

soundstring

Octaphase Omega and Alpha cables

as reviewed by Francisco Duran



It all started with a six-foot pair of Soundstring speaker cables I had. That was fine but in my system I needed an eight-foot pair. An email with my problem to Len Miller of Soundstring Cable and the situation was solved. I traded in my six foot pair for a nine foot pair. But there was a catch. After a few more conversations with Len, I had a whole system of Soundstring cables to evaluate and then some. He sent three power cords, six pairs of interconnects (three Octaphase Alpha Series and three Octaphase Omega Pro Line), and of course my replacement speaker cables. Needless to say, I was ready to re-wire my system and do a review.

Soundstring cables have already been well reviewed by my colleagues Mr. Robert Levi and Mr. Will Wright. Mr. Wright did an excellent job of describing the technical aspects of these cables and the state of high end cables in general. Mr. Levi, in his eloquent way, did a masterful job of describing the music making abilities of these cables. I will focus solely on the sound of these cables in my system. In regards to my system, key elements have changed. I was looking forward to installing the interconnects directly from my new Marantz SA-15S2 SACD/CD player to my Margules U280 SC stereo tube amp, which has left and right volume controls, but unfortunately it broke and had to be sent back to Margules. My Antique Sound Labs tube mono blocks also have volume controls but I felt them far inferior to the Margules in judging cables. In my old system I also had a Decware Tube Buffer between my CD source and Reference Line passive preamp but that was supplanted by the new Marantz gear. So I had a few extra set of interconnects left to install throughout my system. This left me with the power cords and one pair of Alpha and Octaphase to switch between integrated and CD player. The Marantz PM15S1 and

SA15S2 are very tonally neutral and vary capable of revealing the musical nuances of whatever is hooked up to them.

I will confess to being a bit apprehensive in reviewing cables, especially a whole system's worth of them. First of all the work is multiplied many times compared with that of a single component. Secondly the thought of a cable's resistance, inductance, and capacitance and its interaction with various components sends me into a slight degree of audiophile nervosa. My first thought was, will they work in my system? Will I have to wrestle unwieldy and stiff cables around my precious gear and risk scratching them or breaking connectors? Well as far as these two questions are concerned with the Soundstring Cables the answer is a yes to the first question and a no to the second one. The interconnects are as flexible as warm spaghetti, as are the power cords for being fairly thick. The speaker wire, while not as flexible, is fairly manageable but a bit springy. The RCA connectors are to die for!

I started out replacing one Soundstring wire at a time from my full set of JPS Superconductor Q wire, took notes and added a second wire till I had replaced all of the JPS with Soundstring. That is with my current system one pair of Alpha interconnect from Marantz integrated to Marantz SACD player. Then I switched one digital power cord then the power cord to the amplifier and finally the speaker cables. I also ran a pair of either the Soundstring Alpha or Omega interconnects to find the differences of each of these two cables. This was done within the context of the JPS set and then the all Soundstring set. I was also able to use a second pair of Soundstring interconnects and power cords when I installed my Monarchy SM-70 stereo amp and used the Marantz as a preamp. I told you this was work. I tried to do this review before the onset of summer but didn't make it. The heat got me! I am just glad Len Miller sent plenty of cables and is a patient man!

As is my habit in reviewing gear, I usually don't have cherry picked audiophile approved CDs and albums designated for the testing of gear. As a matter of fact, while I am typing this I am listening to a CD of the Alman Brothers from a box set and is far from a great recording but the music holds a very dear place in my heart. When reviewing, I play what I want to hear out of my collection. In this particular review a small example would be things like Seun and Fela Kuti's *Egypt 80*, AC DC *High Voltage*, Suba *Sao Paulo Confessions*, and Robert Plant's *Dreamland*. (I confess to being a bit of a completeist of Robert Plants music) If the component in question can move you emotionally even through a bad recording, it earns high marks from me. OK, of course I threw in Steely Dan's *Gauche* from Mofi and a JVC XRCD of Doug Macleod's *Come to Find* for good measure.



I admit to having formed opinions about these cables without even hearing them. Could it have been the color syndrome? You know gold color components sound warm and silver should lean to the brighter side? It could have been something I read on an internet thread (a sometimes dangerous thing). I was thinking they sounded warm and slightly slow. Actually any pre-conditioned thoughts I had about these cables were quickly dashed the moment I actually started listening to them in my system. With the whole set of Soundstring which included the Alpha interconnects, I heard an open, neutral and detailed sound yet one that sounded smooth and liquid. The sound was anything but warm or bright. They give fullness to the music yet they have a taut, rhythmic, and textured tonality that was neutral in its presentation yet most inviting musically. And these traits were no better heard than on Doug Macleod's *Come to Find* CD. When Mr. Macleod gets going on track two with his acoustic guitar flurries, the words lightning in his fingers could definitely be applied to this man. With the whole set of Soundstring cables in my system, every note that came out of his guitar came out clean, distinct, yet wholesome with the percussion, air, and pressure of the dynamics of that acoustic guitar adding to the feeling of him playing in front of you. In other words with these cables, acoustic music doesn't sound flat. The tone of that acoustic guitar sounded most natural. I heard absolutely no smearing of notes. Here the Soundstring cables did an admirable job of keeping up with my lightning fast Tonian Labs TL-D1 speakers. No mean feat in and of itself. Similarly on track 10, *Rollin' and Tumblin'*, the sounds of the steel guitar has great speed and texture yet retained that steel sound when the guitar strings meet the metal cone resonator. The natural fullness of the whole guitar sound remained intact.

