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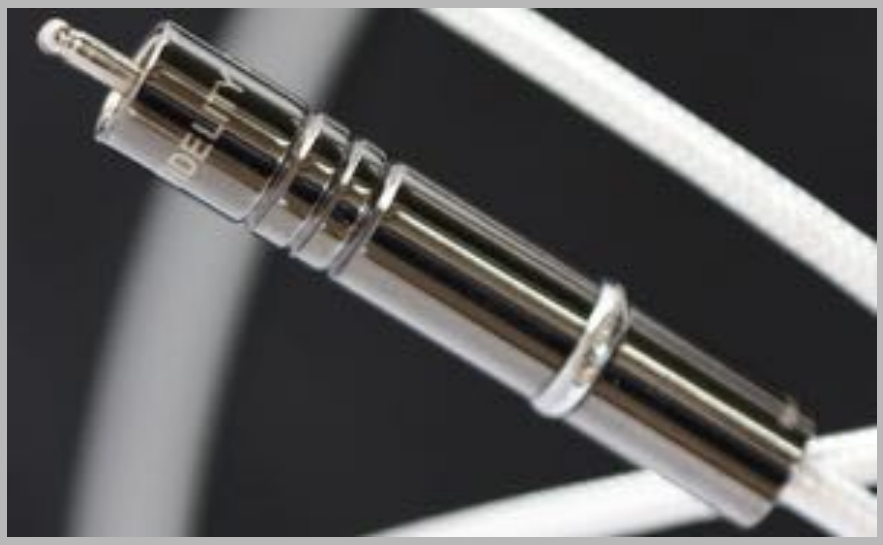
Apr 26 2013

High Fidelity Cables CT1 Interconnect – A Revelation!

Interconnect Cable Review, Reviews

Firstly I owe Jonas Harrow and Rick Schultz of High Fidelity Cables an apology re the lateness of this review but it is well known by now – I think – that I suffered a personal tragedy in November last year that mean't I didn't do any reviewing as such and its only recently that I am back in the saddle – so to speak – and reviewing again.

Regards Neil



Late last March 2012 I received out of the blue a lovely email from Jonas Harrow, marketing manager of High Fidelity Cables – a company I had not heard of before – asking if I might like to review the CT1 RCA to RCA Interconnect and after a number of email exchanges I agreed to doing a review of said interconnect, but it wasn't until August that two 1 m pairs of CT1s arrived, just a day before I was due to go away on holiday – good timing.

Being honest I get lots of emails about products for review, some of which I politely turn down because the logistics are too large to overcome in getting them to my listening room, or I instinctively know the products unsuitability to my system or room and I don't want to waste a distributor or manufacturers time and money with a less than good chance of me being able to do justice to the product (1). However there have from time to time been offers of products that just don't materialise and there having been a large gap between Jonas first emails, my exchanging details with him to the cables actually arriving that I had almost forgotten about them, as like Jonas email the cables arrived by courier out of the blue literally a day before I went away on an annual holiday.

The delay was down to a few changes being made to the connectors – not sound quality related as Jonas made clear to me – and High Fidelity Cables waiting for those so they could start producing the final version of the CT1 and send me my actual production review samples.

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Intrigued

There were a number of factors that intrigued me enough about the CT1s to want to do the review and the involvement of Rick Schultz formerly of Virtual Dynamics was one of those as was the technical aspects of the cables that at least on the virtual paper of the email I read seemed to be offering something unique and different to other cables on the market and lets be honest there are lots of cables on the market each one shouting loudly about what they do that is so different to the rest.

This was Jonas pitch to me:

'It features a new patent pending technology called Magnetic Conduction. It uses controlled magnetic fields as the pathway for the signal. Third Party testing at the University of Toronto has shown dramatically reduced distortion and increased signal to noise ratio compared to conventional cables.

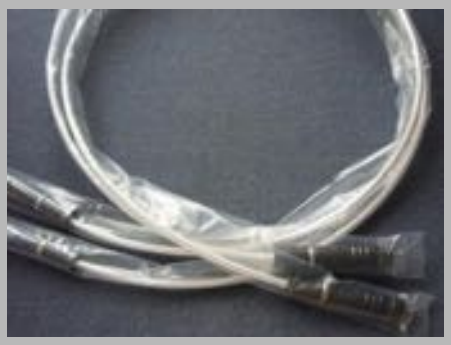
We know that a new cable company appears every week and the general reaction is 'not another one.

Consider the following points of interest

- Magnetic Conduction gives measurable reductions in THD and IHD, with improved signal-to-noise ratio - 5 patents pending - RCA connector designed from the ground up, with over 40 parts - A new theory and execution in cable design that is totally original'

After reading the above he had me but I didn't realise it would be very many months before the cables would arrive but as they say 'all good things come to those that wait' even if they have forgotten about them.

Product Description and In-depth Technical Details.



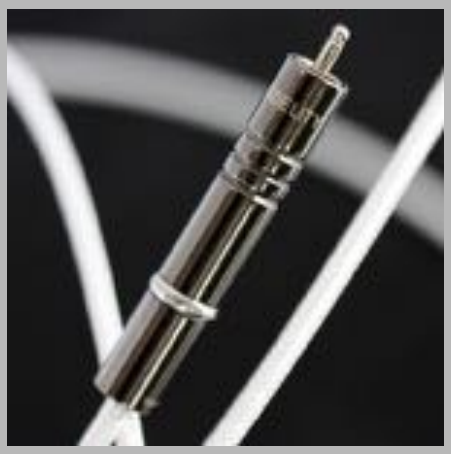
What I received sitting in very long clear plastic bags – not how they are supplied these days – were two 1 m silvery white, fairly thin, fairly flexible interconnects with a separate left and right channel cable. Each was terminated with very long beautifully made connectors, these being custom designed and made exclusively by High Fidelity Cables – more on the Pinlock connectors in a moment or two.

