

Test 3: DYNAMIQUE AUDIO SHADOW 2 USB CABLE

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If we're all going to have to live with streaming from now on, then keep in mind that we'll need to spend some time understanding what we need to do to get the most out of this new medium.

Here are some tips that may seem unnecessary to many of you, but will be invaluable to those starting this journey.

First, choose a platform that offers high definition, such as Tidal or Qobuz. If you opt for a streamer separate from the DAC, choose one that has both USB and coaxial outputs. And lastly, see which of these two options best suits your needs.

And if you're using a USB cable, then read this test, as it may be the solution for those looking to get the most out of this digital media without spending too much.

Aside from those who don't believe cables can have distinct performance characteristics, most of our readers know that it takes time to listen to cables to achieve that much-desired fine-tuning.

Over the past two years, I've tested and listened to a dozen USB cables, ranging from \$200 to \$5,000, on our Reference System, and they all behaved audibly differently.

The positive aspect of this price disparity is that all the products we evaluated started from a level of accuracy that will certainly satisfy 99% of our readers. So, if you're currently looking for your USB cable, I suggest reading the last three editions of Best of the Year to see if any of the products reviewed fit your budget and taste.

Many of our readers, upon reading the review of the Dynamique Apex USB cable, were shocked by its price and asked us if this manufacturer might have a USB cable with the same 'DNA', but suitable for our reality.

I've tested numerous cables from this manufacturer, and I use the Apex line as our benchmark in our main system.

And what I can guarantee is that even the lower-end lines, such as the Zenith 2, Halo 2, and Shadow 2, possess the same sonic signature and many of the qualities of the Apex series.

Another feature I greatly appreciate is the build quality and final presentation of all the series. For example, if you visually compare the Shadow 2 USB cable with the Apex, your first impression is that the most visible difference is in the diameter of the two cables. Everything else is very similar.

The manufacturer states that the Shadow 2 USB is a pure silver design. Two shielded 22AWG PTFE pure silver/air data conductors – and beneath this shielding are braided copper and carbon wires, with the data and power lines physically separated. The anodized aluminum connector housings provide continuous shielding to the termination point, with the pins gold-plated.

For this test, we used the Innuos ZENmini Mk3 streamer with the Nagra TUBE DAC, playing discs from CAVI Records and some from our Methodology – first on USB Apex and then on USB Shadow 2.

For the rest of the system, we used the Norma Audio Revo IPA-140 and Soulnote A-3 integrated amplifiers (see Test 1 in this issue). The speakers were the Wharfedale Aura 2, Rega Aya (see Test 2 in this issue), and the Estelon X Diamond Mk2. All interconnect cables used were also Apex from Dynamique Audio.

The Shadow 2 USB has an excellent tonal balance, without emphasizing any part of the audible spectrum. Precise, incisive bass with excellent energy and air displacement. The midrange has great naturalness and just the right amount of transparency. And the highs, while not having the same degree of airiness as the USB Apex, have excellent decay and extension.

I asked a musician friend, who participated in our CAVI albums, to listen to the same tracks on both cables, and his conclusion was that to hear significant differences, it was only possible when played back on the magazine's Reference System, because on the Rega and Wharfedale speakers, only the high frequencies were easier to detect. This is quite significant for a cable that costs a fraction of the Apex, and which, for that very reason, will certainly be connected and used in more 'realistic' systems.

Its soundstage is excellent! It manages to provide depth, focus, and definition that allow us to truly hear a 3D sound image. This is fundamental for entry-level DACs and streamers, which often suffer from a more two-dimensional sound image.

The plans are maintained even in crescendos, so rest assured that the brass instruments in a symphonic piece will not sound within your right snare drum (if the recording hasn't made that unfortunate mistake with microphone placement during recording).

The textures are refined, with a vivid presentation of the instruments' palettes and an ease in observing the intentions.

If you're particular about timing, tempo, and rhythm, the Shadow 2 won't disappoint. We used raw recordings in the transient playback, and it proved to be solid and accurate in every example.

The dynamics are exemplary for a cable that costs less than 500 pounds in England! Both macro and micro dynamics are reproduced with enormous clarity and ease.

We are concerned that cheaper cables might fail to reproduce macro-dynamics, resulting in muddled sound, or that feeling of making the sound two-dimensional at very high frequencies, taking away the pleasure of hearing that passage at the correct volume. These challenges will not be a problem for the Shadow 2.

Harmonic body in streaming is still a stumbling block, whether or not the defenders of this medium accept it. However, I've heard recordings like the one I mentioned in the October Playlist section that surprised me in this regard – and if the cable under test doesn't have the same impact on this aspect as the USB Apex, the Shadow 2 certainly doesn't look bad.

It's easy to hear the differences in harmonic body between a cello and a double bass, or between a clarinet and a bass clarinet!

The second stumbling block for streamers is still convincing our brains that the musicians are right there in front of us. At least my brain hasn't been fooled yet, who knows, maybe it will be by the end of 2025! Who knows!

But in excellent recordings, at least we can focus and listen with interest to the work we have chosen to evaluate this very demanding aspect of our Methodology.

CONCLUSION

I was truly surprised by the performance level of the Dynamique Audio USB Shadow 2, for its price.

I believe that if it fits your budget, and your system could get even more out of it with a better USB cable, the Shadow 2 needs to be on your listening list. Because its packaging, besides being very interesting, follows this manufacturer's philosophy of not being used as an 'equalizer' for systems with tonal imbalance.

If that's your case, if you're looking for a cable to attenuate bright highs or slightly tone down the bass so it fits without resonating in your room, forget it. Because it doesn't have that 'equalizer' profile.

However, if you have a system that only needs a digital cable to enhance its qualities and give you a higher degree of intelligibility and listening comfort, you'll be impressed by it.

As I mentioned in the introduction to this test, there are dozens of good USB cables on the market, and the Shadow 2 joins that

For those who want to know the benefits that this 'Neutrality' can bring to their system, here's an opportunity to do so without spending a fortune.

POSITIVE POINTS

A safe option for well-tuned and refined systems.

NEGATIVE POINTS

None at that price.

SPECIFICATIONS

Drivers	<div>• Solid pure silver (4N)</div> <div>• Multi-strand OFC copper (6N) with silver plating</div>
Gauge	<div>• 2 x 22AWG AG (data)</div> <div>• 20AWG SPC (power supply)</div>
Insulation	<div>• Teflon PTFE spaced with air (data)</div> <div>• Teflon FEP (power supply)</div>
Construction	<div>• Shielded twisted pair</div> <div>• Data and power physically isolated</div>
Damping & shielding	<div>• 1x Resonance filter</div> <div>• Copper braided shielding with carbon</div> <div>• USB connector with anodized aluminum housing</div>
Terminations	USB Dynamique connector made of anodized aluminum, with gold-plated pins.

DYNAMIQUE AUDIO SHADOW 2 USB CABLE	
Tonal Balance	13.0
Soundstage	13.0
Texture	13.0
Transients	13.0
Dynamics	12.0
Harmonious Body	12.0
Organic	11.0
Musicality	11.0
Total	100.0

VOCAL	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
ROCK, POP	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
JAZZ, BLUES	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
CHAMBER MUSIC	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>
SYMPHONIC	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>	<div></div>



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