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Dynamique Audio Tempest 2 Headphone Cable for HifiMan

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In this review I am testing a high quality aftermarket headphone cable, the Dynamique Audio Tempest 2, configured for Hifiman Sundara.

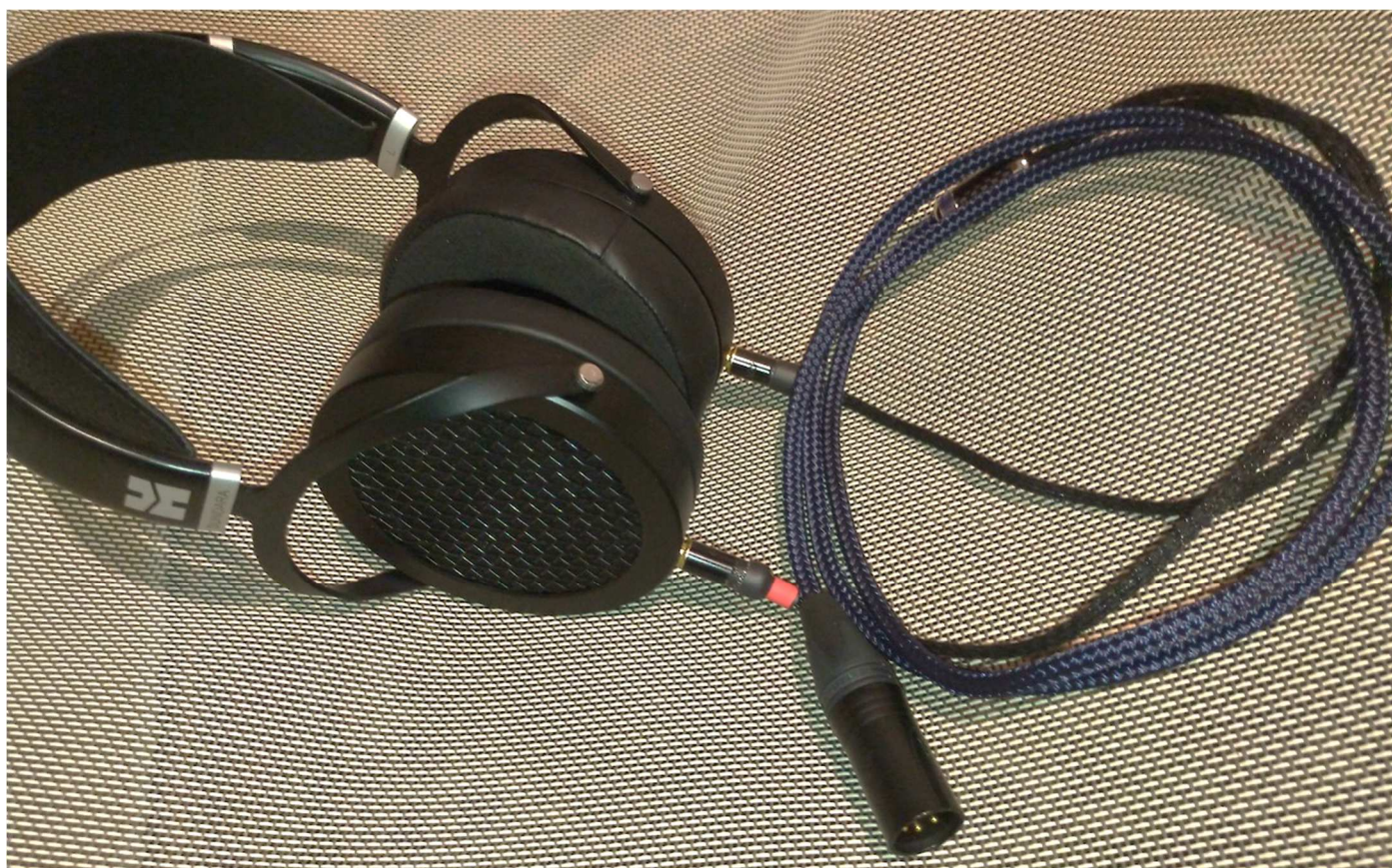
The Tempest 2 uses 4 solid-core 7N OFC conductors. Although solid core wires offer the best sound quality, it's not frequent to find them in headphone cables because of their fragility. To solve this issue, the Tempest 2 uses relatively small wire gauge (26 AWG) arranged in star quad geometry, which provide a level of flexibility and longevity similar to a stranded design, retaining the high quality and low noise of a solid core design.

