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Skywire 1400 Interconnects

Martin G. DeWulf

I fervently try not to be an “interconnect of the month” type of reviewer. After all, the good ones are very expensive, and they are nothing more than wire. As a result, I tend to find an interconnect and then stick to it. That’s the way it should be. For many months my cost no object favorite has been the RWA interconnect from Andy Bartha. Well made with superb sonics they aren’t all that expensive at around \$400, but for a wire it’s still a lot of money. In the bargain department I like the Signal Cable interconnects (and speaker cables). For the basics, the Signal Cable outperforms much of the high priced exotica. Nothing to be ashamed of there.

As a result of my view of such things, interconnects sent to me for audition are properly broken-in, auditioned and then usually put in a drawer. If the manufacturer provides for return shipment, they go back home with nary a word from me. I figure that you know what I like and when something better comes in, I’ll tell you about it. Something better has come in.

Don Palmer e-mailed me a few months ago to tell about a new interconnect that he had designed on behalf of a new company – Skywire. Yes, Don’s old company was called Highwire, or something like that, so the family resemblance was there. But this is not Don’s company. Skywire is owned and operated by Jimmy Chan, a young man that is yet to feel the physical complications of being on the “plus” side of fifty. I like the combination of youth with its vigor and, let’s call it experience, that a learned man such as Don Palmer brings to the equation.



The new Skywire 1400 interconnects (\$585) are the finest interconnects so far used in the Big Rig. Which, in my opinion, makes them very, very good. Surpassing the performance of the RWA interconnects was not an easy task. And in besting my signal bearing fave for the last few years, it was not only the Skywire’s superb retrieval of detail and extension that gave it the advantage, but it was its tonal balance and front to back focus – both, dead on.

Before the Skywire, never would have I thought to call the RWA warmish, but in one-on-one comparisons between these two great interconnects, the RWA came off as the warmer of the two, a little bloomy if you will; which is not necessarily a bad thing. I can enjoy that. But in this instance it was the removal of the aforesaid warmth by the Skywire that ended up revealing more musical realism. Had the difference between the two interconnects been merely a leanness on the part of the Skywire, the RWA might still be king. In going between the two, however, it became clear that what the Skywire initially appeared to lack in warmth and body when compared to the RWA was really the Skywire’s superior tonal balance and what, in retrospect, was a sense of transparency from top to bottom that the RWA could not match.

When an interconnect is a transparent, as dynamic and as extended as the Skywire 1400, the

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added smidgen of warmth in the RWA came off as an unnecessary artifact. Still, this interconnect gave up nothing in the bottom octave. Considering that the RWA is one of the finest interconnects that one can purchase at any price, this comment on the Skywire is intended as high praise in every respect. And it's only their second best interconnect...

The RWA is very much in the same league as the Skywire, leaving very little to be desired and even less to critique. By anyone's criteria, these are great cables. If anything separates these interconnects other than their sonics in the lower midrange, it would be the slightly greater focus of the Skywire in the mids and uppermids. The hitherto unobtainable focus displayed by the Skywire strikes me as being the result of Don's extreme attention to detail, namely; attention to wire resonances (ringing) and RF attenuation. Don calls it his "Standing Wave Suppression Technology." And it works. Listening to the Skywire is almost like listening to an active circuit that is quieter than another active circuit. So often, one doesn't realize that he is listening to noise or blurring until it is removed. You heard the noise, but it didn't register with your brain as being there until it disappeared. Removing something from the sound is oftentimes more dramatic than adding something to it. Both interconnects did a good job in that regard, it's just that the Skywire takes this performance standard a little further – to a quieter place, to a place that I wasn't aware the Skywire could go, until it went there.