The cables are coaxial and directional with small arrows to indicate the direction and require a few hundred hours of run in before reaching their final stable sound – though they sound great from new but do improve over time.

One of my big fears before getting these cables and there were no photos at the time of Jonas contacting me re these cables was that they would be like Virtual Dynamics products and very hard to use. I recall trying a set of VD mains cables once and it was a case of dressing the

system around the cable i.e they were very stiff, hard to bend and could lift small buildings with their springiness not so the HFC cables which are fairly easy to work with bar two things.

I will get the only negatives out of the way right from the off, the unique technology these cables use requires a much longer than normal connector and as such you need to allow lots of room behind your equipment at least 6 inches (15 cms) I feel to allow for the connector and a gentle curve in the cable. This is due to the Pinlock connectors being 3 inches (8 cms) long – possibly the longest RCA connectors in audio.



The second issue won't be an issue for you if you have well made and well secured RCA furniture on your equipment, as the Pinlock RCAs on the HFC CT1 cables have possibly the strongest grip I have ever come across in that they are hard to get on and off. The grip is like the Vulcan death grip and I can imagine these killing many rubbish quality RCA sockets – so you have been warned. I must say getting these on and off during the review was a challenge especially as at times I was doing comparisons with other cables and trying them on various bits of kit, thankfully all my equipment is well made so no RCA sockets were harmed or killed during the making of this review though all were gripped very, very tightly. a grip that never changed during the course of the review.

And Now for the Technology bit…..

In Jonas initial email he listed the following aspects of the CT1s unique design and I will quote from High Fidelity Cables website to outline these in detail as they not only deserve but require:

'Magnetic Conduction is a patented method of signal transfer for electrical energy. It uses a controlled magnetic field as the pathway for the signal. Testing at the University of Toronto show dramatically reduced distortion and increased signal to noise ratio compared to typical cables. The conductor is a unique and proprietary alloy specifically designed to work with this technology.

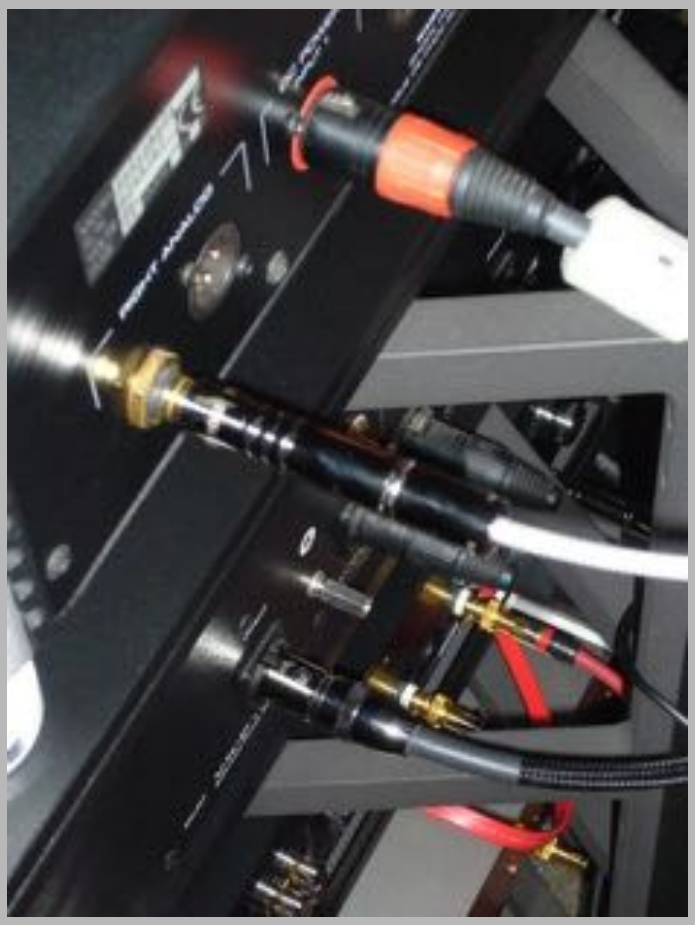
Pinlock Plugs

Traditional RCA connectors cause the signal to micro arc across the resistive pathway of the connection. Our patent pending PinLoK RCA connector has an oversized pin that will compress to enter a normal RCA socket. Spring tension then continues to push and expand the inserted pin for maximum contact pressure. This increase in surface contact lowers the amount of micro arcing and reduces distortion.

Magnetic Wave Guide

Skin effect in a cable is created by opposing magnetic forces which cause the signal to push to the extreme outer edges of the conductor. Our magnetic wave guide technology

creates a tunnelling effect focusing the magnetic force into the middle of the conductor. This eliminates the cause of skin effect and preserves the time and phase aspect of the original signal.



Mechanical vibration decoupling

Micro vibrations are introduced into an audio system by a multitude of sources and will follow the signal path looking to dissipate to a larger mass or point of stress. Each of our cables feature extensive mechanical vibration decoupling. Multiple conductive plates made with a specialized powdered material are used to dampen the vibration transfer within the connector itself.

