

# Analysis of Second-Order Intermodulation in Miller Bandpass Filters

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**Abstract**—Miller bandpass filters combine the properties of N-path circuits with the Miller effect to achieve a narrow bandwidth and high out-of-channel rejection. This brief investigates the second-order intermodulation behavior of such filters in the context of direct-conversion receivers. It is shown that the second intercept point rises by an amount equal to the circuit’s out-of-channel rejection.

**Index Terms**—intermodulation, Miller bandpass filter (MBPF), N-path filter, second-order intermodulation (IM<sub>2</sub>) mitigation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

THE Miller bandpass filter (MBPF) [1] is an N-path topology that can achieve a much narrower bandwidth and operate with smaller switches than conventional designs. Providing bandwidths as narrow as a few hundred kilohertz at a center frequency of 1 or 2 GHz [1], this topology can attenuate both close-in and far-out blockers. One may then surmise that Miller filtering can improve the second intercept point (IP<sub>2</sub>).

This brief analyzes the behavior of MBPFs with respect to second-order intermodulation (IM<sub>2</sub>) effects. It is proved that the IP<sub>2</sub> indeed increases according to the out-of-channel attenuation provided by the MBPF.

## II. BACKGROUND

Fig. 1(a) shows a simple “commutated network,” which is also known as an N-path filter. As shown by Smith in 1953 [2], the periodic nonoverlapping switching of the capacitors translates the transfer function of the original continuous-time circuit to a center frequency equal to the switching rate, i.e.,  $f_{LO}$ . Smith also pointed out that the bandwidth of the resulting bandpass response is approximately equal to  $(NR_S C_u)^{-1}$ , where  $N$  denotes the number of unit capacitors [and the local oscillator (LO) phases]. From another perspective, the bandwidth is inversely proportional to the total capacitance and independent of the number of phases.

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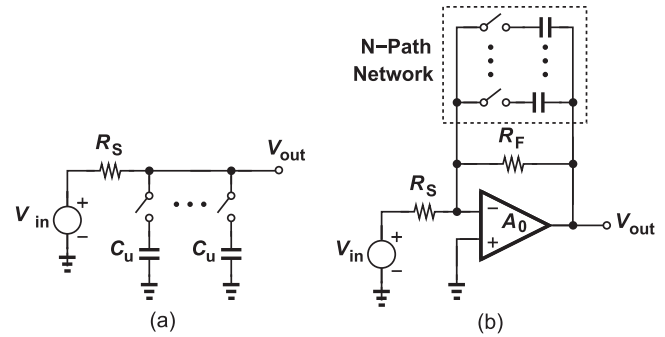


Fig. 1. (a) N-path filter. (b) MBPF.

The MBPF exploits the Miller effect to increase the apparent value of the capacitors in an N-path circuit, thus providing a narrower bandwidth for a given amount of capacitance. As shown in Fig. 1(b), the MBPF consists of an N-path network placed around an amplifier, presenting a bandwidth of approximately  $[2\pi R_S N(1 + A_0) C_u]^{-1}$ . It is also shown that the on-resistance of the switches in the feedback path is divided by  $1 + A_0$ , improving the out-of-channel rejection [1]. The resistor  $R_F$  establishes input matching within the desired channel. In this brief, we assume ideal switches and  $N = 4$ . The analysis is carried out for a single-ended amplifier, but the results also apply to a differential front end (with random asymmetries).

## III. ANALYSIS PROCEDURE

Let us model the amplifier in Fig. 1(b) by a second-order nonlinearity of the form  $y = \alpha_1 x + \alpha_2 x^2$ , where  $\alpha_1 = A_0 > 0$ . Here, we assume that the amplifier is weakly nonlinear so that the  $x^4$  and higher-order terms are negligible [3]. The overall front end is therefore a dynamic nonlinear system that can be analyzed by harmonic balance methods. For IM<sub>2</sub> analysis, we apply to the input two equal tones at  $\omega_1$  and  $\omega_2$  outside the passband and assume an output IM<sub>2</sub> of the form  $V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta]$ , where  $V_{IM2}$  and  $\theta$  are unknown. Our harmonic balance analysis exploits the method of “nonlinear currents” [4] and proceeds in five steps: 1) assume that the amplifier is negligibly compressed and compute the magnitude of the main tones at the output; 2) return these tones and  $V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta]$  to the virtual ground by proper transfer functions; 3) allow the main tones at the virtual ground to travel through the amplifier and generate an IM<sub>2</sub> product; 4) allow the IM<sub>2</sub> component at the virtual ground to be amplified by the small-signal gain;