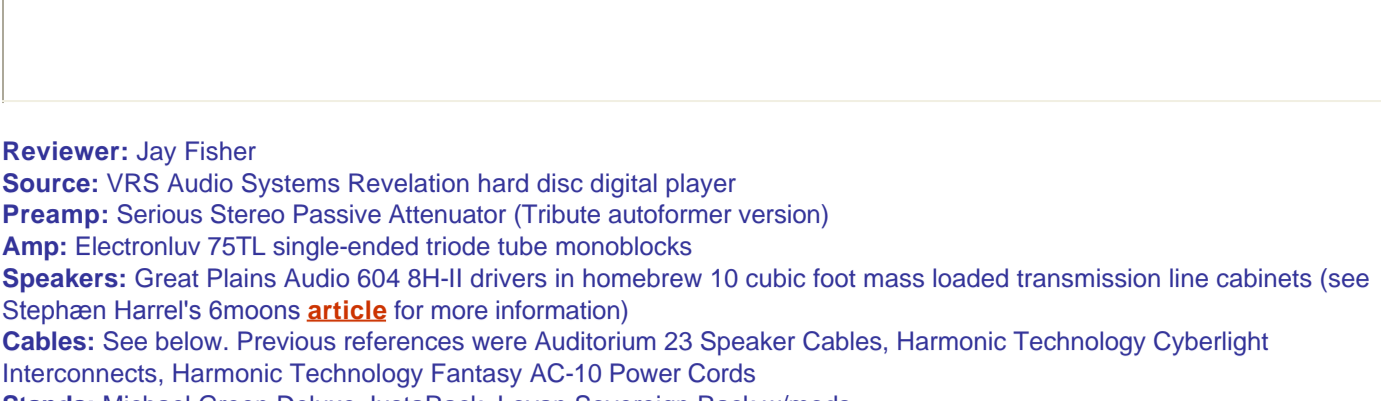
Making a quieter interconnect that doesn't over damp the sound or compress dynamic response, results in a cable that leaves all kind of room for increased musical expression. Transients come at you quicker and the fundamental seems, ah, ummm, more *fundamental!* Decays last longer and the silence between the sounds seems less cluttered – more silent. With the noise floor lowered, textures and harmonic flavorings are brought to the fore and naturally illuminated. One hears into the music just a little bit deeper... The unamplified sounds of acoustic guitar, violin and the human voice take on a tactile realism that draws you to the music. A worthy purchase with a 30 day money back guarantee.

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AUDIO PREVIEW



DECEMBER 2007



Reviewer: Jay Fisher
Source: VRS Audio Systems Revelation hard disc digital player
Preamp: Serious Stereo Passive Attenuator (Tribute autotformer version)
Amp: Electronluv 75TL single-ended triode tube monoblocks
Speakers: Great Plains Audio 604 8H-II drivers in homebrew 10 cubic foot mass loaded transmission line cabinets (see Stephen Harrel's 6moons [article](#) for more information)
Cables: See below. Previous references were Auditorium 23 Speaker Cables, Harmonic Technology Cyberlight Interconnects, Harmonic Technology Fantasy AC-10 Power Cords
Stands: Michael Green Deluxe JustaRack, Lovan Sovereign Rack w/mods
Powerline conditioning: Furman Elite-20 PF I Ultra-Linear AC Power Source
Sundry accessories: Realtraps Mondotraps and Realtraps Microtraps, Symposium Svelte platforms w/ Symposium Rollerblocks, Timbernation cherry amplifier platforms, Sound Quest Isol-Pads, Audiotop Connect-Workstation, Audiotop Digital
Room size: 22' x 22' x 9'

Review Components Retail: Furutech Audio Reference III-N1 (RCA) interconnect cables \$1050. (1.2m pair), Furutech Speaker Reference III-N1 speaker cables \$1430. (3m pair); Ensemble Dynafux FSF interconnect cables \$900 (1M pair), Ensemble Megafux FSF speaker Cables \$1774 (3m pair); Skywire 1400 interconnect cables \$585 (1m pair), Skywire 1400 speaker cables \$985 (3m pair); Townshend Isolda DCT 300 interconnect cables (RCA) \$700 (1m pair), Townshend Isolda DCT speaker cables \$1000 (3m pair); Synergistic Research Tesla Apex interconnect cables (RCA) \$3000 (1m pair), Synergistic Research Tesla Apex speaker cables \$5400 (8ft pair); Synergistic Research Tesla Absolute Reference power cord \$2500 (5ft); Synergistic Research Tesla Hologram D power cord \$2400 (5ft), Synergistic Research Tesla Hologram A power cord \$2400 (5ft), Synergistic Research Tesla T3 power cord \$800 (5ft), Synergistic Research Tesla T2 power cord \$550 (5ft), Tesla PowerCell 6 outlet \$3000, Tesla Enigma valve power supply for Active Shielding \$6000