Also on the Macleod disk, the acoustic bass on these track sounded taut, articulate, and agile. On this disk the bass is not going to bowl you over like the bass on some of my Sly and Robbie LP's. But it did show that the Soundstring cables could play bass that was pitch correct and clean. I couldn't resist pulling out my copy of *Star Tracks* on Telarc with Eric Kuzel and the Cincinnati Pops Orchestra. On this disk the CPO go through many of John Williams's famous film tracks from *Star Wars*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Superman*, and *Star Trek*. OK, they aren't all Williams' compositions. This disk is a lot of fun and an adrenaline rush. These tracks are very explosive dynamically and the Soundstring cable didn't choke. This was especially true on the first track, "Star Wars: Main Title." With a quick burst of explosiveness that would seem to knock over the first three rows in the audience the song builds to the famous theme. These cables kept all of the elements of dynamics and deep bass under control while at the same time delivering deep, full bass. The soundstage was solid and intact.

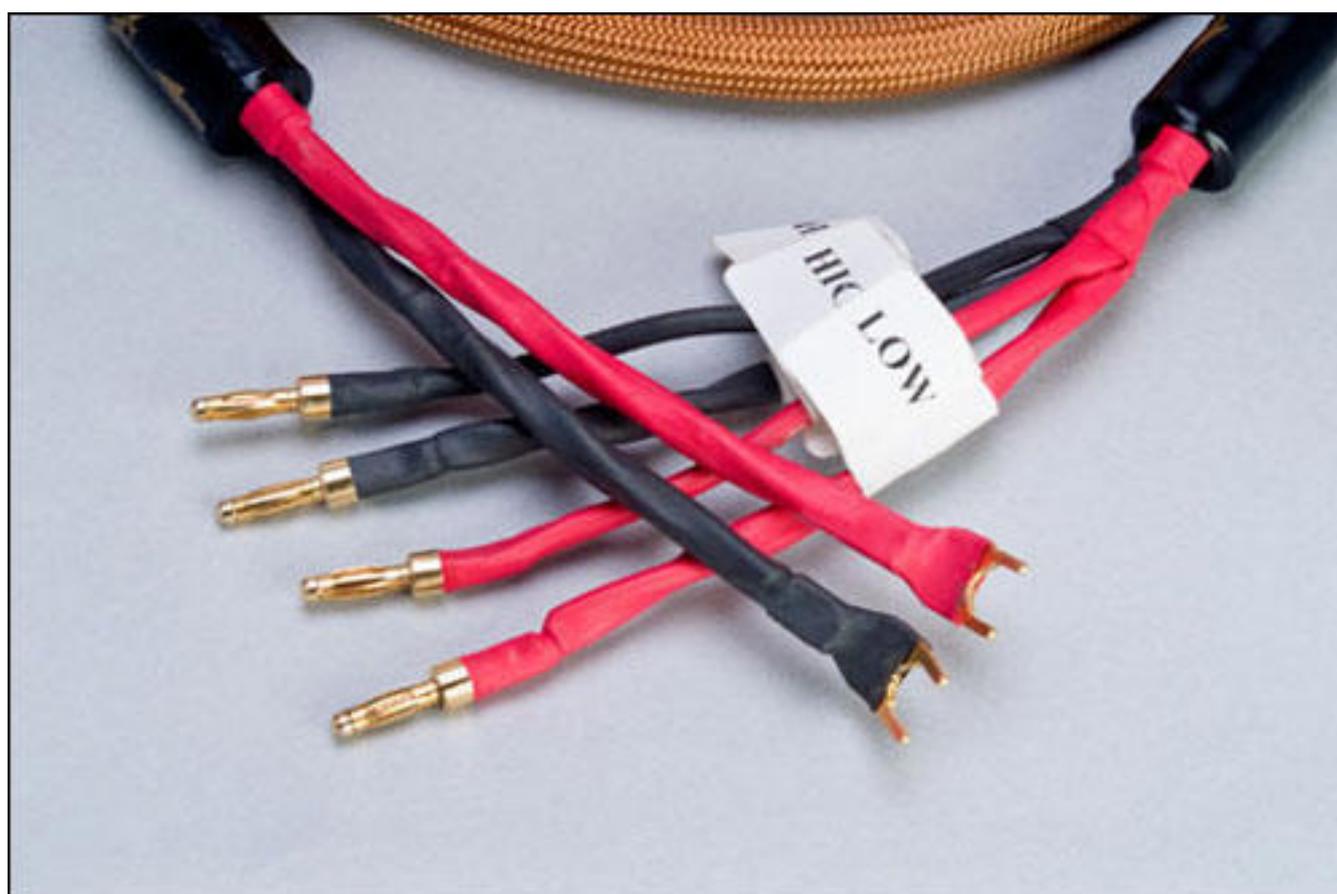
In the process of doing this review over the last few months, I had the opportunity to switch out my full set of JPS Superconductor Q cables more than a few times with the Soundstring. With all JPS in the system I wanted to see what difference just the replacement of the power cords would show me. So I replaced just my JPS Power AC+ with the Soundstring Tricormaxial High Output (rated 30 amps) Power Supply Cord. To my surprise the Tricormaxial had the edge in deep bass extension. The JPS Power AC+ comes with street cred a mile long. Yet here was this golden sheathed cable nudging it out of my system. The JPS power cord's bass is full, taut, and fast. But so was the Soundstring yet with noticeably more fullness and weight in the lower registers.