Inteli Shield

High Fidelity Cables uses a dual shielded coaxial design that has extremely high rejection capability. This coaxial design is combined with Magnetic Conduction's patented ability to control unwanted electro magnetic interference. This particular geometry gives all our cables a class leading ability to filter out unwanted radio waves (RFI) and stray magnetic fields (EMI).

Micro Signal Transfer

Quiet passages of music and subtle audio details are represented by lower power electrical signals. In conventional cables these micro signals are easily prone to loss and distortion because they lack enough current to move through the conductor. Lab testing has shown Magnetic Conduction technology to preserve and keep these micro signals intact, resulting in large performance gains for audio system reproduction.'

'What is Magnetic Conduction?

Magnetic Conduction is a patented method for signal transfer. The technology was developed by Magnetic Innovations LLC. As implemented by High Fidelity Cables it uniquely offers a magnetic as well as electrically conductive pathway for signal transfer. This technology operates in several ways:

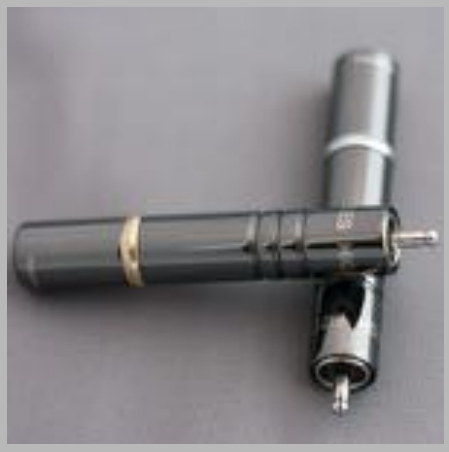
Creating Magnetic Force in the Conductor

To appreciate the impact of Magnetic Conduction technology, it is important to understand that an electrical signal is always accompanied by a magnetic field. It is the use of the magnetic element of signal transfer that makes the CT-1 fundamentally different as a conductor technology. Magnetic Conduction maximizes the magnetic as well as the electrical force.

An electrical signal is strongly motivated to follow a magnetic field, as demonstrated by experiments in which electricity/plasma is attracted or repelled by magnetic fields. Our "Magnetic Mapping" process is used to "align" magnetic poles at each end of the cable in a proprietary and directed way so as to "draw" the electrical signal through the conductor. In effect, we use magnetism to keep the electrical signal flow aligned and to minimize the random pathways for electrons within and along the conductor. In the CT-1, the entire cable is directionally magnetized to promote signal transfer where resistance to the signal is highest and where the greatest losses can take place.

Pre-Applying Magnetic Force to the Input Connector

In the Magnetic Conduction process, we minimize signal distortion, particularly in lower level signals that may otherwise be distorted as a result of resistance in the transfer. By 'pre-applying' a magnetic field to the signal cable, Magnetic Conduction preserves the energy that an electrical signal otherwise loses when electrons jump from one ionic core to another, i.e., from a component's output connector to an interconnects male input connector. This results in more faithful transmission of low-level signal elements.



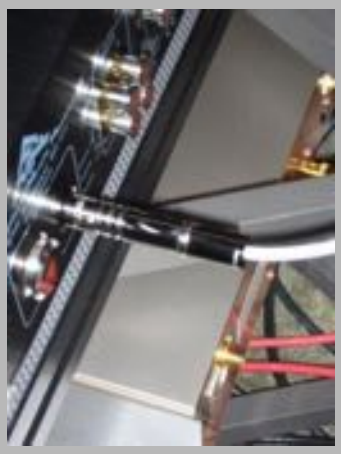
Enhancing Signal Flow

The PinLok CT-1 connector uses magnetic force to focus the signal into the center of the connector and transfer that signal into the CT-1 conductor. The CT-1 conductor is made from highly permeable alloy that, once attached to the connectors, becomes fully magnetized. The signal then follows this magnetically and electrically conductive pathway. This pathway is magnetically active, as the PinLok RCA at the exit end of the conductor is magnetically "pulling" the signal through the conductor. The magnetic field applied at the input and output connectors controls eddy currents, forcing electrical signals to 'flow' in only one direction — along the magnetic field through the conductor from source to termination. This allows us to use an entirely metallic connector that minimizes eddy currents, improving signal flow.

Employing a Unique Conductor

The conductor of the CT-1 is composed of a proprietary alloy. The unique conductor itself becomes part of the patent-pending process because it is attached to the magnetized PinLok connectors. The CT-1 conductor is wrapped in Teflon, well known for its excellent dielectric character. The conductor is made in a coaxial configuration. The inner core of the CT-1 is encased in a braided sleeve that serves as the ground connection. This allows the enveloping ground element to mitigate the potential for noise reaching the center conductor. With this design, cables can be routed without concern for crossing power cables or picking up random noise. The coaxial design also helps to focus magnetic energies back into the cable core. This supports both the magnetic and the electrical transfer functions.

The advantage is a light, flexible, low noise, low loss and highly functioning technology for transferring an audio signal. The effects are cumulative with the addition of each Magnetic Conduction device. The technology works for both AC and DC and for power and signal transmission.'