Cable Quest: A Five Cable Journey to Synergistic Research's Tesla Series

I've had many opportunities to listen to exceptionally high quality recordings played through what many reasonable people would consider extreme, perfectionist, cost-no-object, perhaps even lunatic fringe level audio systems. Each time, despite the impressive, even spectacular sound quality, I usually leave woefully aware of what seems like an unbridgeable chasm between the recorded musical illusion and what the music sounds and *feels* like at a live performance. Despite how unlikely it may seem to actually bridge this gap with my own music system, I am compelled to spend an embarrassing amount of time, energy and resources attempting to achieve a more convincing musical illusion that will give me a deeper, more satisfying musical experience and allow me to suspend disbelief more of the time. While these efforts may be partially fueled by an irrational yearning to be *transported* to the recording venue or better yet, to transport Sarah Vaughn, John Coltrane or The Academy of Ancient Music into my living room, the overarching goal is to hear and feel more of what the musicians were expressing when recorded.

This year I assembled a new high-efficiency system that gets me much closer to the music than others I have owned. The speakers are 10 cubic foot mass-loaded transmission lines employing the 15" two-way coaxial Altec 604-8H-II driver from Great Plains Audio. Upstream components include the VRS Audiosystems hard disc digital player, directly driving a pair of Electronluv 75TL single-ended tube monoblocks. Volume is controlled with a Serious Stereo passive preamp that employs a pair of autotformer attenuators from Tributue of the Netherlands. Ever since assembling the system, I knew that the cables, and in particular the speaker cables, were not allowing the system's full capabilities to be heard. Much of the music was not getting through. So I began my eight-month quest for the most musically revealing cables I could get my hands on. Hopefully, these cables could help me transport myself more of the time.

The Search for Musicality and Realism.

A deeper experience of the musical expression and feeling of a recorded event is the transcendent goal. Sonic realism and authenticity of presentation are powerful means of getting there. Of course we all have our individual notions of what sounds 'real' and 'natural' and for me this does not always coincide with 'beautiful'. I have greedy ears and they want to hear it all - musicality and realism ruthlessly revealed, warts and all. My grandiose goal was to find cables that would let all of the music through without emphasizing or editing any portion of the audible frequencies. Cable-induced artifacts of any kind were taboo. The hunt was for the vivid revelation of tone color; unlimited dynamic agility (both macro and micro dynamics); and super detail and transient speed without rounding or highlighting leading edges. Notes should be allowed to decay naturally without truncation. The cables must enable the spatial information in the recording to be rendered with impeccable timing, 3-dimensionality and precise localization of instruments and voices. The search was for musicality but without sounding overly polite or 'laid back'. If a trumpet recording has tremendous sibilance or if a live venue sounds dead or too reflective, let's hear it all, unadorned. The cables would be pipelines for sublime musicality but not at the expense of filtering or altering one iota of the recording. All of this delivered through cables that are themselves inaudible. That was the dream.

The Cable Conundrum: Tradeoffs... always tradeoffs

Cables usually present tradeoffs. The cable that delivers lightning-quick transients and microscopic detail retrieval may sound subtly bleached or lean. The cable with the deliciously lush midrange and ultra smooth treble may lack detail retrieval and have bloated or ill-defined bass. The combinations of strengths and weaknesses vary but are usually present to some degree. This makes the cable that can deliver all the sonic goods across the audible range something as rare as hen's teeth but in this case, the object of audio desire.

After much research and many recommendations from a number of audiophile friends whose ears I trust, I narrowed down the survey to 5 promising cable sets of interconnect and speaker cables. These range in price from moderate to expensive. The search was not intended to be an apples-to-apples comparison with regard to price but rather, a quest for complete musical satisfaction. It is important to note that I listened to all the recordings listed in this article through all of the cable sets reviewed to understand their comparative performance. I have cited these recordings below to highlight various capabilities of each cable set.



