

Dynamique Audio Celestial Speaker Cables, Zenith Interconnects, Firelight USB, and Infinite Power Cables

Created on Saturday, 15 June 2013 00:00

Written by Hans Wetzel



The median household income in the US in 2011, according to the US Census Bureau, was \$52,762. *Household* income. To me, that sounds like a pretty modest amount of money, but I find that such a perspective is a wonderful thing to have. I'm hugely fortunate that my monetary worries are few. But reading such a statistic, I wonder if spending enormous amounts of money on audio gear brings me proportionally more enjoyment than, say, an iPod dock. The answer, of course, is no -- diminishing returns, and all that. It's all well and good that I can hear the differences among various high-priced loudspeakers, amps, and cables, but it doesn't mean that I can no longer be moved by listening to music through pair of \$300 computer speakers.

I'm sure there are some people out there who, having sampled the best of the best, thumb their noses at lowly proletarians who enjoy anything else. It's easy to comprehend why: the more expensive something is, the better it is supposed to serve its intrinsic purpose. Obvious stuff, this.

Suppose this wasn't the case, however. Suppose that, one day, a top company came out with something twice as expensive than anything else on the market, but was little or no different from the company's own next best product? Imagine competitors' derision at such a move, and said derision replaced by shock, as people actually bought the product. Now *all* the competitors come out with equally expensive products, with equally little difference between them. Consumers buy them with gusto because the products cost what they think they should be paying for a top-quality product. Yet the products are no better than before. In short, you can't have \$60,000 speakers, \$120,000 worth of electronics, but only a mere \$20,000 worth of cables and interconnects. The weak point is *obviously* the wiring. Just sack up and pay the \$50,000 it will take to balance out your system. The more expensive stuff is clearly better. But is it?

Dynamique Audio

This rather humble British company, based in East Sussex, thinks not. About half of Dynamique Audio's products are made using conductors of solid silver of at least 99.99% purity. For the wiring loom reviewed here (excepting the Firelight USB cable), the silver is actually 99.999% pure. The rationale behind the use of silver is not one of marketing or appearance, but because other conductors just don't sound as good. Far from simply sheathing someone else's wire in fancy jackets, the folks at Dynamique have expertise in mechanical polishing, electroplating, and the use of anodizing baths, which they use to hand-make all but their least expensive wire, from the raw silver on up. Each of their flagship cables -- the subjects of this review -- takes up to three days to construct.