Benefits of the PinLok Connector

Our mechanical design of the connector improves signal flow for reasons other than the applied magnetic fields. PinLok is designed to improve signal transfer and help overcome the weakest link in the audio system — the mechanical connection where the signal must migrate from the female sleeve to the male pin of the RCA. In order for a traditional male pin to fit inside the female sleeve, the pin must be smaller in diameter than the sleeve. This creates a gap that the signal will have to cross over, and this gap creates the opportunity for signal loss and distortion. The amount of surface contact of the signal carrying elements in traditional RCA connectors is minimal; and the less contact, the greater the resistance. For this reason, the CT-1 PinLok connector applies a unique split pin-ball style male termination. The uncompressed ball at the end of the CT-1 connector is designed to be larger in diameter than the female sleeve. Insertion pressure collapses the split ball, while spring pressure expands the ball and creates maximum contact area, which lowers electrical resistance.

Beyond this, the CT-1 connector is coated on the ball with a unique conductive polymer called Stabilant 22. This polymer becomes conductive in the presence of signal transfer and helps to reduce resistance even further. The connector also includes mechanical damping to lower distortions caused by the transfer of mechanical noise. Each CT-1 PinLok connector is made up of 55 individual custom made parts.

The Results

Once a CT-1 interconnect has been placed into a system, an organized magnetic field resides along the cable to help guide the signal. Once the signal leaves the CT-1, it maintains a magnetic property for a significant distance before randomization occurs as electrons rebound in and around ionic cores of the electrical pathway. Installing a second or third CT-1 in the signal path further enhances the magnetic attraction and helps to pull the signal through the audio system, as each CT-1 will magnetically map a signal path and maintain non-random signal transmission through the system. This mapping effect can be applied in interconnects, speaker cables, and power cables. It can also be applied internally inside loudspeakers, pre-amplifiers, amplifiers, power conditioners, and such. Applying more of this technology is desirable, as each cable or component incorporating it will aid in greater efficiency of transferring signals and result in a more resolute audio system.

Lab Testing

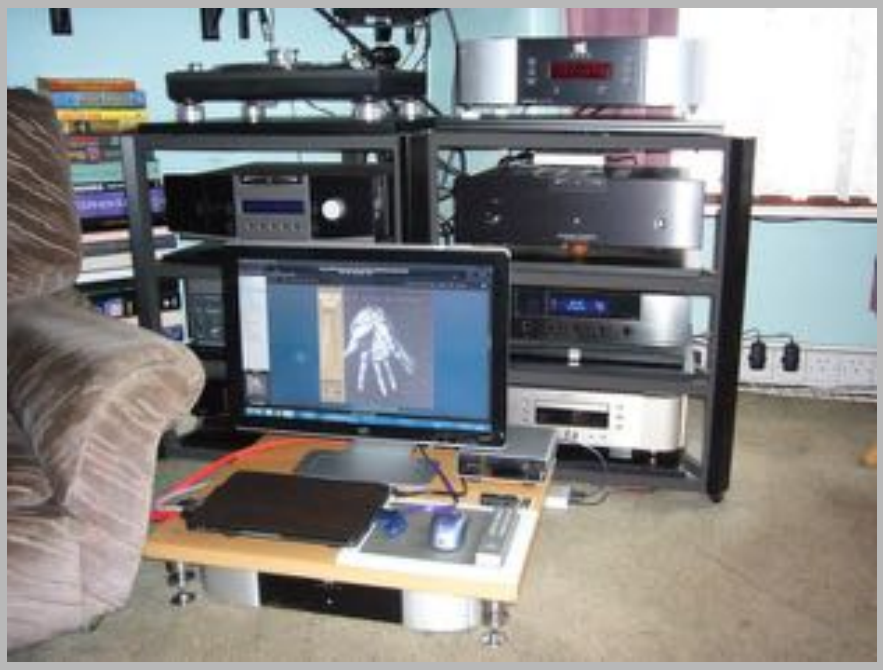
A testing facility in Canada contracted by Magnetic Innovations LLC tried testing very low level signals, as low as -59 dB from a full signal strength of 2 volts. They discovered that long after conventional audio cables significantly obscured test signals, High Fidelity Cables were still at work clearly transferring this low level information. In controlled tests, a system wide reduction of 14% THD and 14% IMD was measured. Signal to noise ratio improved by 1.5 dB which is significant. This test was conducted by a third party in a controlled environment, using an RCA cable with Magnetic Conduction technology (these results will vary with different systems).

Patent Approval

Magnetic Innovations LLC has now been granted U.S. Pat. No. 8,272,876.'

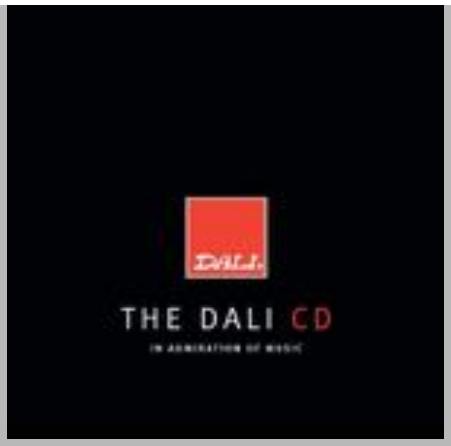
All of the above reads brilliantly but what about the reality of the claims…..

