

## Silversmith Audio

### Speaker Cables & Interconnects

Source: NewView Audio Tech

Price: \$5,575.00 Cdn, \$3,850.00 US per 3.6m pair

Rating: 3 1/2 musical notes

The world of high-end audio cables is rife with gimmicks and fads that come and go. We're going to have a look at some very unusual cables that an affable fellow named Jeffrey Smith has been producing in Southern California for the last six months or so. If the quality of workmanship and the fine sound these cables can transmit are the results of Smith's first attempt at cable making, then I can't wait to see what he comes up with next.

Smith graduated from the United States Naval Academy with a degree in Engineering. His first two tours gave him exposure to a variety of sonar systems as the Anti-Submarine Warfare Officer. At the same time, he became involved in high-end audio and started to research how he could make simple cables that reduced or eliminated the known or suspected causes of distortion in wire while minimizing any sonic trade-offs. This led Smith to discover what he believes to be an optimal mix of dielectric materials and conductor configuration.

### Appearance

The external sheath of the speaker cable is quite typical of what we've come to accept over the last ten years or so: black plastic mesh. In this case, the outside of the cable is about one inch across and somewhat flattened so that it appears almost oval. Though the company states that the cables are flexible and can be turned back 180 degrees, the eight-foot pair I was given for review was fairly heavy and assumed a long arc that discouraged any thoughts of rough handling. The point where the cable terminates emerges from the mesh jackets and is protected with either red or black heat-shrink tubing, labeled  $\text{\textcircled{S}}$ Silversmith<sup>1</sup> with a directional arrow.

The outstanding visual feature of these cables is the terminator. It's a continuation of the internal conductor, a ribbon of three 9s silver, rolled to a thickness of .005 inches and notched with a cut-out that will fit the binding posts of most amps and speakers.

The interconnects appear conventional at first glance. They are very flexible and are terminated with Cardas silver RCA plugs. The external jacket is a very finely woven black plastic mesh. However, if you hold the cable up to a light source and examine it carefully, you'll see an extraordinarily fine wire netting. It surrounds the translucent Teflon tube that contains the closely spaced pair of silver conductors. Once again, the junction of the outer jacket and RCA plug is sealed with red or black heat-shrink tubing printed with an arrow for correct orientation.

### Technology

Jeffrey Smith says that his cable design was very heavily influenced by a paper published in 1995 by the respected British digital boffin, Malcolm Hawkesford, in which he purported to have discovered a new electrical property of wire which he called  $\text{\textcircled{I}}$ indo<sup>1</sup> or self-inductance. Hawkesford postulated that this property, not to be confused with what we normally term  $\text{\textcircled{I}}$ inductance<sup>1</sup>, was the primary source of sound degradation in wire.

As I don't have a copy of Hawkesford's paper handy I can't comment on his idea. All I can say is that you should contact Jeffrey Smith at Silversmith Audio if you have any questions about the theory. Additionally, the use of a very small, round conductor is purported to eliminate the above mentioned effect. Coincidentally, I've noted over the last year or so that many designers have supported a move to smaller and smaller gauge solid core conductors.

The difficulty with fine gauge conductors is that they can't carry much current<not the amount that Silversmith believes is necessary to drive a speaker properly. So listen up all you Krell, Levinson, Rowland and Threshold devotees (did I leave anyone out?).

Silversmith speaker cables are equivalent to 13 awg. wire and are designed to carry 20 amps<continuously!

Jeffrey Smith is a firm believer in using air as a dielectric insulator because it contributes so little distortion. Where he can't use air, he uses Teflon, configured to minimize contact with the silver conductors.

But be warned! The speaker cables are not shielded from RFI in any conventional way, but do have an effective silver mesh. They are said to be less susceptible to stray magnetic fields, as silver is highly diamagnetic, compared to other metals. Four Velcro straps are included to help the purchaser tie the legs of each channel together. Lifting the cables off the floor is also recommended.

### The Sound

My system is primarily analog. I've been using a VPI HW-19 Mk III with a JMW10 tone arm for about a year. My Lyra Lydian cartridge was just given a tune-up by Mishima at Scan-Tech, Japan. I haven't mounted it yet because I've been enjoying the penultimate Grado Woodie. I recently purchased an active Vibraplane to support the turntable A Bel Canto Phono1 (phono preamp) is connected with eight feet of NBS King Serpent II to the Manley Labs 300B linestage. My amp is the Jadis Orchestra and that little gem is usually hooked up to my Quad ESL-63 Monitors with vintage Purist Audio Design Aqueous cable. Digital duties are handled by an obsolete NAD 502 one-box player that benefits greatly from being sited on the Vibraplane. To round things off, I have a couple of 4 track reel-to-reel tape decks.