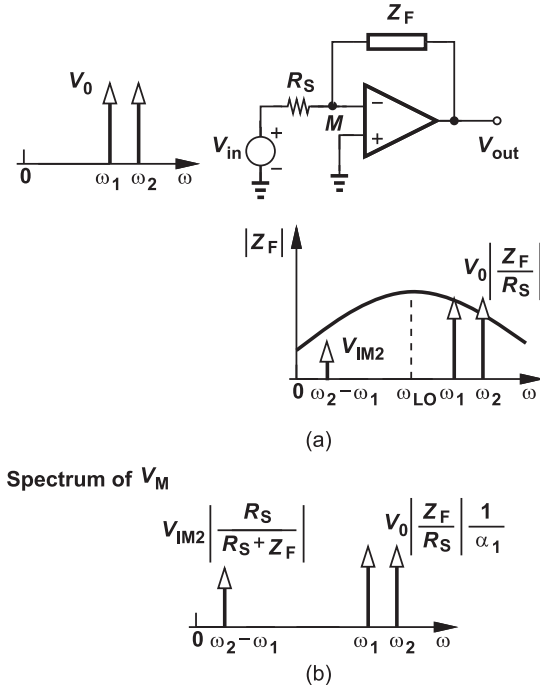


Fig. 2. (a) Frequency response of a nonlinear amplifier with frequency-dependent feedback impedance. (b) Frequency spectrum at node  $M$ .

and 5) equate the sum of the  $IM_2$  components computed in the last two steps to the original output  $IM_2$ , i.e.,  $V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta]$ , obtaining  $V_{IM2}$  in terms of known quantities.

#### IV. CONTINUOUS-TIME APPROXIMATION

Since the N-path network in Fig. 1(b) acts as a bandpass impedance, we intuitively expect that we can approximate it by a continuous-time equivalent. Here, we model the entire feedback network by a continuous-time impedance  $Z_F$  and, as shown in Fig. 2(a), apply two closely spaced tones at the input. The output thus contains the main tones and an  $IM_2$  component at  $\omega_2 - \omega_1$ .

For our harmonic balance analysis, we make the following simplifying assumptions: the amplifier has a high gain and a low output impedance and  $Z_F$  has approximately the same magnitude and phase at  $\omega_1$  and  $\omega_2$  because  $\omega_2 - \omega_1$  is small. If  $V_{in} = V_0 \cos \omega_1 t + V_0 \cos \omega_2 t$  and the amplifier gain is high, the main tones experience a transfer function given by  $-Z_F/R_S$  and emerge at the output as

$$V_{out,\omega_1,\omega_2}(t) = -V_0 \left| \frac{Z_F(\omega_1)}{R_S} \right| [\cos(\omega_1 t + \phi) + \cos(\omega_2 t + \phi)] \quad (1)$$

where we have assumed  $|Z_F(\omega_1)| \approx |Z_F(\omega_2)|$  and  $\angle Z_F(\omega_1) \approx \angle Z_F(\omega_2) = \phi$ .