Reference System

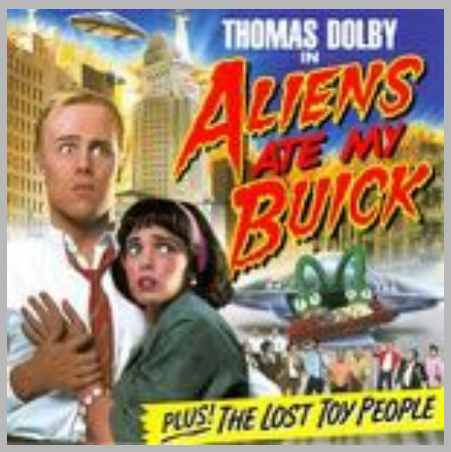


The review system was as follows: Balanced Audio Technology VK300se integrated amplifier, Anthony Gallo Reference SA amplifier, Anthony Gallo Reference 3.1 speakers, Moon Andromeda CD player, Marantz SA7, Acer 1810TZ notebook, Freecom 2TB hard drive, HP 22 inch screen, Freecom 2TB hard drive, Ifi Audio iUSB Power USB power filter. Digital cabling: Wireworld Ultraviolet, Starlight Red, XLO. Analogue cabling: Atlas Mavros RCA to RCA, XLR to XLR, Atlas Mavros speaker cable, QED Genesis speaker cable. Mains: the computer aspect of the system was isolated via a Mark Grant 8 way distribution, EC Audio Pandora's box hooked to the Acer. Main cables were Audience Au24, Analysis Plus Power Oval silver and Mark Grant 2.5. Equipment tables were Clearlight Audio Aspekt racks, SSC isolation platforms, Bright Star Audio Isonodes and Sound Mechanics M8 cones. I also used Telos caps to cover unused sockets both in and out.

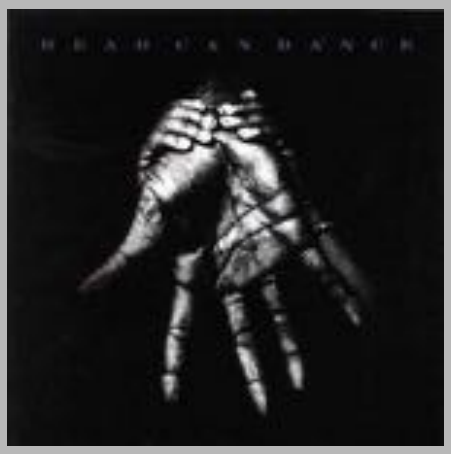
Music Used



The Dali Demo CD



Thomas Dolby – Aliens Ate My Buick

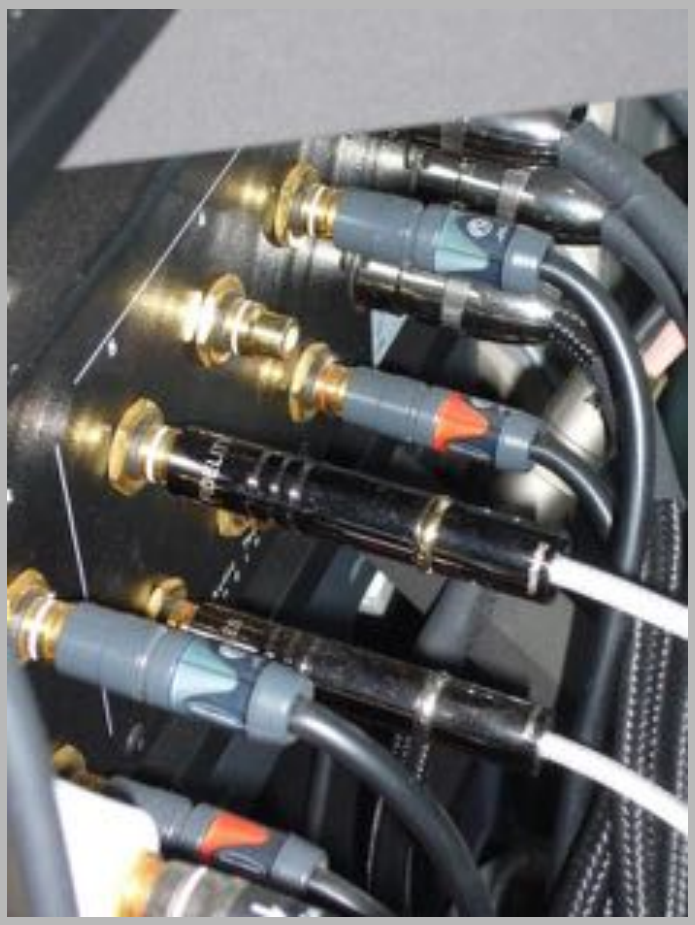


Dead Can Dance – Into the Labyrinth

A Concern…..

One thing that did concern me before taking on the review is that for the most part my reference system is balanced in its functionality comprising of truly differential balanced designs (2) and as such using the RCA outputs and inputs over the balanced XLR ones automatically puts a bit of a downer on overall sound quality so naturally I was concerned that music played via the RCA outs on the Moon Andromeda CD player into my Balanced Audio Technology VK300 se integrated amplifier's RCA inputs would mean I was perhaps not hearing the HFC CT1 interconnects to their fullest, the balanced design of the equipment putting the single ended nature of the cables at a disadvantage in comparison with my Atlas Mavros XLR cables in any comparison I might do with them – something which is natural enough to do

during any review as one listens in isolation then compares to known references (3) However as things turned out I need not have worried about this.



