

aM hardware

soundstring cable

Alpha Octaphase interconnects

as reviewed by Robert H. Levi



I have good news—Soundstring cables, which were reviewed and lauded in these pages a few issues ago, have now gotten less expensive and better! This just does not happen very often. The champagne is uncorked, and I'm celebrating with my favorite Murray Perahia SACD of Bach keyboard concertos. The new interconnect is Soundstrings' Alpha Series Octaphase, available only non-shielded and single-ended. It retails for \$430 for a 3-foot length, versus \$488 for the older Omega Pro Line cable, which is shielded. This American-made cable is a winner. The Alpha Series retains the smoothness and definition of the Omega Pro, but has a more neutral and open sound quality with increased speed and air. It also retains the Omega's excellent flexibility, fitting in and around tight places.

I ran in the Alphas on the Cable Cooker for three days and on a second system for two more days before reviewing. The cables are directional and clearly marked. In addition to my Marantz ST17 tuner, I used the following CDs for my auditions:

Murray Perahia, *Bach Keyboard Concertos*, Academy of St. Martin in the Fields (SACD 89690)

Sonata for Violin and Piano (Wilson Audiophile CD WCD-8722)

Diana Krall, *When I Look Into Your Eyes* (Verve SACD 440065374-2)

Getz/Gilberto (Verve SACD 314589595-2)

XLO Reference Recordings (HDCD RX-1000)

ROBERT H. LEVI'S SYSTEM

LOUDSPEAKERS
Avalon Eidolons and REL
Stadium III subwoofer.

ELECTRONICS
Marantz 17 tuner, Pass XONO
and E.A.R. 324 phono
preamplifier, E.A.R. 890
amplifier, Pass X1 preamplifier,
Pass X600 monoblocks, and an
Adcom 750 preamplifier for
secondary sources.

SOURCES
VPI Scout/JMW 9 tonearm, VPI
SDS Controller, and Benz Ruby2
H cartridge. Sony SCD-1 SACD
player, Theta Gen. 5a DAC,
Theta Jade transport, Alesis
Masterlink, Theta Data II DAC,
Marantz DV8400. Magnum
Dynamab MD 108 Hybrid
Reference Tuner

CABLES

Kimber Select balanced, Kimber TAK phono AG, Kimber Hero balanced and single ended, Kimber KCAG/KCTG. Soundstring Alpha interconnects and speaker cables, and AC power cords. Eichmann Express AC cables and interconnects for secondary system.

ACCESSORIES

Power Wing line conditioning, Tice Power Block, Kimber Palladian power cables, Tara RSC and Decade power cables, Tiff power cables, Tice power cables, Tice Clock, and Audio Prism Quiet Line IIs.

Musicality was excellent with the original Omega Pro. With the Alpha it is now superb, in fact near state-of-the-art. The magic bullet in this cable's design is the claim that it is naturally shielded up to 100 feet without RF problems. It sounds very close to my reference Kimber Select copper cable, and has musical overtones similar to that of my Kimber Select Hyper Silver interconnects. It delivers layers and layers of texture and a stunningly realistic musical character. The Alpha's even sound quality from lows to highs makes it better than ever before. If you own a Marantz DV8400 Universal Disk Player, Alpha cable should be your next purchase, as it maximizes the DV8400 like NO other interconnects I've tried!

More air and ambience are quite apparent. Piano overtones, soprano voices, bells, and ambient cues are more obvious. The Alphas sound similar to the best Wireworld formulas, but smoother and a touch more liquid. These subtleties do not keep these cables from telling the truth. They merely refuse to subtract anything from the music that makes for enjoyment. You'll hear tons of high-end definition. Tape hiss is neither emphasized nor de-emphasized. Cymbals are simultaneously silvery and brassy, with correct overtones. The Alphas give you highs that are good for you!

The Alphas have the proverbial midrange to die for—detailed, textured, smooth, and realistic. They remind me of Magneplanars in the mids. There is no hint of compression, and oodles of depth. The backgrounds are not quite as black as with my pure silver cables, but as clean as those of any copper formula I've heard at any price. The sound is not threadbare, either, as it can be with silver cables. And that subtle sweetness for which Soundstring is famous continues to bless each gorgeous note of music.

Bass is tighter and deeper than with the older formula, with lots of texture and power. I love the enhanced drive of this design. Though not as ultra neutral as some, the Alphas are excellent to superior at delivering the bass goods, and are always believable. The increased neutrality of the Alpha is welcome here, as it makes this new cable more compatible with tube amps and ancillaries. The Omegas remain the perfect cables for most solid state systems, while the Alphas sing with everything from SETs to bipolar designs. I loved the bass of the Alpha with my 300B Euro Audio Team AE-1 tube amp and my E.A.R. 890 amp.

This is great cable. You can listen at virtually any level and hear both the subtle and the dynamic. It gets out of the way of the music without taking any away. It is perhaps a bit forgiving compared to Nordost or Siltech cable, but you won't care. Accuracy is overdone these days, and thin sound is out of fashion. I think high-caloric sound is right—that's how it sounds when it's live. That is why I'm a big Kimber fan AND a big Soundstrings fan, but even bigger now, with the Alpha Series.



Omega Series

All cables sound different, and the subtleties make this hobby fun. The new Soundstring Alpha Series is winning, with a capital W. The Alphas retain Soundstring's superb connectors, which have less metal, real wood casings, and terrific RCA conductors, and now sport a black nylon cloth jacket. The musical performance is better than ever. They have more detail, speed, and air than the Omegas, yet lose none of the Omegas' mellifluousness and smoothness. Great with tubes or solid state, the Alphas are one of the best all-copper designs available anywhere. They are now THE interconnect cables to beat! As I told you before, buy now before the price goes up. I am. **Robert H. Levi**

Addendum

I finally received additional pairs to try, and can now report that the Alpha, though unshielded, makes excellent phono cable for RCA-terminated tonearms like the VPI JMW. Before the Alpha, I hadn't found an interconnect that could do double duty in ultra-low-voltage situations, so I was using Kimber TAK AG and living with its crisp presentation. The Alpha is just as quiet, though unshielded. It is highly detailed, smooth as silk, and honestly neutral, but what rang my bell was the realistic sounding musical textures it revealed in LP playback. I could hear through the music to the rear of the soundstage. The Alpha is more neutral than the Soundstrings Pro cable, which I still like very much with solid state gear. If you are looking for tonearm cable, put the Soundstrings Alpha on your short list. It is my new tonearm cable reference, and is also a killer interconnect in single-ended applications, for tube or solid state systems.

Omega interconnects

Retail: \$429 per meter pair

Soundstring Cable

web address <http://www.soundstringcable.com>