In order to compute  $V_{IM2}$ , we allow the output components to circulate around the loop, i.e., we refer them to node  $M$  and subject the results to the amplifier characteristic, i.e.,  $\alpha_1 x + \alpha_2 x^2$ . An interesting and critical point here is that the output  $IM_2$  product and the main tones are referred to  $M$  by

different transfer functions. This is because  $V_{in}$  itself contains no signal at  $\omega_2 - \omega_1$ . Consequently, the  $IM_2$  component is simply divided by  $R_S$  and  $Z_F$  as it returns to  $M$ , i.e.,

$$V_{M,IM2}(t) = \frac{R_S}{|R_S + Z_F(\omega_2 - \omega_1)|} \times V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta + \beta] \quad (2)$$

where  $\beta$  is the phase contributed by the voltage divider  $R_S/|R_S + Z_F(\omega_2 - \omega_1)|$ . Note that  $Z_F$  in (2) is calculated at  $\omega_1 - \omega_2$  and, owing to its bandpass nature, is very small. On the other hand, to refer the main tones to  $M$ , we divide their magnitude by the amplifier gain  $\alpha_1$  [see Fig. 2(b)], i.e.,

$$V_{M,\omega_1,\omega_2}(t) = \frac{V_0}{\alpha_1} \frac{|Z_F(\omega_1)|}{R_S} [\cos(\omega_1 t + \phi) + \cos(\omega_2 t + \phi)] \quad (3)$$

In the next step of the harmonic balance analysis, we allow  $V_{M,IM2}(t)$  to be amplified by a factor of  $\alpha_1$  and  $V_{M,\omega_1,\omega_2}(t)$  to experience the amplifier nonlinearity and hence generate  $IM_2$ . The sum of these output  $IM_2$  components is then equated to our original expression  $V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta]$ , i.e.,

$$\begin{aligned} \frac{\alpha_2 V_0^2}{\alpha_1^2} \frac{|Z_F(\omega_1)|^2}{R_S^2} \cos(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t \\ - \alpha_1 \frac{R_S}{|R_S + Z_F(\omega_2 - \omega_1)|} V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta + \beta] \\ = V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta]. \end{aligned} \quad (4)$$

Recognizing that  $R_S/|R_S + Z_F(\omega_2 - \omega_1)| \approx 1$  and  $\alpha_1 \gg 1$ , we obtain

$$\begin{aligned} \alpha_1 V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta + \beta] \\ = \frac{\alpha_2 V_0^2}{\alpha_1^2} \frac{|Z_F(\omega_1)|^2}{R_S^2} \cos(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t. \end{aligned} \quad (5)$$

For this relationship to hold at all  $t$ , the amplitudes must be equal, and hence

$$|V_{IM2}| = \frac{\alpha_2}{\alpha_1^3} \frac{|Z_F(\omega_1)|^2}{R_S^2} V_0^2. \quad (6)$$

This result suggests that if  $Z_F$  in Fig. 2(a) attenuates the two tones by a factor of  $k = |Z_F(\omega_1)|/R_S$  with respect to the peak at  $\omega_{LO}$ , then  $V_{IM2}$  falls by a factor of  $k^2$  and the  $IP_2$  rises by a factor of  $k$ . The key point offered by our analysis is that a bandpass network placed around an amplifier can raise the  $IP_2$ . On the other hand, if  $Z_F$  is a simple resistor and much greater than  $R_S$ , then we can rewrite  $|V_{IM2}|$  as

$$|V_{IM2}| = \frac{\alpha_2}{\alpha_1^2} \frac{|Z_F(\omega_1)|^2}{R_S^2} \frac{1}{\frac{\alpha_1 R_S}{|Z_F(\omega_2 - \omega_1)|} + 1} V_0^2. \quad (7)$$

Equation (7) indicates that  $|V_{IM2}|$  is suppressed by only a factor of  $\alpha_1^3 (R_S/|Z_F(\omega_2 - \omega_1)| + 1/\alpha_1)$ , which can be much smaller than  $\alpha_1^3$  in (6).