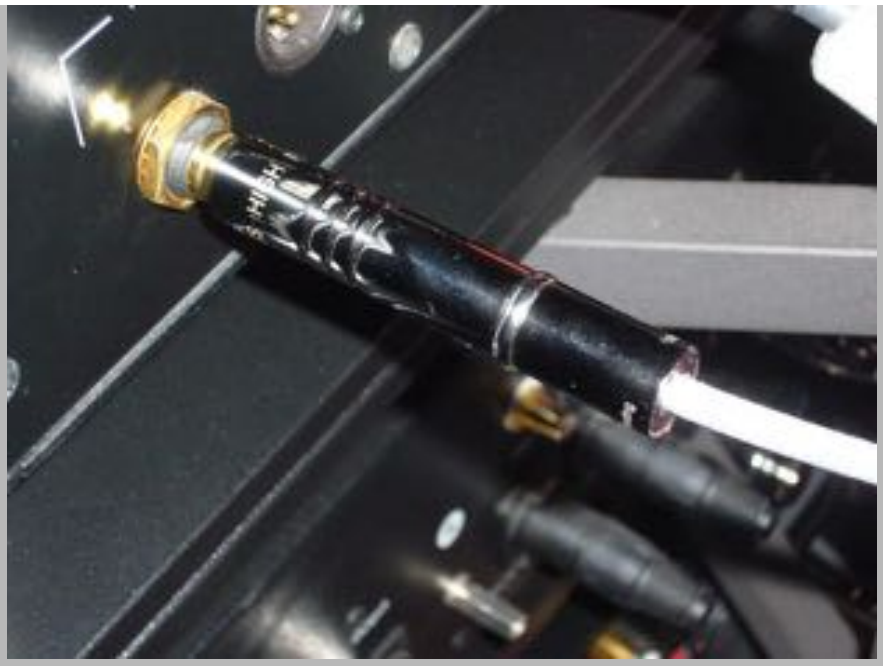
Let the Listening Begin

After returning from holiday in September 2012 I began during the running in process to listen but only at a fairly low volume level and only in a casual way to this cable and to be honest as I had a number of ongoing, upcoming reviews I didn't pay a lot of attention to what I was hearing except that it was quite good even though I had the volume turned down way low.

I had fully intended in doing the review sometime after the AMR DP777 (originally scheduled to be completed and published in November 2012) but as things turned out all my reviews bar one were shelved after my Dad died suddenly in November 2012 so it was not until more recently that I have begun listening again to the HFC CT1 and what a revelation that has been – frankly I feel that I have been missing out on one of the best parties of all time by not using the CT1 in all that time – doh!!!

Whether connected to my Marantz SA7 or the Moon Andromeda the High Fidelity Cables CT1s have been incredible in that they have allowed much more of the music to come through than any other cables I own or have tried before in this system and by quite a marked margin and as this equipment is all balanced in design I wonder how much more there is to be had when the CT1 XLR cables are available – some time in the future.

I know its an oft used and possibly abused thing in reviewing to describe a product as revelatory (and some will call you out if you say this too often) but these interconnects are exactly that, in that I have been hearing things in well known, well trod music for the first time and please trust me on this I know these tracks inside out or I thought I did. The degree of clarity these cables brought to my system was incredible but what was also amazing is that this was achieved without spotlighting, hyper detailing or drawing attention to any part of the frequency band over the other. Music played through my system with these cables in place was presented with an effortless, organically natural musicality that I have rarely heard before – not only was the sonic advantage that balanced connection normally imparted levelled but it was in many areas surpassed and not subtly – however my gut feeling is that even with all that a set of balanced CT1s would raise the game even further as my system components are balanced by design and thus perform to their best used that way.

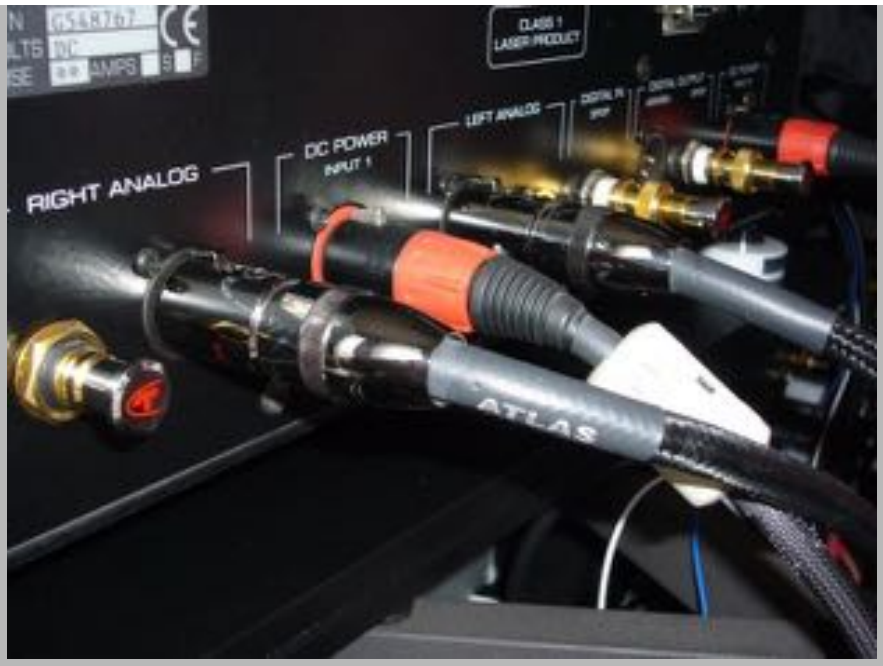


Getting down to the nitty gritty of comparisons to my reference cables wasn't too hard as the CT1s don't really hide their lights under a bushel.