I listen to classical music of all types and jazz from the era of be-bop to the late 1960s. Blues and the odd pop record find their way onto the platter. My two daughters are still unsuccessful in their attempts to destroy my Eupstairs<sup>1</sup> Quad 57s with Brittany Spears. Now let me tell you what I discovered about the Silversmith cables.

I really like the 5th Symphony by Jan Sibelius. I have many versions but my favourite is on vinyl<Sir Colin Davis conducting the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Sir Colin has a deeply nuanced understanding of Sibelius<sup>1</sup> music. Once the Silversmiths settled into my system I realized that they had an easy, delicate way with the intricate harmonies and solo parts in this symphony. This is what I call the magic of silver. Silver conductors have a special sound, different from even the best copper.

In the past, this recording had seemed distant and muddy. Now it shone forth in splendid, rapturous detail. And most significant of all, the very, very loud brass passages were reproduced without the slight edge of harshness I'd grown accustomed to. I could play the record at much higher levels than usual. I could relax and bask in the golden glow and luxuriate in the power of the brass section giving it's all. Here, I believe, we have the

proof of all the claims made by Silversmith Audio regarding the current handling capacity and low distortion of this design. Where I had winced, I could now relax. Other examples were easy to find—even with digital sources! Take for example, the Mercury re-issue of Stravinsky's ballet Petrouchka coupled with The Rite of Spring on the same disc. The perspective in both recordings is very close to the stage. In this recording using the Silversmith cables we can feel the heart-rending irony of Petrouchka's unrequited love for the empty-headed Ballerina and the whimsical brutality of his rival, the Moor. When Stravinsky first played sketches of The Rite of Spring on a piano his friends thought he'd gone mad. The Rite has incredible dynamics—from top to bottom—coupled with bizarre, simultaneous polyrhythms. I've never heard them reproduced with this much impact on the Jadis/Quad system. This is really savage, primitive, unearthly music. The Silversmith speaker cables and interconnects brought extra depth, dimension and emotion to this music played on my system. They were clearly a step up from what I was accustomed to.

At the other end of the dynamic scale they allowed me to hear individual voices, complete with sibilants, in a recording of unaccompanied hymns by Healy Willan, sung by the Choir of the Church of St. Mary Magdalene, Toronto. I'm personally familiar with the sound of the venue and this choir, and I can assure you that the scale, balance and timbre of the recording was remarkably well captured and reproduced.

#### Synopsis & Commentary

The issue of speaker cable technology always seems to have an element of hocus-pocus to it. I have to admit that I had a lot of trouble understanding what the design of these cables was all about from the information on the Silversmith website. As well, I found they had some peculiarities that I had never experienced before—example: a strong 60 Hz hum was present until I picked up the CD player sitting on the Vibraplane and placed it at a 30 degree angle to the rest of the system. On another occasion the signal going to the left speaker was weak until I lifted the (black) return leg cable off the floor and away from the other leg. Conversely, the interconnects exhibited no such problems and complemented the sound of the speaker cables well.

The two occurrences cited above indicate to me that these cables are very sensitive to interference because they are not shielded in a conventional way. This mandates a 'try before you buy' approach because they might not work for you. Fortunately, Silversmith Audio offers a 30 day money-back program either through their growing network of dealers or 'factory direct' if you can't find a dealer in your area. Some conditions may apply, so check with Silversmith first if this is your intention.

I was mainly concerned that the pure silver termination tabs would be too fragile and could break off. I was assured by Smith that, in the (admittedly short) time he has been making these cables, this has never happened. For the average home user, this should never be a problem as the tabs proved to be quite robust. The set I was loaned had really been through a torture test and remained in one piece. In any case, I believe that Silversmith Audio will stand behind their products and remedy any problems, should they arise. For those who insist, spade lugs or banana terminations are available at extra cost. Is it really worthwhile doing without spade lugs or bananas and clamping the conductor directly to the binding posts? I think so. If these cables are in your price range don't hesitate to try them. They're the best I've had in my system. Really. }

ED NOTES: This review was written by Blair T. F. Roger and is his first contribution to the magazine. He comes from a musical family and was encouraged to play the piano but switched to the flute at age 11. He studied in Manhattan with Julliard graduate and pupil of George Barerre-Henry Zlotnick for five years. After music studies he went on to earn a B.A. in Philosophy with a Minor in French Literature. His day job is Systems Analyst and COBOL Programmer.

\*\*\*\*\*

The Inner Ear Report  
A magazine worth listening to

<http://www.innerear.on.ca>

<mailto:editor@innerear.on.ca>

\*\*\*\*\*