In our study, we examine the spectrum at the output of the amplifier in Fig. 1(b) to measure the (low-frequency)  $IM_2$

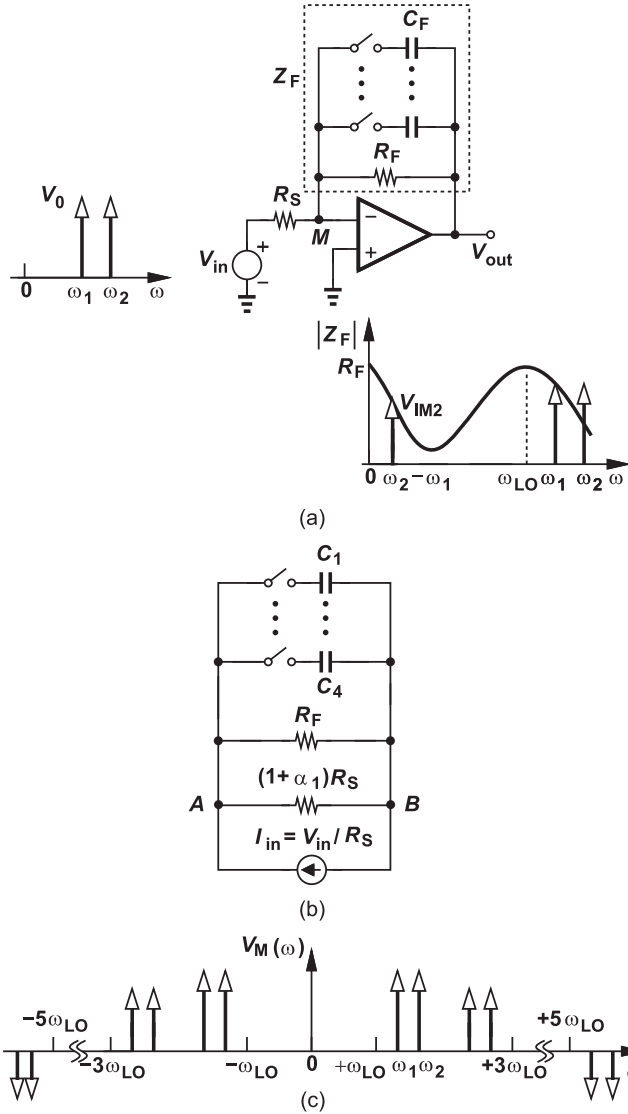


Fig. 3. (a) Frequency response of a nonlinear amplifier with an N-path filter in feedback. (b) Frequency spectrum at node  $M$ .

component. The receiver  $\text{IP}_2$ , however, also depends on the mismatches within the downconversion circuit, which can be either an explicit stage following this front end or simply embedded within the N-path filter [1]. In other words, the results of our study must be scaled according to the downconversion circuit mismatches to yield the overall  $\text{IP}_2$ .

## V. DISCRETE-TIME FEEDBACK

While intuitive and mathematically efficient, the continuous-time approximation disregards various mixing products that are generated within the feedback N-path network, casting doubt on the validity of (6). We must compute both the main tones and the  $\text{IM}_2$  product for the discrete-time system.

### A. Main Tones at Output

To determine the amplitude of the main tones, we first replace  $V_{\text{in}}$ ,  $R_S$ , and the amplifier in Fig. 3(a) with their Norton equivalent [see Fig. 3(b)]. We also recognize that  $|Z_F|$  in Fig. 3(a)

rises as  $\omega$  approaches zero. Note that  $C_1 = \dots = C_N = C_F$ , and  $R_F = (1 + \alpha_1)R_S$  is necessary for input matching [see Fig. 3(a)]. The impedance presented to  $I_{\text{in}}$  has been calculated in [5] and, in the vicinity of  $\omega_{\text{LO}}$ , can be simplified to

$$\begin{aligned} Z_{AB} &\cong \left[ \frac{8}{\pi^2} \frac{(1 + \alpha_1)R_S}{2} \right] \parallel [Z_4(\omega - \omega_{\text{LO}})] \\ &= \left[ \frac{8}{\pi^2} \frac{(1 + \alpha_1)R_S}{2} \right] \parallel \left[ \frac{2}{\pi^2} \frac{1}{jC_F(\omega - \omega_{\text{LO}})} \right] \end{aligned} \quad (8)$$

where  $(1 + \alpha_1)R_S$  is divided by 2 to account for  $R_F$ , and  $Z_4$  denotes the impedance of the four commutated capacitors. Writing  $V_{AB} = I_{\text{in}}Z_{AB}$  and noting that  $V_{\text{out}}$  in Fig. 3(a) is simplified to  $[\alpha_1/(\alpha_1 + 1)]V_{AB}$ , we obtain the transfer function as

$$\frac{V_{\text{out}}}{V_{\text{in}}} = \frac{4}{\pi^2} \frac{1 + \alpha_1}{1 + 2j(1 + \alpha_1)R_S C_F(\omega - \omega_{\text{LO}})}. \quad (9)$$