Listening to Thomas Dolby's wonderful album Aliens Ate My Buick – an album I have been listening to both for pleasure and as an assessment tool since the late 80s was quite a revelation as I kept hearing things I had not heard before.

The Keys to her Ferrari had more acoustic air, depth, dimensionality to the soundstage and more body to the instruments and vocals than with my reference Atlas Mavros cables. The music ebbed and flowed with dynamics from macro to micro happening effortlessly and no obvious drag, shifts in pace and volume reproduced as if this was a live recording rather than a studio construct. In fact switching back and forth between the Atlas Mavros XLRs and the High Fidelity Audio CT1s left me feeling that music via the CT1s just had a more organic and less rushed feel. This is where I will struggle a bit to exactly describe what I was hearing but via the balanced connection music sounded rushed, almost frenetic, whereas via the CT1s music sounded more natural and relaxed.

In typing that I know I am not really getting it right, as to the reader they will perceive that I am saying the CT1s sounded laid back, relaxed and dead in comparison and that is not the case at all: as music sounded right via the CT1s with all the pace, drive and dynamics one expects from the instruments and music listened to but via the Mavros/balanced connection it sounded more like a race to get to the finish.



At 3 mins into the track I was left with my mouth hanging open as the degree of depth, clarity and separation of the instruments within the acoustic was breathtaking. I was hearing things in away I had just not heard them before and hearing round them in away I had not before. I am well aware I have wrote about instruments and vocalists having more body and dimension before and indeed each listening experience in the past has rendered more reality to the music being listened to but the CT1s took that further than before and truly were a revelation as not only was there a front, bottom, top, and sides to the musical performances I listened to but there was also now a back, as these cables allowed me to hear subtle acoustic clues and reflections of sound that gave reality to the rear of instruments and vocalists.

Micro details, once buried in the recordings, there but less clear, now stood clear exposed by the CT1s clarity. This was not as I have said earlier done with any added emphasis, or exaggeration, everything was in its correct place just obvious now where once upon a time these subtle musical details where obscured. In away using the CT1s was like moving from listening to MP3s to full bandwidth vinyl, CD or SACD. Where once subtle musical clues, masked by other louder more obvious ones where obscured, hidden they now took their place as part of the overall performance – no longer hidden – truly the window cleaner was in but with new cleaning solutions and equipment.

The opening of the track Pulp with its beautifully played bass lines was breathtaking as once again the CT1s let me hear more of the music. Moving onto the albums epic track Budapest by Blimp left me once again shocked by how much newly heard detail was in this recording.

The haunting sensuality for the ears that this piece of music is and always has been, beautiful in its simple beginnings but growing as new layers of musical information build to create an epic experience. Via the CT1s the track was laid bare in all its gentle complexity, every layer audible, in its own space and three dimensional reality.

One test as to how good the resolving power of a system or component is, is how it reproduces the massed choir of voices in the almost foot ball stadium melae towards the end of the track and via the CT1 cable I heard more of the individual voices in this section of the track than before but it was the single voice coming in at 4 mins and 37 seconds that truly blew me away, as for the first time it stood completely clear in its own acoustic space and was very solid and distinct. Also during this track many layers of Thomas Dolby's own voice being used in a backing capacity were much more obvious than before and on a few occasions the degree of depth and acoustic around these was quite amazing.

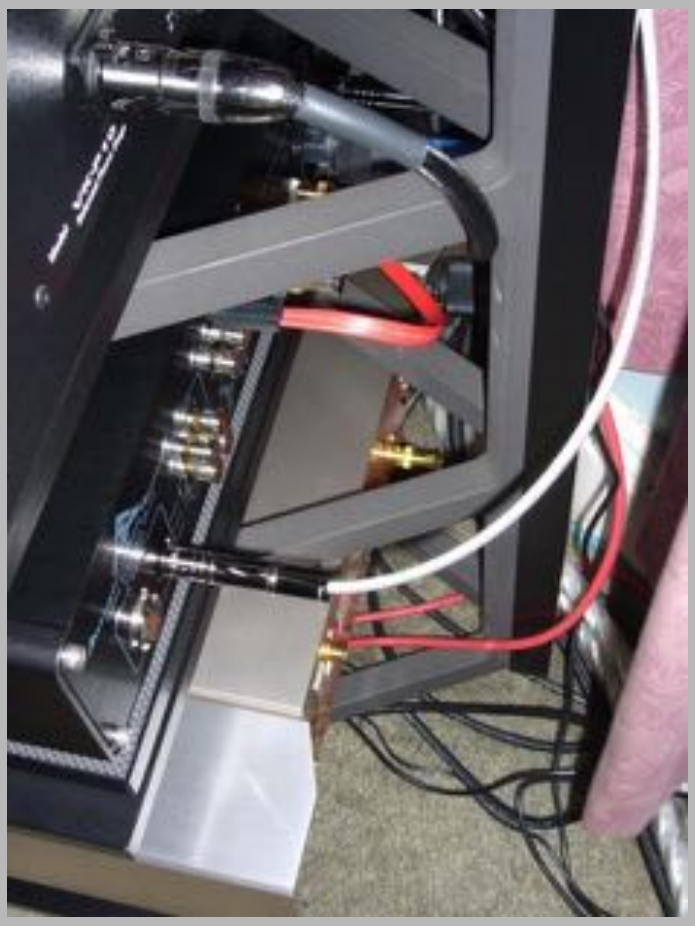
Switching to Stimela by Hugh Masekeala another track I know intimately well was also breathtakingly good in all the areas already mentioned in regards to the Thomas Dolby album

and once again switching to the Atlas Mavros reduced the degree of clarity and depth of image layering that the CT1 cables had revealed.

