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hardware

soundstring cable technologies

Interconnect and speaker cables, Part 2

as reviewed by Robert H. Levi



In Part One, I reviewed the Soundstring power cables (www.positive-feedback/soundstring), and found them to be musical and spot-on in every parameter that my Avalon Eidolon loudspeakers could reveal. I did prefer the Kimber Palladian cord, at three times the cost, on my REL sub, for its even greater impact, but the Soundstrings were more textured and realistic in the critical mids and have now replaced the Palladians, Taras, Tiffs, and Tices on seven components and two Power Wings. Now it's on to the interconnects. I connected these bad boys to all of my digital sources and my amps, preamp, and speakers. This system is all balanced. In system two, single-ended Soundstrings are connecting my modified Dynaco Stereo 70 to the passive Adcom preamp.

ROBERT H. LEVI'S SYSTEM

LOUDSPEAKERS
Avalon Eidolons and REL
Stadium III subwoofer.

ELECTRONICS
Marantz 17 tuner, Pass XONO
and E.A.R. 324 phono
preamplifier, Pass X1

The Soundstrings' retail costs are as follows: 6-foot speaker cables \$475, 8-foot speaker cables \$532, 1-meter single-ended interconnects \$419, 1-meter balanced interconnects \$454, 3-meter balanced interconnects \$502. All cables are shielded,

preamplifier, Pass X600 monoblocks, and an Adcom 750 preamplifier for secondary sources.

SOURCES

VPI Scout/JMW 9 tonearm, VPI SDS Controller, and Benz Ruby2 H cartridge. Sony SCD-1 SACD player, Theta Gen. 5a DAC, Theta Jade transport, Alesis Masterlink, Theta Data II DAC, Pioneer DV-09 CD player.

CABLES

Kimber Select balanced, Kimber TAK phono AG, Kimber Hero balanced and single ended, Kimber KCAK/KCTG. Soundstrings Interconnects and speaker cables, and AC power cords.

ACCESSORIES

Power Wing line conditioning, Tice Power Block, Kimber Palladian power cables, Tara RSC and Decade power cables, Tiff power cables, Tice power cables, Tice Clock, and Audio Prism Quiet Line IIs.

and the unique RCA plugs are wood covered and gold plated, with spring-type center pins for tight fit. The very flexible interconnects are patented, and feature 10-gauge, multi-strand, oxygen-free copper covered in an elegant rayon cloth. (Please read the technical discussion in Part One for further details.)

First the conclusion, then the discussion. The Soundstring speaker cables bested the Kimber Silver Selects, with better imaging, more musical texturing, and less of a paper-ships-on-a-paper-sea effect. The Soundstrings sound more realistic, dynamic, and communicative. The Tara "The One" speaker cables also have many of these dynamic qualities, but less air and delicacy. They are also a bit lumpy in the lower mids, which the Soundstrings are not. The Soundstrings are smooth throughout the range, with nary a lump or bump at any frequency. Whoever designed these speaker cables knows music!

On first listen, the Kimbers appear a bit better at air and ambience than the Soundstrings, but what is happening with the Soundstrings is that the ambience seems to move down a couple of octaves, into the upper midrange. There is so much more midrange definition and hall ambience that the super highs sound less pronounced. Right to left and up to down, the soundstage is increased in size by this, and the entire presentation is more realistic. The Kimbers have less meat on the musical bone, while the Taras have too much. The Soundstrings are just right.

At one-tenth the cost of the Kimber or Tara speaker cables, the Soundstrings are the bargain of all bargains. This is certainly the best all-copper formulation I've heard, rivaling and often surpassing not only the Tara and Kimber but the MIT, Monster, and Transparent designs that have graced my system in the past five years. The Soundstrings did not seem slow compared to the silver formulations, either. Cymbals, flutes, snares, triangles, etc., were silvery and spot-on correct. Voices were more textured and realistic than I've heard at any time since I've owned the Avalons, and I mean take-your-breath-away realistic. On the *Rutter Requiem* on Reference Recordings or the *Carmina Burana* on Telarc, the voices were palpable.