If the tones lie outside the passband, then  $|\omega - \omega_{\text{LO}}|^2 \gg 1/[2(1 + \alpha_1)R_S C_F]^2$  and

$$\left| \frac{V_{\text{out}}}{V_{\text{in}}} \right| \approx \frac{2}{\pi^2} \frac{1}{R_S C_F(\omega - \omega_{\text{LO}})} \approx \frac{|Z_4(\omega - \omega_{\text{LO}})|}{R_S}. \quad (10)$$

For a two-tone input, we thus have

$$V_{\text{out}}(t) = -V_0 \frac{|Z_4|}{R_S} [\cos(\omega_1 t + \theta) + \cos(\omega_2 t + \theta)] \quad (11)$$

where  $|Z_4(\omega_1)| \approx |Z_4(\omega_2)|$ , and  $\angle Z_4(\omega_1) \approx \angle Z_4(\omega_2) = \theta$ .

### B. Feedback Components

We now return the output tones and the  $\text{IM}_2$  components to node  $M$  in Fig. 3(a). The former are divided by the amplifier gain in a manner similar to (3), i.e.,

$$V_{M,\omega_1,\omega_2}(t) = \frac{V_0}{\alpha_1} \frac{|Z_4|}{R_S} [\cos(\omega_1 t + \theta) + \cos(\omega_2 t + \theta)] \quad (12)$$

where  $Z_4$  is evaluated at  $\omega_1 \approx \omega_2$ .

We must add the mixing products as well to the preceding value. Specifically, the main output tones mix with  $4\omega_{\text{LO}}$ ,  $8\omega_{\text{LO}}$ , etc., as they return to  $M$ . As depicted in Fig. 3(c), the resulting spectrum contains these components with declining amplitudes, for example,  $V_M(4\omega_{\text{LO}} - \omega_1) = (1/3)V_M(\omega_1)$  and  $V_M(4\omega_{\text{LO}} + \omega_1) = (1/5)V_M(\omega_1)$  [6]. This is the first difference between the continuous- and discrete-time models.

The output  $\text{IM}_2$  component propagates through the N-path impedance, with this impedance evaluated at  $\omega_1 - \omega_2$ ; as depicted in Fig. 3(a), this impedance has a *high* value if  $\omega_1 - \omega_2$  is small. We expect that the four capacitors present an overall impedance of  $[4C_F(\omega_1 - \omega_2)]^{-1}$  at low frequencies, attenuating the  $\text{IM}_2$  component by a factor of  $R_S/\{R_S + R_F \parallel [4C_F(\omega_1 - \omega_2)]^{-1}\}$ . This is the second difference between the continuous- and discrete-time models. It follows that the  $\text{IM}_2$  returned to the virtual ground is given by:

$$\begin{aligned} V_{M,\text{IM}_2}(t) &= \frac{R_S}{R_S + \frac{R_F}{1 + 4jR_F C_F(\omega_1 - \omega_2)}} \\ &\quad \times V_{\text{IM}_2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta + \beta]. \end{aligned} \quad (13)$$

Since  $R_F = (1 + \alpha_1)R_S \gg R_S$ , this result can be simplified if  $\omega_1 - \omega_2$  is small, i.e.,

$$V_{M,IM2}(t) = \frac{1}{1 + \alpha_1} V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta + \beta]. \quad (14)$$

One may wonder whether the output  $IM_2$  component in Fig. 3(a) is mixed with the LO phases as it returns through the N-path network, i.e., whether it manifests itself at  $\omega_{LO} \pm (\omega_2 - \omega_1)$  at node  $M$ . Indeed, the mixing occurs, but with perfectly matched paths, the upconverted phases of  $V_{IM2}$  exactly cancel as they reach this node.

