

# Silent Angel Bonn N8 Pro network switch

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It's not really a switch, you can't really switch things on and off with it in the usual sense, yet this is the name that the network data switch has been given and a bit like other terms from the networking world (endpoint anyone?) we have come to accept it. Essentially, Silent Angel's Bonn N8 Pro is a computer controlled distribution block that in most instances shares a signal, or multiple signals across a number of ports. The technically inclined can access that computer and tell it how to route specific in- and outputs but for audio streaming purposes that's not necessary, all we need it to

do is connect a network streamer and maybe a hard drive and hook up the router/Wi-Fi so that we can control what gets played and stream from the WAN (wide area network where streaming services like Qobuz and Tidal exist). Even that doesn't sound simple though, so 'switch' seems like an entirely inadequate term.

Silent Angel is an interesting company that specialises in network audio components. It makes two streamers, three network switches and a Roon core as well as various power supplies and accessories. The theme that unifies their offering is modular upgradability, which is not unlike





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» that pioneered by Naim and does largely consist of power supplies. Unlike the black boxes of Salisbury, however, Silent Angel's Forester F2 linear power supply can be used with multiple components and doesn't take up a lot of space. That is another Silent Angel theme, compact casework, few of their components are full width; the Bonn N8 Pro being a rare exception to that rule.

### Word up

The Bonn N8 Pro is Silent Angel's flagship network 'switch'. It's as wide as many 16-port examples but supports eight RJ45 connections, enough for most audio-specific installations. It has a switched mode power supply onboard and an IEC mains connection but there's a second socket to allow a PSU upgrade with a 12V external supply such as the Forester F2. One feature that we've not seen on a network switch until now is a connector for an external 10MHz word clock, again this isn't something you're likely to buy just for a switch (they are rarely inexpensive) but if your DAC and/or streamer could share the same precision timing source it would be very appealing. That said this switch has a decent TCXO clock onboard which should keep jitter pretty low in the first place.

The last unusual feature on the N8 Pro is a ground point. Ground plane noise is a big issue in digital electronics and a number of brands make components to combat it (CAD,

Chord Co etc). Having a ground point means that noise can be absorbed by such devices which should benefit the performance of the switch. The only feature that might be useful but isn't present is a fibre connection for those components that can benefit from the low noise potential of optical connection. It's something we saw on the (considerably more pricey) Melco switch but is relatively rare on audio components.

The case on the N8 Pro is metal, probably steel, with a matt black finish and a nice front panel with a single green LED to indicate power status. The LEDs on the various ports can be switched off which is a nice feature; useful only when problem solving they serve no purpose once everything is up and running and probably make things a tiny bit quieter electronically speaking when off.

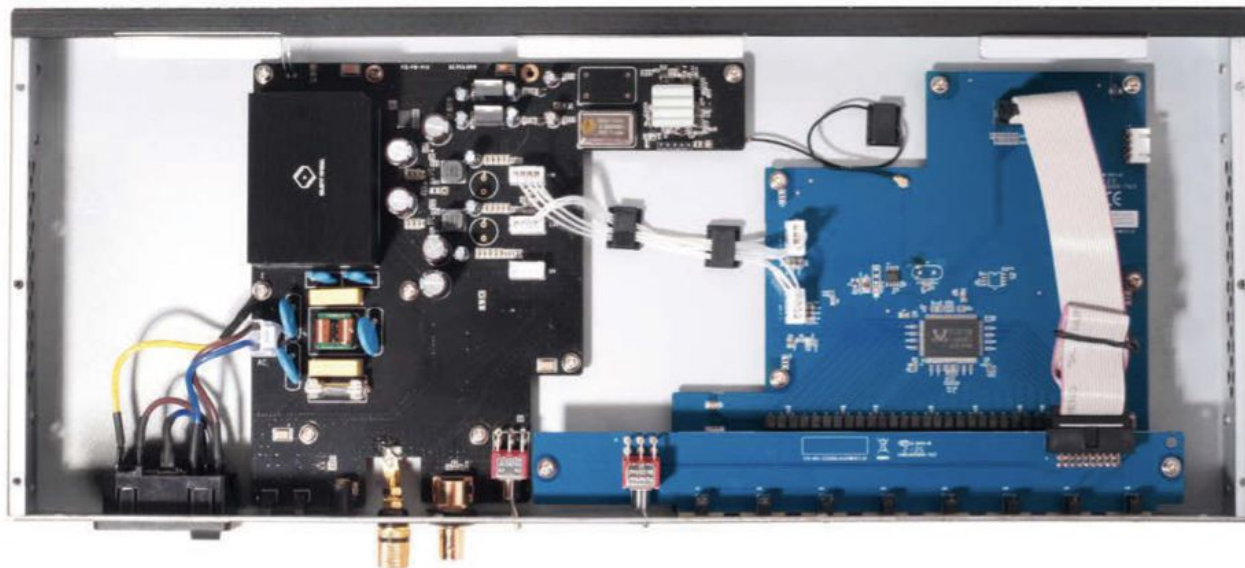
### The bells

A network switch fulfils another function in the context of streaming audio and that's as a barrier to electronic noise on the network, routers for one are very noisy things in this regard and best kept at least one if not two switches away from the audio system. I generally use two switches in my studio with the first connected to the computer, wi-fi device and router and a second switch with only audio streaming connections. Dropping the N8 Pro into this second switch place instead of the English Electric 8Switch »





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» that usually does the job and playing Qobuz resulted in a distinct increase in relaxation thanks to greater openness and sweeter leading edges, the percussion on 'Drycleaner from Des Moines' [Joni Mitchell, *Mingus, Asylum*] sounding more like bells than previously. This is generally achieved by reducing the noise floor in the signal which in turn unveils the quieter sounds and takes the harshness out of leading edges.

In a more conventional arrangement with just one network switch doing all of the work and connected to router, wi-fi and streamer but contrasting the Silent Angel with a Cisco Catalyst 2960 brought an enhanced version of the same result. Here the sense of relaxation was palpable and allowed the music to be expressed more clearly, there is even a sense of the sound breathing and the image gaining in depth. The same contrast with the 8Switch brought image quality right to the fore, it pretty well snapped into 3D focus as soon as the N8 Pro took over. There is clearly more detail being allowed through/not obscured by noise and this means that everything is fleshed out, including timing and realism. Out of interest I also tried connecting the ground point to a CAD GC1 ground cleaning device, this opened the image up still further by taking out more noise to give a smoother, sweeter sound.

With the Silent Angel in the system and using both Qobuz and locally stored media the results seemed that bit more engaging and enjoyable than usual. As the usual situation involves combining the 8Switch with a Chord ARAY grounding device that's a strong result.

The N8 Pro is clearly good at keeping noise out of the streaming network, it performs better than expected for the price and it would be intriguing to find out how a power supply upgrade would benefit results. If past experience is anything to go by it's likely to be worth the asking price. I like the fact that this is a strong component in its own right yet there are a number of ways to upgrade it without replacement. Silent Angel are onto something good here. +

### Technical specifications

Type Streaming audio network switch  
LAN Ethernet ports 8 (via RJ45)  
Fibre optic ports none  
Clock TCXO  
Packet data buffer not specified  
Features Optional upgrades; power supply, word clock  
Finish Matt black.  
Dimensions (H×W×D) 52 × 441 × 175mm  
Weight 2.6kg  
Price £1,099

Manufacturer Silent Angel [silentangel.com](http://silentangel.com)

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