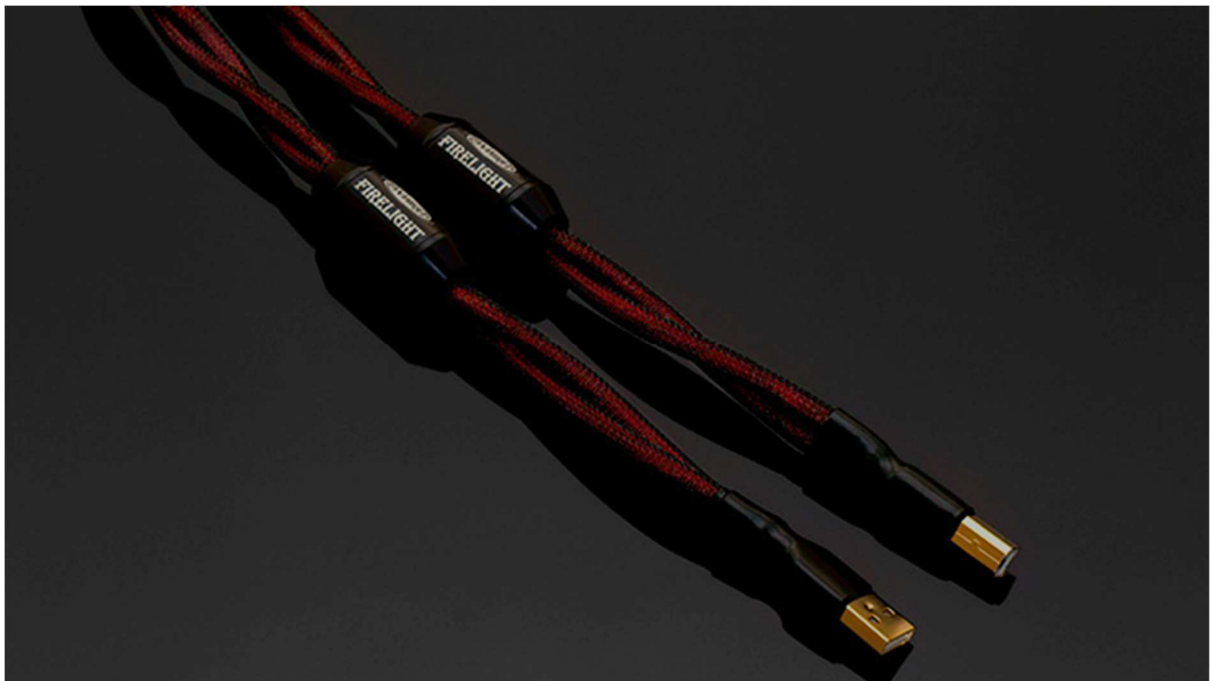
Making these cables by hand permits more complex geometries to be used. An air-core dielectric, or insulator, is used in each cable, such as the spade-to-spade Celestial speaker cable (\$7650 USD per 2m pair), which has a distributed gauge arrangement: four solid-core conductors each of 16AWG, 18AWG, and 19AWG, and two 20AWG strands. In aggregate, this equates to 2x9AWG per channel -- a serious amount of pure silver. Had I opted for a 3m pair of Celestials, I could expect to be handling over two pounds of silver. These variously sized conductors are helically counterbalanced, and insulated with a dielectric of "super air-spaced" Teflon. Each cable also has twin dampers, and the finest, pure-silver NextGen connectors from WBT.



The Zenith RCA interconnects (\$2550/1m pair) have pairs of 20AWG, 21AWG, and 22AWG solid cores in each channel. Like the Celestials, the dielectric is air-spaced Teflon, with two resonance dampers per wire, and WBT silver NextGen RCA connectors at each end (carbon-fiber Furutech XLR connectors are also available). The Infinite power cord (\$3350/2m cord) has six 16AWG solid cores for its current lead, which aggregates to 11AWG per conductor, and a ground wire of 99.99999% copper plated in 16AWG silver -- around 100 μ m worth. A variety of classy Furutech wall plugs are available, depending on where in the world you reside.



Finally, I was supplied with a Firelight USB cable (\$495/1m), which has two 21AWG solid cores for the signal, and two 20AWG power leads of silver-plated copper. A single resonance filter per channel is harnessed here, with gold-plated Type A and B USB connectors on opposing ends.



The Dynamiques looked terrific, with high-quality construction throughout, and nary a hint of homebrew. Some may fancy the garden-hose thickness of some high-end cables, but I think they're absurd. There's no correlation between cable thickness (as opposed to conductor thickness, or gauge) and sound quality. These cables are classy and unobtrusive. And *heavy* -- all that silver adds up. My waifish figure

almost wasn't up to the task of carrying all of the Dynamiques in one arm across my listening room. They were also a bit stiff, and not easy to maneuver in and around my equipment, but there's no way to avoid this.

Dynamique Audio backs their products with a lifetime warranty, and a 30-day return policy if you're not satisfied. I'm not aware of another high-end cable company with so generous a policy.

System

I hooked up the Dynamiques to a wide variety of equipment during their layover here, from the NuForce DDA-100 direct digital amp (\$549) and Rogue Audio Sphinx hybrid integrated amplifier (\$1399), up to my reference, Hegel Music Systems' H300 integrated amplifier-DAC (\$5500). Arcam's rLink (\$249) and FMJ D33 digital-to-analog converters (\$3299) were also used, to test the Zenith interconnects. On the loudspeaker front, the Celestials cavorted with my references, the KEF R900s (\$4999.98/pair), Vivid Audio's two-way V1.5s (\$7500/pair), and Cabasse's monolithic Pacific 3s (\$16,000/pair). While my impressions below combine my experience with the Dynamiques across all of this gear, the Hegel H300, Arcam D33, and Vivid V1.5s figured most heavily.

