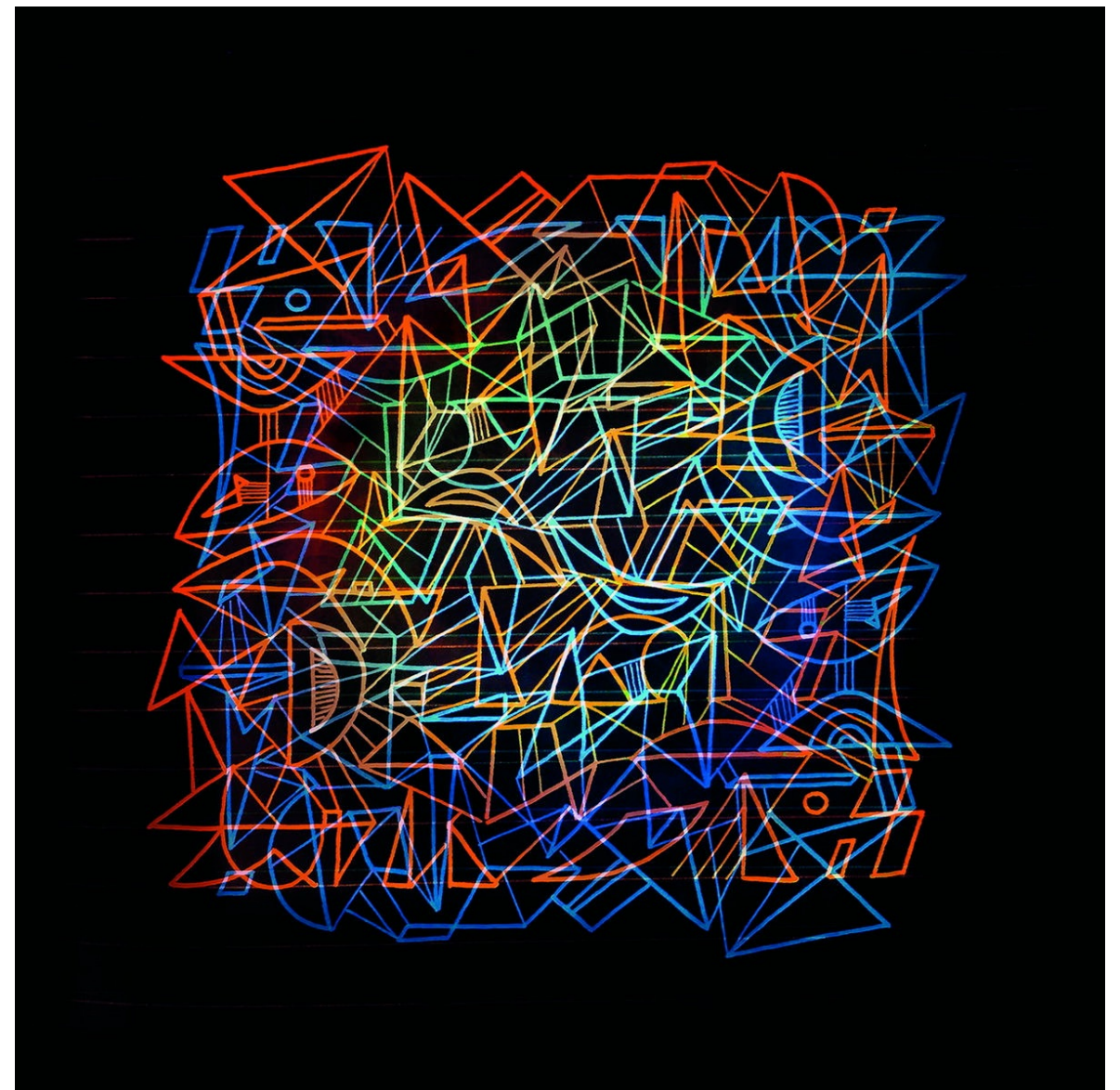
[Exit North - Book of Romance and Dust](#)

[Linkwood en Greg Foat - Linkwood & Foat](#)

## **Spotify**

[Exit North - Book of Romance and Dust](#)

[Linkwood en Greg Foat - Linkwood & Foat](#)





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