The structure is supported by fluoropolymer dielectric around the conductors and a dual cotton layer to minimize handling noise, vibration and microphonics, and grant additional durability. The resulting cable is sturdy and has an elegant feeling to it, provided by the cotton layers. The Tempest 2 is not too stiff, and using it instead of the thin Hifiman cable does not decrease the freedom of movement.

My Tempest 2 is configured with 3.5 mm stereo minijacks that connect tightly to the Sundara headphone, and has balanced (XLR) connector to the amp end. I was also provided with a separate balanced to single-ended jack adapter with identical specs to the main cable, internally and externally.

The Hifiman Sundara headphone has a very warm and lush tonality, with a midbass and lower midrange emphasis and subdued treble. In my review, I described it as the “smaller sibling” of the Ananda, maintaining the philosophy of an easy to listen headphone, although the Sundara is less linear and detailed than its bigger brother. These characteristics make it a great candidate to be improved through a better cable, with the goal of tightening up its tonal balance.

I have been testing Tempest 2 cable and Hifiman Sundara with Yulong Aquila 2 DAC/headamp, which offers both single ended and balanced output, in order to compare the following configurations: single ended Sundara with stock cable; Sundara with Tempest 2 recable and adapter (to work in single ended mode); Sundara with Tempest 2 in balanced mode.



Listening Impressions

Comparing the stock Sundara against the recabled, single-ended configuration, there are some immediate differences. First of all, the midbass / lower midrange portion is less congested, less cavernous. With the stock Sundara, there is a “layer of fat” and resonance in that frequency section, which is present most of the time, and marks its main limitation against superior headphones such as the Ananda. With the Tempest 2 recable, this layer is much less apparent and the resulting sound is much more linear, without taking away the headphone’s inherent warm/lush character. With this tonal shift, the microdetail that was masked by the headphone’s fat character, is a bit more upfront. Such detail comes from the headphone’s resolution and it was already there, just less apparent. The midrange is clearer and it is easier to hear the nuances in the singers’ voices, and the highs, while still quite subdued in the overall tonal balance, are increased in quantity and extension. The resulting soundstage is larger and more distance can be heard between each instrument. The midbass/deep bass ratio is also improved and the overall timing and sense of involvement of the headphone is improved.

Upon doing more testing on the Tempest 2-recabled Sundara in single ended and balanced mode, the latter shows further improvements, but in this case, there are more variables to consider: there is the inherent advantage of using the headphone amplifier in balanced against single-ended mode, and associated increase in driving power. But the cable obviously manages the signal differently, making full use of its conductors (instead of sharing the ground between channels, done in single-ended mode).

The improvements in balanced mode, in my test configuration, involve mainly treble and soundstage: where Tempest 2 (in single ended mode) increases treble and detail against the stock cable, the Tempest 2 in balanced mode makes it further refined, as if the sound was “painted” more delicately and carefully in the picture. The soundstage is improved of another step, further increasing the relative distance between instruments, which was already noticeably improved when going from stock cable to Tempest 2 in single ended, as if the stock cable was compressing the soundstage.



Conclusion

I like a lot what the Tempest 2 does to the sound, because it does not change the nature of the headphone, does not introduce any peaks (like it's the case, for example, with certain silver plated copper I have been listening in the past, which were making stuff like Sennheiser HD600 and HD650 sibilant), but contributes in freeing the Sundara's potential. It's similar to what often happens with analogue interconnects, where the wrong interconnect somehow “chokes” the sound as if we were talking of water pipes. In this case, the analogy works really well, and the Tempest 2 puts the Sundara much closer to the Ananda than it was before, perhaps still missing something in terms of transparency, but with the same level of linearity and soundstage capabilities.