

## TEST: Stack Audio SmoothLAN

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Stack Audio SmoothLAN is one of those devices or accessories, if you prefer, you can easily convince yourself you don't need at all. Music streaming is still, to a large extent, uncharted territory where you can find all sorts of things, and in that pond one can find numerous signal, voltage, and power purifiers, various cables... Among such devices there is no small number of LAN filters - passive, active, signal regenerators... Stack Audio SmoothLAN is one of them: a passive LAN filter that you insert in the path between the home network (wall socket, router, switch) and the music streamer. The purpose of the thing: removing interference and noise present on the network, regardless of their source and origin. These unwanted phenomena that enter the streamer's LAN circuitry need to be removed so the device can demonstrate its full potential.

SmoothLAN removes these unwanted disturbances by isolating the network input to the audio system, using six completely independent isolation circuits, each encapsulated in its own aluminum pocket. This eliminates the influence of unwanted energy and blocks external and internal interference, i.e., noise, so the signal is cleaner, more stable, and relieved of unwanted noise load, and as such is ready to enter the streamer.

According to Stack, SmoothLAN is not just a filter, but a multi-stage isolation system, with particular attention to details that improve signal purity and, consequently, musical reproduction. The elements that form and contribute to this effective whole are a precisely machined aluminum enclosure, materials that absorb electromagnetic interference, a sealed chassis construction, an optimized PCB, and galvanic isolation that breaks parasitic current on the ground path. Thanks to SmoothLAN, the streamer could — and should — “breathe” more easily. The device itself, with moderate dimensions of 104 × 40 × 21.5 mm, is rather easy to place behind a streamer, and it comes in a nicely designed box with a short cable used to connect it to the streamer. The cable is of sufficient quality that you don't have to rack your brain about whether you need something better — it is an OFC CAT7 cable with gold-plated connectors, 25 cm long. The unit's weight is 200 g. We should also mention that the LAN throughput is 100 Mbps, which is more than enough even for the most demanding audio formats (for a stereo 24-bit/192 kHz file, for example, the required bandwidth is ten times lower, at 9.216 kbps).

### System context

The rest of the system consisted of a Pass Labs INT-25 integrated amplifier and Davis Courbet 7 and Rogers Studio 1a loudspeakers. Under both speakers we used Stack Audio Auva 50 isolators - more on that soon - which also contributed to the improved sound of the system. Interconnects ranged from expensive to super-expensive high-end Stealth Audio interconnects, plus a variety of speaker cables (from Wireworld, Supra, Furutech, Anticable).

As recommended by the manufacturer, we inserted the device in the system between a standard gigabit switch and my Meitner MA3 streamer. Between the switch and the SmoothLAN we used an AudioQuest Vodka LAN cable, and from the SmoothLAN to the streamer the supplied Stack Audio cable was employed.

## Sound

Installing SmoothLAN into the system, we were more than a little surprised by the changes. Even with a highly refined component as resolved and accomplished as the Meitner MA3, the soundstage shifted back and expanded into a somewhat larger sphere than before. Particularly striking was the “silence” from which the music emerged, with each note of the program material rendered with a touch more emphasis and delineation. Firm positioning and “anchoring” of images, tighter focus, plus a modest lift in perceived musicality and overall flow were what kept us glued to our seats during the first hours of listening. True to its name, SmoothLAN raised the system’s performance to a higher level, primarily through heightened focus, a sense of easier “breathing,” and a more fluid presentation, with the signal now significantly relieved of artifacts we hadn’t even suspected were there. Improvements in definition and overall clarity of the soundstage are easy to grasp. Perhaps the best outcome is that a system with SmoothLAN simply increases the pleasure of listening to music.

## Conclusion

Only after extended listening did we turn to the price. In the world of high-end audio, improvements of this scale are typically priced well into four figures. Stack Audio’s SmoothLAN, by contrast, comes in at under €300 including VAT, placing it firmly in the category of components you don’t need to agonise over — either in terms of purchase or system compatibility. In our system the sonic gains were ample enough to justify the asking price; even if they had been smaller, we’d still consider SmoothLAN a must-have in any reasonably ambitious streaming chain. **Stack Audio SmoothLAN delivers on its name, its purpose, and its price. Excellent.**

## Specifications: **Stack Audio SmoothLAN**

<b>Type:</b>	Ethernet filter
<b>Connections:</b>	RJ45 input and output
<b>Dimensions (H × W × D):</b>	21,5 × 104 × 40 mm
<b>Weight:</b>	200 g
<b>Price:</b>	289 €
<b>INFO:</b>	Stack Audio
	Tel: +44(0)1626 24 9005
	email: <a href="mailto:info@stackaudio.co.uk">info@stackaudio.co.uk</a>
	web: <a href="http://www.stackaudio.co.uk">www.stackaudio.co.uk</a>

## System Used:

**Source:** Meitner MA3, Chord Qutest + Sbooster BOTW and Sbooster Ultra MkII, NOS DAC, **Amplifier:** Pass Labs INT-25, **Speakers:** Davis Acoustics Courbet No. 7, Rogers Studio 1a, **Interconnect Cables:** Wireworld Silver Eclipse 8, Wireworld Eclipse 7, Wireworld Starlight 8, Mundorf Silver/Gold, **Speaker Cables:** Wireworld Eclipse 7, VdH CS122, Anticable, Furutech u-2T, Xindak FS1, **Power Conditioner/Filter:** PS Audio Quintet, **Power Cables:** Wireworld Electra 5-2, Aurora 5-2, Supra LoRad 2.5