I'm not what you'd call an ardent believer in cable "burn-in," or, at these prices, in the idea of mixing and matching cables from different brands. I threw all the cables into my system at once, snaked the Firelight USB cable to my 2009-vintage Apple MacBook Pro running iTunes and Songbird, and hit Play.

Candor

While cables are intended to merely convey an analog or digital signal to and from one's components, they're often used as tone controls to improve a system's sound. Which is fine -- I guess. I don't like it, but can understand the situation audiophiles frequently find themselves in: loving *almost* everything about a specific amp or pair of speakers. I discovered this when reviewing Dynamique's Caparo speaker cables a few years back. I erroneously believed that the Caparos were bass-heavy because of how fulsome my Mirage OMD-28 speakers were in that region. With more experience, I discovered that it was the *Mirages* that were bass heavy, and that the Dynamique cables were merely passing this along, while competing cables seemed to editorialize on the low-end energy.

Wiser ears and a more cultured tongue should be able to convey great insight into how something this expensive sounds, but after months of using the Dynamiques with a great variety of gear, I'm groping for words to describe their sound. I found them to be supremely honest cables whose presence remained inconspicuous. Their virtual lack of any sonic signature laid bare the characteristics and

shortcomings of everything connected to them. Tonally, nothing was accentuated, nothing omitted. You might read in other cable reviews that “highs sparkled,” or that the bass was “particularly impactful.” Yet in real life, highs don’t sparkle, and if bass appears fuller than it’s been previously, it may well be artifice. And so it was -- or wasn’t -- here.



Random Access Memories (16-bit/44.1kHz ALAC, Columbia), the newest album from the elusive pair of French DJs who comprise Daft Punk, is pretty terrific. At once familiar and new, it has a clean sound -- studio processed, to be sure, but not at all scrubbed of fine detail. “Giorgio by Moroder” features 73-year-old Giovanni Giorgio Moroder, a man with immense musical history. A monologue by this cultured Italian opens the track, and his layered voice is rich, a slightly strained quality beginning to reflect his years. His exploration of his early forays into the European music scene includes changes in timbre, perhaps products of his accent, that the Dynamiques just *nailed*. Surely, having Vivid Audio and Hegel gear upstream helped in this regard, but cables can tilt voices to sound under- or overemphasized, and give sibilants an edge that flatters to deceive. The Dynamiques did none of this. Instead, they highlighted a slight edge in Moroder’s voice that I know stems from the Hegel’s built-in DAC. They let the Vivids and their superlative aluminum-dome tweeters sing with seemingly infinite extension. And when I played Moroder through a variety of other equipment I’m familiar with, I could easily identify how each component somehow colored the music. What I could *not* hear, despite my best efforts, were the Dynamiques.

While I couldn't hear the Dynamique cables directly adding to the music, I rapidly divined what they helped to strip away. A fine, low-level haze that I hadn't been aware of vanished with the Dynamiques, leaving the music delightfully naked, with backdrops as quiet and dark as I've ever heard. This allowed musicians and instruments to stand in the starkest relief. "Mer Girl," from Madonna's *Ray of Light* (16/44.1 ALAC, Warner Bros.), illustrated this. In this spare recording the Material Girl croons sentimentally, in the way only a billionaire could possibly express. About halfway through the track, when all goes quiet, her voice emerged from *complete* silence in as holographic and three-dimensional a stereo image as I've ever been able to muster from my 16/44.1 collection -- such purity and unfiltered, organic beauty that, like a virgin, touched my ears for the very first time. It was the kind of seminal experience that makes hi-fi so addictive. I imagine Madonna would approve.



If there's something to skimp on in a stereo system, it's the wire. Speakers, followed by the amplifier and preamplifier, have a profound impact on sound quality that cables just don't have. But -- and this is a weighty, substantial "but" -- you can't have reference-level sound without reference-level components in *all* categories. The most resolving equipment passes on so much raw detail from the recording that subtle changes become quickly audible, and the Dynamiques were, to my ears, the best cables I have used. It's a mischaracterization to say that a cable "sounds" great -- unlike loudspeakers, which turn an analog signal into sound, or amplifiers, which increases the power of an analog signal, cables aren't supposed to *do* anything other than pass along the signal unaltered: the model middleman.