Substituting just the JPS Digital AC with a Soundstring eight foot Low Output Digital power cord (rated 10 amps) also proved interesting. The Soundstring cable is designed for high speed low power small transformer digital applications. Here again the Soundstring held its own with another highly regarded cable. There was no restriction or diminution of performance at all with regards to bass, soundstage, or speed or any other parameter of performance for that matter. This was from a low cost cable that is very utilitarian looking being of white with plastic molded ends. Chalk another one up for Soundstring!

Len Miller also sent three pair of their Octaphase Omega Pro Line interconnects. Compared to the Omegas, the Alpha edged out their brethren most noticeably in the midrange. Vocals sounded slightly truer in timbre. Wooden instruments sounded a tad bit more natural. And small changes in dynamics were more easily heard. A second listen also revealed the Alphas to resolve upper end details more cleanly and realistically. This was most noticeable in the Macleod disk where cymbals and steel guitar sounded cleaner. I detected a very slight smearing of upper end details with the Omega cable. I also felt the Alpha cables to sound a little more coherent and evenly balanced from top to bottom. These differences were apparent but it took work to hear them. The JPS Superconductor Q interconnects on the other hand are very clean and naturally detailed. They sound a little more up front and open in the

mids and a smidge less closed in and very slightly brighter than either of the two interconnects from Soundstring.

The Soundstring Tricormaxial speaker cables, being from the same family displayed the same characteristics as their interconnects and power cables did. Yet unlike the other Soundstring cables that I felt very comfortable putting in my system and forgetting about, there was something in the performance of the speaker cables that did not quite sink in. At first there was a slight shutting in and darkening of the decay and trailing edges of the music. Whether it was this closing in or a bit of darkness at the back of the soundstage, there was something that was pulling me away from the music and into trying to pinpoint the difference of speaker cables. I wanted so much to try these cables out with my Margules U280 SC tube amplifier but was unable at the time due to its being upgraded. After switching out other amps in my stable for the Marantz integrated I realized this phenomenon was most noticeable with the Marantz amp. The speaker cables still share the family resemblance of a very grainless and liquid presentation and detailed and dynamic and smooth sound. It seemed I only heard this anomaly when I hooked the speaker wire to my Marantz PM15S1 integrated amp more than any other amp in my stable. So it may very well be an impedance mismatch between the two pieces. I will say also that this anomaly was on the slight but still noticeable scale. In fact I got great results with them hooked up the new Almarro A340 mono block amps that I have in for review.



OK now I am going to throw an audiophile monkey wrench into the mix. In regards to the above paragraph, I got a strong feeling that the Soundstring speaker cables could be revealing something in the Marantz amp and or my Tonian speakers that my regular speaker cables were not. If so these are some very revealing cables yet ones that retain their musicality. After all, I don't have the top of the line JPS speaker wire. I have some investigating to do as far as my system is concerned. I will be eager to try the Tricormaxial speaker cables with my Margules tube amp when it returns. Oh, it never ends!

I have to concur with Mr. Levi and Mr. Wright about the performance of the Soundstring Cables. As I said above these are open, neutral, and detailed yet smooth, liquid, and musical cables. The words brightness, grain, or harshness are not in the Soundstring vocabulary, but musicality is. Their build quality is also exemplary and they are very affordable in today's cable market. In other words they can run with the big boys and not cost an arm and a leg. Count me in as another believer. I would like to thank Mr. Miller for his patience and for the opportunity for me to have a listen to their wire. I look

forward to hearing more music through these cables. Actually I know I will be listening to music through these cables in the future because they will be a permanent part of my system. **Francisco Duran**

Octaphase Alpha Series Single Ended Unshielded Interconnect

Retail: \$420 3 Ft. pair

Octaphase Omega Pro Line Single Ended Shielded Interconnect

Retail: \$430 3 Ft. pair

Tricormaxial Speaker Cables W/Gold Plated Spade Lugs

Retail: \$610 9 Ft. pair

Tricormaxial high Output Power Supply Cord

Retail: \$420 6 Ft.

Low Output Digital Power Supply Cord

Retail: \$75 8 Ft.

Soundstring Cable Technologies LLC

149 Woodward Ave.

South Norwalk, Ct 06854-4798 USA

TEL: 203-853-9300 Fax 203-853-9304

email address: sales@soundstringcable.com

web address: www.soundstringcable.com