

# soundstring

## Generation II Platinum Series Cables

as reviewed by Robert H. Levi



Few folks know this, but my Soundstring Cable Review, some nine years ago, was my first ever review of interconnects and speaker cables, and remained a big influence on my opinion of wires for years after that. I was at the *Stereophile* Show in San Francisco, and just popped into a listening room to check out some mighty nice sounds coming from within. There I met Len Miller and the rest was history! I declared Soundstring to be the best wire under \$1000 per meter I had ever heard, and best of show.

Why? Because it was. By 2000, most wire manufacturers were striving for a hyper-neutral, lean sound. Exceptions included Kimber, which was still leaner than today's Select, and Cardas Cables. Most other brands were downright skeletal. Then I heard Soundstring. It was rich, powerful, robust, warm, slightly sweet, well-defined, and anything but threadbare. I fell in love. Do you blame me? One audio reviewer told me it sounded like it had tubes in it! It was not perfect, but it was very, very musical and unfailingly satisfying. My speakers at the time were the Avalon Eidolons, a tough loudspeaker to please as well.

That was then; this is now. New to the market are the Soundstring GEN II Platinum Series Interconnect and Power Cords. These highly revised wires have been in R&D for quite a while, and are now available. These are important wires, and so I am dividing my review of the entire line into segments for easier auditioning, and am examining the interconnects and power cords here.

First up, though, are some comments about the science of Soundstring from Len Miller himself.

"In developing the new "GEN II Platinum Series" product line, we decided to continue using the basic raw material guidelines that were used for all of our original products. That is, using O.F. bare copper and very soft and flexible flame retardant PVC as the insulation for the conductors and jackets. We again chose not to use some of the more exotic and expensive materials that would mean much higher material and production costs without making a really significant difference in overall performance. By comparing the new GEN II product performance with some the industry's highest rated and most expensive cables, we found the new GEN II cables to be no more than a few percentage points off from the very best. That difference is too small to justify the higher costs to anyone but the wealthiest persons who must have the most expensive cables no matter what! In fact, several people that tried out the GEN II products said that they prefer them over some of the higher priced cables regardless of price or ratings.

The Gen II cables are constructed using 6 nines Oxygen Free, High Conductivity very finely stranded electrolytic bare copper. FYI, our "finely stranded" means from #40 (315" thick per strand) to #44 gauge (198" thick per strand), depending upon the product. That is considerably thinner than the individual strands of hair on your head! It also means that there are many, many more individual strands in each gauge of each conductor for each product. For signal carrying cables (speaker and interconnect) this means a larger surface area for the frequencies and signals to travel over faster and more accurately. For current carrying power cables and power cords, this means a larger diameter and circular mil area cable for improved current flow. That makes it easier for all the internal parts of the components they power to work more efficiently, resulting in improved overall component performance and longevity.

For example, in the GEN II speaker cables, each conductor is a 12 gauge with 672 individual strands of 6 nines OFHC bare copper! By comparison, a standard 12 gauge used for traditional speaker wires and some high end cables has 65 strands. The original #12 gauge Monster Cable "high definition, low loss" 2/c speaker cable had 259 strands. Having more strands per conductor increases the circular mil area (distance around) of the finished conductor simply because of the number of strands being used. A larger surface area allows signals and frequencies to travel faster and more accurately over the conductor surface. This helps to create a more open, accurate, transparent sound for your sound system. There is a whole lot more to it than just those basic enhancements. Better impedance, lower capacitance and improved velocity of propagation are also bi-products of the design, as is improved flexibility of the finished cables, no matter how large they are. This is one case where "bigger" (meaning more strands) is better.

With the GEN II High Out-put power cable and power supply cords, the increased overall dimension (circular mil area) of each conductor produces better, faster and more accurate voltage flow to the components being powered. We also found that the increased strand counts have the effect of being a power filtering agent in the power cable and power cords and also appears to have energy saving side effects because the components do not have to work as hard to utilize the incoming voltage to its maximum potential. This is not an insignificant bonus! When components do not have to work as hard, they tend to run cooler, use less energy and have longer individual internal component life.