Now that I've waxed enthusiastic about the speaker cables, let me do the same about the interconnects. I replaced my Kimber silver-and-copper, balanced Select interconnects from the digital sources to the Pass preamp and from the preamp to the Pass X600 amplifiers. With each substitution, I heard and reveled in more detail, smoothness, texture, soundstage, traction, slam, and realism. Depth was about the same, and air/ambience was again heightened in the mids.

In my second system, I replaced my Kimber Hero interconnects (\$150 per meter) with single-ended Soundstrings (\$419). This was unfair, but so what? The sound of the system with the Soundstrings was well beyond its capability with the very good



Hero. It was a shocking change, and it verified for me that the single-ended Soundstring formulation is just as mellifluous and realistic as that of the balanced cable.

Lauridsen's *Lux Eterna* with the LA Chorale had endless definition and pinpoint imaging, with bass lines as clear as the treble passages. The new Telarc Hovhannes SACD was a treat for the ears, with the sweet and rosy sound of the strings placed just so in the room. Duke Ellington's *Blues in Orbit* on SACD never sounded so alive. The Soundstrings maximized SACD as never before via the Sony SCD-

1. The Theta Gen. 5a sounded smoother and more analog-like. I did not miss the more expensive interconnects for one moment. I know that cables are components too, but my system sounded like I replaced an amp or preamp. Like the Soundstring speaker cables, the interconnects are a true, unmitigated bargain. As I write, I'm listening to my modified Stereo 70 vintage amp, and the Soundstring

cables make it sound like a Tenor or Cary design (subjectively, of course). The Soundstring guys claim 100 cumulative years of cable-making experience, and a metallurgical discovery too good to share with their OEM customers. They don't seem to be bragging. Aside from the sonics, the Soundstrings' fit and finish are top of the heap.

To that point, all my listening had been done with digital sources, so it was time to replace the balanced five-meter Kimber Select copper cable between the E.A.R. 324 phono stage and the Pass preamp. I assumed that differences in this link would be very easy to discern, as my turntable setup is more detailed and less compressed than my digital sources. Wow! What a change! I anticipated a 10 to 20% improvement, similar to what I'd heard after substituting the Soundstring interconnects on my digital sources, but this was more like a 30 to 40% improvement. Not only was the sound more detailed and textured, but it was more realistic and smooth. The warmth and sweetness was welcome, but to have more definition, too! I'd expect this much difference if I replaced my Benz cartridge with a newer model, but not from replacing interconnects. The five meters of all-copper Soundstring has the sound of some silver/copper blends or the Tara "The One" or "Zero," at nowhere near the cost. The Soundstring interconnects transport the listener closer to the musical event, like state-of-the-art cables do.

My recommendations are as follows:

Power cables: These are superb and musical, and a real bargain at \$475 for a 6-foot length. They convince me that some companies overcharge for their designs. They work extremely well with all electronics, solid state or tube, digital or analog, enhancing midrange and dynamics. They are very good with subwoofers, but are not as strong in deep bass as the Palladians. Buy them now before the price goes up.

Speaker cables: State of the art. They bested my reference speaker cables, which cost ten times as much. The Soundstrings are the best all-copper design on the planet. They aren't just a bargain, they're a giveaway. There may be some silver, silver/gold, aluminum alloy, or unobtainium cables out there that sound as good, but who cares?!

Interconnects: These are the best interconnects under \$1000 per meter on the market today. They do midrange just right, have sweetness when the source is sweet, have dynamics and detail galore, and are smooth from top to bottom. They are a real bargain at half the price of any cable that I'm aware of that is better in any way. All Soundstring cables are grounded and shielded, a bonus for those who crave quiet and elimination from RF problems.

The Soundstring cables are the new kids on the cable block, with the real thing to offer. I love the fact that they offer only one model because it's the best they can do. I've wired my entire system with them, and Soundstring will get them back only from my cold dead hands. Highest recommendation.



Soundstring Cable Technologies, LLC
P.O. Box 658
Stony Point, NY 10980
TEL: 845.942.1433
web address: <http://www.soundstringcable.com>
email: amiller@soundstringcable.com