### C. $IM_2$ Product at Output

In a manner similar to the continuous-time approximation, we allow the components at node  $M$  in Fig. 3(a) to propagate through the amplifier: the main tones around  $\omega_{LO}$ ,  $3\omega_{LO}$ , etc., experience the second-order nonlinearity, generating  $IM_2$ , whereas the  $IM_2$  component at  $M$  is simply amplified by a factor of  $\alpha_1$ . In order to compute the  $IM_2$  product resulting from the main tones, we calculate  $\alpha_2 x^2$ , where  $x$  represents the time-domain counterpart of the spectrum in Fig. 3(c). That is, we convolve this spectrum with itself, group all of the terms that land at  $\omega_1 - \omega_2$ , and multiply the result by  $\alpha_2$ . We thus write in the frequency domain

$$\begin{aligned} V_{M,IM2}(\omega_1 - \omega_2) &= \alpha_2 \frac{|V_M(\omega_1)| |V_M(\omega_2)|}{2} \delta(\omega_1 - \omega_2) \\ &\quad \times \sum_{k=0}^{\infty} \frac{2}{(2k+1)^2} \\ &\cong \frac{\alpha_2 \pi^2}{16} |V_M(\omega_1)|^2 \delta(\omega_1 - \omega_2) \end{aligned} \quad (15)$$

where  $|V_M(\omega_1)| \approx |V_M(\omega_2)|$  denotes the amplitude of the main tones at node  $M$  and, from (12), is equal to  $(V_0/\alpha_1)(|Z_4|/R_S)$ . In the time domain, therefore

$$V_{out,IM2}(t) = \frac{\alpha_2 \pi^2 V_0^2 |Z_4|^2}{8 \alpha_1^2 R_S^2} \cos(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t. \quad (16)$$

### D. Overall $IM_2$ Calculation

In our final step, we add (16) to the amplified  $IM_2$  component and equate the result to  $V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta]$ , i.e.,

$$\begin{aligned} &\frac{\alpha_2 \pi^2 V_0^2 |Z_4(\omega_1)|^2}{8 \alpha_1^2 R_S^2} \cos(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t \\ &\quad - \frac{\alpha_1}{1 + \alpha_1} V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta + \beta] \\ &= V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta] \end{aligned} \quad (17)$$

when the spacing between the two tones, i.e.,  $\omega_1 - \omega_2$ , is small. Since  $\alpha_1$  is large, we can assume  $\alpha_1/(1 + \alpha_1) \approx 1$ , arriving at

$$|V_{IM2}| = \frac{\alpha_2 \pi^2 V_0^2 |Z_4(\omega_1)|^2}{16 \alpha_1^2 R_S^2}. \quad (18)$$

The key result here is that  $|V_{IM2}| \propto |Z_4(\omega_1)|^2/R_S^2$ , as was the case in the continuous-time approximation. Thus, the  $IP_2$  rises

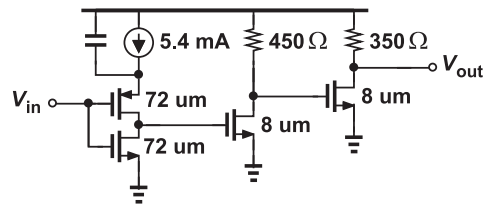


Fig. 4. Actual low-noise amplifier (LNA) topology ( $L = 60$  nm).

by the factor that the MBPF attenuates the blockers at  $\omega_1$  and  $\omega_2$ . We can observe that  $|V_{IM2}|$  in (18) is attenuated by  $\alpha_1^2$  rather than by  $\alpha_1^3$  in (6). This is because  $Z_F(\omega_1 - \omega_2)$  approaches  $R_F$  with discrete-time feedback, but zero in continuous-time feedback.