Furutech's Reference Series

Next to be auditioned were the Furutech Reference Series interconnects and speaker cables. With their unsurpassed fit and finish, these cables are beautifully made and luxurious looking. Furutech is one of Japan's premier producers of high-end audio and AC connectors, so naturally their Audio Reference III-N1 (RCA) interconnects sport their ingeniously engineered RCA connectors. These are rhodium plated with brass housings. The multi-faceted, phosphor bronze center pin and locking collar ensure a tight connection and operate with the smooth feel of precision tools. The Speaker Reference III-N1 cables are terminated with nonmagnetic rhodium-plated pure copper spade lugs or banana connectors. To suppress RF and absorb EMI, the reference line is double shielded including Furutech's hexagonal GC-303 modules. Judging by the Reference's silent background, the modules do a commendable job of absorbing EMI.

The cables employ conductors of "Ohno continuous cast single crystal copper in a helical array". The flexibility of the cable line makes them a pleasure to install. The conductors and all other metal cable parts undergo Furutech's two-stage Alpha Process, which includes "deep conditioning cryogenic freezing and a patented ring demagnetization treatment". On first listen, the benefits of the cable's construction plus the Alpha process are clear. The robust energy and body of the music are instantly audible when clarinetist Don Byron and his band chug through Duke Ellington's "The Dicky Glide" like a locomotive on the CD *Bug Music* [Nonesuch/7559-79438-2].



There is an even-handed quality to the entire audible range that brought to mind the term coined by the late Dr. Harvey 'Gizmo' Rosenberg. It is musical *wholeness*. The cables succeed in not accentuating or diminishing any particularly portion of the frequency range, letting the woodwinds, brass and percussion of *Bug Music* play with full tonal and harmonic richness. After many hours of listening, my appreciation for the Furutech References grew because of how non-fatiguing they can be while still revealing a very high level of detail. The extension of both treble and bass is excellent but it is the wholeness and balance of the sound that makes the Furutech Reference stand out.

Furutech [website](#) | US importer's [website](#)