As I had been listening to Into the Labyrinth by Dead Can Dance a lot recently I had a good listen to this album with the CT1s and once again I heard a lot of things I had not heard or noticed before.

During the Carnival is Over, Brendan Perry's voice had greater emotional content than I had noticed before and I put that down to the greater clarity of the CT1 over the Mavros as I felt there were better insights given by the CT1 in regards to phrasing and intonation of Brendan's vocals thus bringing more emotion to the simple vocal style used by him on this track.

As on other albums I listened to during reviewing the High Fidelity Audio cables this Dead Can Dance album was also exhibiting more depth of image, instrument separation, focus and clarity with the Moon Andromeda hooked up by them, rather than via the what should on paper be – and in my past experience – the superior balanced inputs, connected via Atlas Mavros (4) XLR cables, and on this occasion, with this particular RCA cable wasn't.



Towards the end of the review period I hooked the AMR DP777 DAC up via these cables and was pleasantly surprised – though I guess I should not have been – to find that doing so narrowed the gap between the AMR DP777 computer set up and the Moon Andromeda CD player – which was still better (5) but not by as great a margin as it had been before hooking the CT1s up to the DP777.

Conclusions

To say I was quite shocked by how well and big a difference these single ended cables brought to my balanced system is putting it mildly. Normally everything is connected up – that can be – by XLR cables and sounds better that way and by a usually large percentage but on this occasion that was not the case as I have already said so frankly this has really put the cat among the pigeons re my normal expectation as to how balanced outperforms single ended.

High Fidelity Cables make claims re how their cable technology does the following things: **'This coaxial design is combined with Magnetic Conduction's patented ability to control unwanted electro magnetic interference. This particular geometry gives all our cables a class leading ability to filter out unwanted radio waves (RFI) and stray magnetic fields (EMI)'** and **'that long after conventional audio cables significantly obscured test signals, High Fidelity Cables were still at work clearly transferring this low level information. In controlled tests, a system wide reduction of 14% THD and 14% IMD was measured. Signal to noise ratio improved by 1.5 dB which is significant. This test was conducted by a third party in a controlled environment, using an RCA cable with Magnetic Conduction technology'**

These are the areas that balanced technology is usually superior to single ended audio designs, thus giving superior reduction of noise floor, distortions and interference which allows more of the music to be heard but in the case of these cables they have levelled the playing field and better it in a balanced audio system. As I said earlier in this review, I wonder how much better the level of performance in my system would be by being able to hook it up fully via balanced CT1 cables, the very though makes me grin broadly as my feeling is that this would be spectacular.

I have listened to lots of cables over the years and usually the differences and improvements they bring over others are quite subtle and writing about them in the context of a review can sometimes make those differences and improvements sound more than they are in reality, but in the case of the High Fidelity Cables CT1 interconnects, and the superior sound quality they brought to my system, these improvements were very marked indeed and I hope I have done full justice in my prose to that reality.

As with all reviews I do and recommendations the usual caveats apply re not buying before you try in your own system – as your mileage may vary – but I will thoroughly recommend the High Fidelity Cables CT1 cables even to the point of suggesting you might also like to try them in a balanced set up, but with the strong suggestion you wait till the XLR versions are available. For those with single ended systems it really in my view is a no brainer to put these cables at the top of your to listen to list.

The High Fidelity Cables CT1 interconnects are a stunning revelation, are revolutionary and a major achievement – in my view – in interconnect designs. I for one can't wait to see what Rick Schultz and High Fidelity Cables come up with next – well done!

Neil

Product – High Fidelity Cables CT1

Retail Price (USA) $1600 per 1m stereo pair

Source of Loan – Manufacturer

High Fidelity Cables
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(1) Over the time period AIHFA has been in existence I have turned down quite a few review opportunities but if I have any doubt re a products suitability to my set up, room or even my own likes and dislikes which I try to factor out but can't always so any major aversions such as my disliking the sound of horn drivers does factor into what reviews I do or don't do. Anyway in the round I always feel it better to explain the issues, give the pluses and minuses, say no or see if the company in question wants to take a risk re sending me an item or not.

(2) For those interested in the technical aspects of Balanced, dual mono, differential designs you can read the following article by Bill Whitlock of Jensen Transformers http://sound.westhost.com/articles/balanced-interfaces.pdf and this one http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balanced_audio

(3) As yet Nigh Fidelity Cables don't offer a balanced XLR version of the CT1 as they are still developing an XLR connector, which like their Pinlock RCA plug will be a totally new, from the ground up design incorporating their unique magnetic conduction technology.

(4) Part of doing any review is comparing items to your existing references in this the Atlas Mavros cables that I have been using and enjoying for quite a number of years so I hope my finding the CT1 interconnects better is not seen as me rubbishing these fine cables but as they are twice the price this should also be seen as no disgrace.

(5) See the Adventures in High Fidelity Audio AMR DP777 review http://www.adventuresinhifiaudio.com/10/04/2013/the-abbingdon-music-research-dp777-dac-crossing-the-rubicon-or-how-i-learnt-to-love-computer-audio/

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Posted by admin at 12:24 am

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High Fidelity Cables CT1 Digital Cable – 'Redefining the SPDIF Interconnect' »

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