Our derivation of (18) has made two simplifying assumptions, namely,  $(1 + \alpha_1)R_S = R_F$  and  $|\omega - \omega_{LO}|^2 \gg 1/[2(1 + \alpha_1)R_S C_F]^2$ , which may not hold if the open-loop gain  $\alpha_1$  is not very large. It is possible to repeat the analysis without these conditions; (9) leads to

$$\frac{V_{out}}{V_{in}} = \frac{4}{\pi^2} \frac{2(1 + \alpha_1)}{1 + \eta + 4j(1 + \alpha_1)R_S C_F(\omega - \omega_{LO})} \quad (19)$$

where  $\eta = (1 + \alpha_1)R_S/R_F$ . With the  $IM_2$  returning to the virtual ground, (14) must be revised as

$$V_{M,IM2}(t) = \frac{R_S}{R_F} V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta + \beta]. \quad (20)$$

Writing (17) without the simplifications

$$\begin{aligned} &\frac{\alpha_2 \pi^2 V_0^2 16}{8 \alpha_1^2 \pi^4} \frac{4(1 + \alpha_1)^2 \cos(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t}{[1 + \eta]^2 + [4(1 + \alpha_1)R_S C_F(\omega - \omega_{LO})]^2} \\ &\quad - \frac{\alpha_1 R_S}{R_F} V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta + \beta] \\ &= V_{IM2} \cos[(\omega_1 - \omega_2)t + \theta]. \end{aligned} \quad (21)$$

This yields a more accurate output  $IM_2$ , i.e.,

$$|V_{IM2}| \approx \frac{\alpha_2 \pi^2 V_0^2 16}{8(1 + \eta) \alpha_1^2 \pi^4} \frac{4(1 + \alpha_1)^2}{[1 + \eta]^2 + [4\eta R_S C_F(\omega - \omega_{LO})]^2}. \quad (22)$$

We note that (18) provides insight while (22) has higher precision.

## VI. SIMULATION RESULTS

In order to verify the results of our  $IM_2$  analysis, we have carried out a multitude of simulations in Cadence. This section summarizes our findings. We have chosen the values in Fig. 1(b) as follows:  $R_S = 50 \Omega$ ,  $R_F = 1 \text{ k}\Omega$ ,  $f_{LO} = 2.5 \text{ GHz}$ , and an N-path network consisting of four 10-pF capacitors. The uncompressed voltage gain of the amplifier is  $\alpha_1 \approx 27$ , yielding an RF channel bandwidth of about 12 MHz.

In the first test, we apply two tones at  $f_1 = 2.520 \text{ GHz}$  and  $f_2 = 2.522 \text{ GHz}$ , each having a peak amplitude of  $V_0 = 6.3 \text{ mV}$ . This test is run on the following: 1) a behavioral amplifier (a voltage-controlled voltage source) with  $\alpha_1 = 27$  and  $\alpha_2 = 440 \text{ V}^{-1}$  and 2) the actual amplifier topology (65-nm CMOS technology with a 1.2-V supply) shown in Fig. 4, which

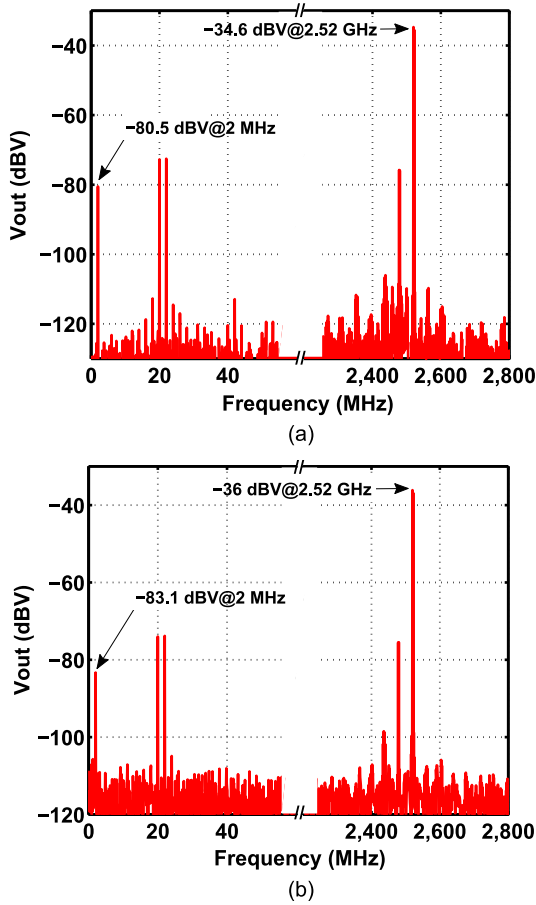


Fig. 5. Frequency spectrum of the (a) behavioral amplifier and the (b) actual amplifier.