“White Night,” from David Arnold’s score for the film *Tomorrow Never Dies* (16/44.1 ALAC, A&M), runs the full dynamic range from intimate to explosive, from sizable bass to tinkling highs, all in an expansive-sounding recording space. Once again, the Dynamiques effortlessly captured the music’s micro- and macrodynamic swings. To highlight one aspect of this track would be a disservice to the British cables: from top to bottom, it was utterly pristine.

Comparison

Nordost’s Frey 2 cables are a rather different sort. The speaker cables are arranged in a flat array, rather than helically, and cost \$2799/2m pair, which gets you 22 strands per channel of 99.99999%-pure, oxygen-free copper (OFC) plated with 22AWG silver. The Frey 2 interconnect comprises five 24AWG conductors of the same quality, and cost \$1399/1m pair. The Frey 2 power cord runs five 16AWG conductors, and weighs in at \$1899/2m cord.

I was immediately struck by the Nordosts’ treble. There was a taut concision in the highs that revealed admirable amounts of resolution and ambience in recordings such as “Your Hand in Mine,” from Explosions in the Sky’s *The Earth Is Not a Cold Dead Place* (16/44.1 ALAC, Bella Union). I found it easy to be attracted to such a crystalline top end, but ultimately couldn’t be seduced to the same degree as I was by the Dynamiques. This broad instrumental track sounded slightly forward overall and more immediate through the Nordosts, though ultimately less immersive than through the Dynamiques. Bass through the Frey 2 loom sounded almost as well defined as through the Dynamiques, but a touch light in terms of overall weight.

The Nordosts’ outright resolution was very good, but between their more contoured sound -- accentuated highs, welterweight bass, and intimate posturing -- and the small but discernible gains in resolution with the Dynamiques, it shouldn’t take terribly long to ascertain for yourself what roughly twice the money buys you. Focusing on the speaker cables alone, one physically has twice as *much* cable, if not twice the length, when comparing the dense and sophisticated Celestials to the flat, hard-plastic Frey 2s with their basic spade connectors.

The final word

I haven’t listened to any other company’s flagship cables, to be able to compare them to the loom of Dynamique Audio cables that I’ve spent the last several months with. What I can say is that, for all intents and purposes, they are perfect cables. Deeply resolving and full of high-quality components, they look, feel, and, most important, sound like the reference-caliber products one should demand at these prices -- prices that are still only fractions of what other companies sell their reference products

for. The *differences* in cost between those cables and the Dynamiques could build you an excellent system. The average American household will probably disagree, but if there's such a thing as good value in high-end cables, I have a sneaking suspicion I've found it.

Hans Wetzel

Associated Equipment

- **Speakers** -- Cabasse Pacific 3, KEF R900, Vivid Audio V1.5
- **Integrated amplifiers** -- Hegel Music Systems H300, Rogue Audio Sphinx
- **Sources** -- Apple MacBook Pro running Songbird and iTunes, Arcam rLink and FMJ D33 DACs, Hegel Music Systems H300
- **Speaker cables** -- Nordost Frey 2
- **Interconnects** -- Nordost Frey 2
- **USB cables** -- DH Labs Silversonic, Nordost Blue Heaven LS
- **Power cables** -- Nordost Frey 2

Dynamique Audio Celestial Speaker Cables

Price: \$7650 USD per 2m pair, spade or banana connectors.

Dynamique Audio Zenith Interconnects

Price: \$2550 USD per 1m pair, RCA or XLR connectors.

Dynamique Audio Firelight USB Digital Interconnect

Price: \$495 USD per 1m cord.

Dynamique Audio Infinite Power Cords

Price: \$3350 USD per 2m cord.

Warranty (all): Lifetime, materials and workmanship; 30-day return policy.

Dynamique Audio Ltd. Third Floor, Vantage Point, Brighton, East Sussex BG1 4GW

Website: <http://www.dynamiqueaudio.com/>