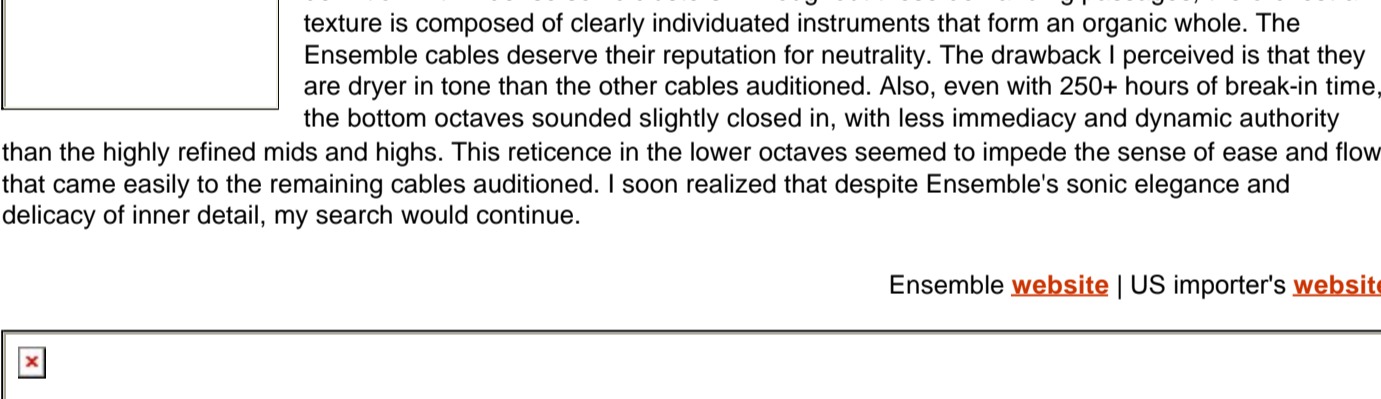


Ensemble Dynafux Interconnects and Megafux Speaker Cables

Next came the Swiss-made Ensemble Dynafux FSF analog interconnect cables and Megafux FSF speaker cables. The interconnects and speaker cables employ 6 high-purity copper conductors of .25mm and 1.5mm respectively. These conductors are individually film shielded from RF by a micro layer coating of a proprietary material. The conductors in both designs are configured in a helical array, which is enclosed in two external shields. The damping of micro-vibration throughout these designs is achieved with a proprietary resonance-control material. The Ensemble's overall sound is very transparent, with an especially refined midrange and a seductively silky, extended treble. In a word, the Ensemble sound is *elegant*. The cables did particularly well at revealing inner detail throughout dense or complex musical passages and textures.

In "Dance of the Tumblers from the Snow Maiden" on the CD *Exotic Dances from the Opera* [Reference Recordings/RR-71] with Eiji Oue conducting the Minnesota Orchestra, shimmering triangles illuminate the Minneapolis' Orchestra Hall; symbols and maracas hover behind masses of strings, with each player individually audible. Pianissimo passages lead into explosive crescendos with brass, woodwind and percussion instruments retaining clear timbral definition within dense sonic clusters. Throughout these demanding passages, the orchestral texture is composed of clearly individuated instruments that form an organic whole. The Ensemble cables deserve their reputation for neutrality. The drawback I perceived is that they are dryer in tone than the other cables auditioned. Also, even with 250+ hours of break-in time, the bottom octaves sounded slightly closed in, with less immediacy and dynamic authority than the highly refined mids and highs. This reticence in the lower octaves seemed to impede the sense of ease and flow that came easily to the remaining cables auditioned. I soon realized that despite Ensemble's sonic elegance and delicacy of inner detail, my search would continue.

Ensemble [website](#) | US importer's [website](#)

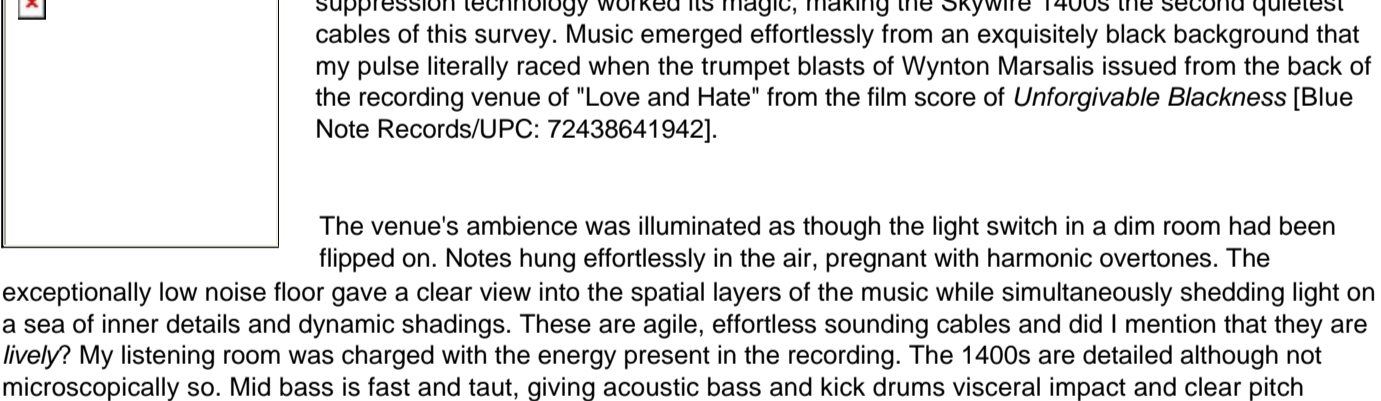


Skywire 1400 Series

The next cables auditioned are new high-end offerings by Skywire. Skywire's founder Jimmy Chan commissioned long-time cable designer Don Palmer, formerly of Highwire Audio Cables, to design the new Skywire series. The Skywire 1400 interconnects and speaker cables employ Don's patented standing-wave suppression technology. These interconnects and speaker cables are constructed with 14 gauge conductors composed of 19 strands of silver-plated copper. The conductors are insulated with Teflon and enclosed in a braided electrostatic shield composed of silver-plated copper. The cables are wound circumferentially with a patented suppression wire that dissipates RF energy as heat and reduces the amplitude of RF ringing in the cables.