also has  $\alpha_1 = 27$  and  $\alpha_2 = 440 V^{-1}$ . The amplifier output spectra for the two cases are plotted in Fig. 5.

We observe that the former yields an  $IM_2$  amplitude of  $-80.5$  dBV, about  $0.5$  dB lower than (22). The latter gives a value of  $-83.1$  dBV, which is  $3.1$  dB lower than (22). This discrepancy is attributed to the input capacitance of the LNA ( $\approx 140$  fF), which has not been included in the nonlinearity analysis.

In the second test, we increase the amplitude of the two tones from  $4$  to  $22.4$  mV<sub>p</sub>, noting from (22) that  $V_{IM2}$  should grow proportional to  $V_0^2$ . Fig. 6 plots the simulated results against this prediction, implying good agreement.

In the third test, we sweep the tone frequencies while maintaining a  $2$ -MHz separation, thereby exercising different parts of the front-end frequency response, i.e., different values of  $|Z_F|^2$  in (18). The  $IM_2$  behavior is depicted in Fig. 7 along with  $|Z_F|^2$ , revealing a constant difference in decibels from  $10$ - to  $30$ -MHz offset.

VII. CONCLUSION

The MBPF technique not only allows narrow-band filtering and blocker rejection but also improves the  $IP_2$  of single-ended

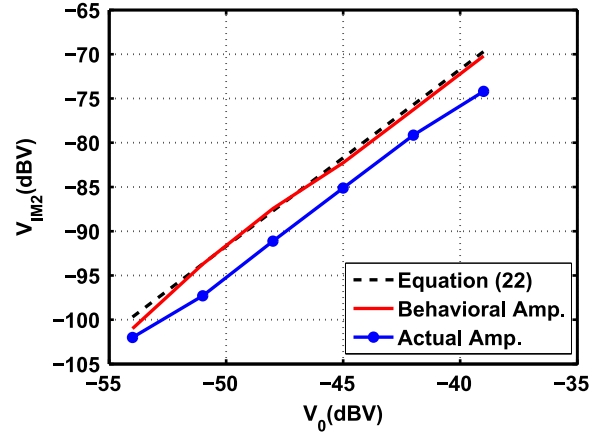


Fig. 6.  $V_{IM2}$  as a function of  $V_0$ .

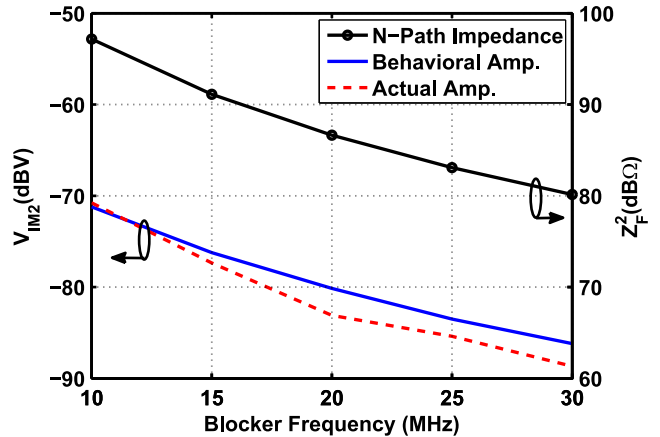


Fig. 7.  $V_{IM2}$  and  $|Z_F|^2$  as a function of blocker offset frequency.

or differential front ends. In this brief, we have employed an approximation to analyze the dynamic nonlinearities of the MBPF, concluding that the  $IP_2$  rises by the same amount that closely spaced blockers are attenuated.

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