

SOUNDBITES – BLACK RHODIUM CABLES

Neville Roberts



Black Rhodium Fusion Mains Cable 1.5m - £90

Black Rhodium Prelude Interconnects 1m - £80/pair

A couple of new silver-plated products that have recently emerged from the Black Rhodium stables are the Fusion mains cable and Prelude interconnect cables. The combination of silver plating on copper conductors seems to be gaining favour in high quality cables as it offers excellent high frequency response combined with superb bass and midrange handling capabilities.

Black Rhodium is a British company that since 1990 has been producing high performance audio and home cinema cables designed by Graham Nalty. They pride themselves in using high quality materials and technologies in the manufacture of their products and these new cables are certainly no exception.

Fusion Mains Cable

The mains cable, which is fitted with ferrite suppression rings over each of the three conductors, is made from silver-plated copper conductors shrouded in low loss silicone rubber insulation. Of course, the high cross-sectional area of the 13A copper conductors offers a low electrical resistance from the mains supply to the equipment. This, coupled with the silver plating should result in a low impedance over the entire audio spectrum.

The silicone rubber is post-cured after manufacture to remove excess impurities that were created during its manufacture. This process claims to deliver a more flowing and purer musical sound quality than other high quality low loss insulation made from harder materials.

Comparing the use of this cable against a standard 'kettle lead' in the power supply that feeds my preamp and phono amp units, there was indeed a very noticeable improvement in the overall refinement across a wide range of music. Strange as it may seem for a mains cable, there was a discernible ease in the way music was reproduced in comparison to the kettle lead.

Of particular note was a reduction in background noise from external sources, such as clicks and pops from refrigerators and the like. This reduction in the noise floor resulted in a greater clarity to the sound.

All in all, this is a very well made cable and, at below £100, represents very good value for money.

Prelude Interconnecting Cable

These snazzy green 1m interconnects are terminated with high quality phono connectors, which sport gold plating at the business end. As with other cables in their range, the conductors are made from silver-plated copper. However, the Preludes are specifically designed for low microphony.

Although the signals flowing in an audio cable are very small, they do result in forces that can create displacement between the conductors, which in turn can generate undesirable electrical charges. All this creates electrical noise, so a cable designed to reduce this effect should result in a cleaner transfer of the signal. The technique for minimizing this microphony is to place a conducting electrostatic shield between the inner insulation and the screen. This has the effect of bleeding away these small electrical charges and is achieved in the Preludes by applying a conductive layer to the inner PTFE insulation.

The signal flow in a cable can be compromised by a number of factors such as resistance, skin effect, capacitance, inductance, RFI and dielectric material. All of these factors can affect the transfer of complex musical signals. The combination of copper conductors and silver plating should result in an excellent frequency response across the entire audio spectrum. Also, as one would expect with such a high quality product, the cables are directional and this is indicated by printed arrows on the sheath. A period of burning in is also recommended as this affects the crystalline structure of the metals and allows many of these variables to settle down which has a positive effect on sound quality. Generally speaking, it is good to burn in cables for between 70 and 100 hours. In my experience, however, the first 10 hours make the greatest difference to the sound and then the cables continue to improve in a less dramatic fashion.



So much for the theory, but how did they sound in practice? After leaving the cables running overnight between my preamp and power amps, it was time to put them to the test.

My former cables were oxygen-free copper co-ax and obviously well run in. By comparison, the Preludes exhibited a cleaner top end with an excellent midrange and a taught and crisp bass. The overall effect when compared with the copper co-ax was that musical instruments sounded more real. This was best illustrated with a 1979 vinyl recording of Beethoven's Piano Concerto No. 5 "The Emperor" on Decca Digital Master SXDL 7503. The piano, one of the hardest instruments to record and reproduce, became more alive in my sitting room.

I can summarise the overall effect by saying that the new cables add a new dimension of realism, detail, clarity and presence to each individual instrument, whether in a small ensemble or a large orchestra. Considering the price, they are excellent value for money and make the prospect of re-cabling your entire system a viable proposition.

Contact Black Rhodium on +44 (0) 1332 342233 or email info@blackrhodium.co.uk or visit their website at <http://www.blackrhodium.co.uk>

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