In my listening room, which is situated in an RF-rich neighborhood of Los Angeles, the noise suppression technology worked its magic, making the Skywire 1400s the second quietest cables of this survey. Music emerged effortlessly from an exquisitely black background that my pulse literally raced when trumpet blasts of Wynton Marsalis issued from the back of the recording venue of "Love and Hate" from the film score of *Unforgivable Blackness* [Blue Note Records/UPC: 72438641942].

The venue's ambience was illuminated as though the light switch in a dim room had been flipped on. Notes hung effortlessly in the air, pregnant with harmonic overtones. The exceptionally low noise floor gave a clear view into the spatial layers of the music while simultaneously shedding light on a sea of inner details and dynamic shadings. These are agile, effortless sounding cables and did I mention that they are *lively*? My listening room was charged with the energy present in the recording. The 1400s are detailed although not microscopically so. Mid bass is fast and taut, giving acoustic bass and kick drums visceral impact and clear pitch definition.



The Skywire 1400s do not plumb the lowest octave with the same authority as the mid bass. Similarly, the treble region, while extended and exceptionally smooth, is not extended to ultra-ti extremes. However, the exceptionally open midrange, upper bass and airy treble are wonderfully natural. The 1400s can communicate the beauty of the human voice as well as the best cables I have heard. Acoustic instruments sound authentic, even organic. The Skywire 1400 cables are an exciting musical find and an absolute steal considering they can sonically embarrass quite a few well-known cables costing much more. Amazingly, the 1400s are only Skywire's mid level offering. The top level 2020 series has just been released and its audition should be something to look forward too. A future 6moons review perhaps?

Skywire [website](#)



Townshend Isolda Cables

Whoohoo! When the music poured through these British cables, I blurted an involuntary hoot of approval. The Townshend Isolda cables with the addition of the midrange sparkle, clarity and easy flow of the Skywire 1400s but with the much of greater treble sizzle and deep, take-no-prisoners bass. The lowest plucked acoustic bass notes in "The Saga Of Harrison Crabfeathers" on Brian Bromberg's virtuosic *Wood* [A440 Records/ART7009] became more articulate, with clearer pitch definition and harmonic overtones than I had previously heard. I was also surprised by the Isoldas' seemingly higher efficiency.



I perceived an increase in overall volume at the same previous control settings. The Isolda's wide frequency response, clarity, dynamic range and exceptional bass control are partly attributable to the cables' very effective impedance matching devices. These modules are housed in small stainless steel canisters at the cables' ends. These modules closely match the impedance of the cable to the load of the speaker and simultaneously serve as effective RF filters. The devices were inaudible and succeeded in providing a very low noise floor. Isolda speaker cables and interconnects are constructed with copper ribbons that undergo deep cryogenic treatment. These conductors are insulated in thin polyester and then sheathed in polyester braid. The Isolda cables do not produce quite as black of a background as the Skywire 1400s. They also play back music with (and I am splitting hairs here) a slightly more diffuse presentation. However, they exceed the Skywire 1400s in their pitch-perfect bass control and their ability to present large-scale music with an even greater sense of scale and ease. If called upon, these cables can convey a huge and realistic soundstage. They are equally big on tone and texture, which is authentic in character. Here is a cable that can flesh out the music from the top to bottom octave. Actually choosing between the Townshend Isolda and the Skywire 1400 cables would be a tough decision, based more on listening priorities than quality. The Townshend Isoldas are killer cables (maybe even giant killers) and represent great value.

So far the cable quest had been a musically enlightening journey, with each stop along the way bringing a lot of enjoyment. Had I not proceeded beyond the first four cable sets, I might have lived contentedly with any of them. But, as the experience goes, "sometimes you don't know what you don't know". I had no clue that the next cables auditioned would strike the musical lode.

Townshend [website](#) | US importer's [website](#)