So, there appears to be a lot of significant upside to our multi-stranded constructions. In addition, we reformulated the PVC compounds used for all the GEN II products. They are now fully compliant with all UL, CSA and international flame retardant standards, all are in 100% compliance with international standards for lead free (RoHS) content, all are certified for in-wall use and all have better overall flexibility. In addition, the power cables are certified for in-wall use as dedicated lines from circuit breaker panel boxes to individual wall outlets in dedicated sound rooms. Dedicated circuits for sound systems are invaluable in achieving enhanced overall system performance too!

Last, we were looking for a method to further reduce potential RF interference in all of the cable types and did not want to use the traditional braided or spiral shielded copper types because they add too much to cost and take away from flexibility. We experimented with many materials and finally found a flame retardant (FR) material that could be woven over the outside wall of the cable jacket before applying our Platinum Silver woven Nylon outer covering. The results were significant—especially with the power supply cords and we will now use this "RF" barrier on all of our GEN II cables in all new production runs. The added cost is minimal, the results are significant and it does not take away from the flexibility of the cables."

It is not often that manufacturers are this forthcoming with the science of their wires. I applaud Len for this explanation. Now for the sound!



## The Interconnects, Gen II

With my Marten Bird Loudspeakers, the Gen II Interconnects are both flexible and nicely improved over their excellent predecessors. The first improvement you will hear is more definition, top to bottom. This means more air on top; added layering and structured mids; and more powerful detailed bass. Better yet, the three ranges blend together much more as a whole than the Gen I. Keep in mind that the cost of these near-uber cables are only \$540 for the first meter! This is amazing in our often very expensive interconnect world today. (All pricing will be listed at the conclusion of the review.)

You are not missing much with the Gen IIs. The sound is slightly thicker and less neutral than the best wires [at 10X the cost], obscuring some definition. However, wait until you hear the timbres of the new Soundstring. They are so right sounding, so "you-are-there" correct, that you will be thrilled. I know that I was. The closest competitor is the Kimber 1016 Select, which is equally nuanced and right, at about twice the price. And the Soundstrings are all made in the USA, as are the Kimbers.

I also noticed that the unshielded Gen IIs are quieter with blacker backgrounds than the older brew. You are likely to become more aware of system flaws, or, more pleasantly, of system strengths. Remember that whenever you lower the noise floor, which is a good thing and which the Gen IIs do, you may need to change your VTA or make other minor changes. I floated my amp grounds just to improve things a bit with the Gen IIs on board.

The balanced versus the single-ended wires provided little difference. I like balanced best for my number one far-field reference system, and single ended in my near-field system. The single-ended versions [unshielded] were very revealing and quiet, and almost as good as the balanced [shielded.] I can fully recommend both versions to suit your needs, depending on your system. You do not need to order extra length (for a change!), as these new Soundstrings are as flexible as noodles to manage, though not thin and fragile as some of their more flexible competitors.



### **The Power Cords Gen II**

The Gen II High-Output Power Cords are killer! The thinner Gen II Digital Power Cords do not perform as well as the big boys, even in low power applications. They sound less robust and detailed than the bigger, High-Output wires. I really like the High-Output power cords for all applications when you demand the best and wherever critically quiet, highly-detailed power cords are needed.

The Digital Power Cables may be all you need if you are running a personal listening station or a computer headphone setup. They are not as quiet as the larger power cords, though they are good, equally as musical with correct timbres, and more flexible. They also cost a good deal less than the big boys.

Just wait until you see the robust, gorgeous Furutech plugs on both versions of these Gen II Power Cords. This is great fit and finish, and a big improvement over the original Soundstrings. I am impressed. You plug these into your gear and the wall and forget about it.



I tried the High-Output Cords with both solid state and tube gear...both sounded right as rain. The Power Cords have the slightly lush house sound of the Soundstring Interconnects, and it is refreshing and involving. The High-Output Gen II is absolutely a candidate as a go-to power cord in any high-end installation.

### **Summary**

The never less than powerful and highly textured Soundstring Gen II Platinum Series Interconnects and High-Output Power Cords are new and solid choices for the audiophile searching both for high value and high performance in one package. The interconnects, both balanced and single-ended, perform convincingly, as if priced much higher than their near \$500 per meter price would ever indicate. With gorgeous timbres, bold

dynamics, and airy highs, you will not be disappointed. What a bargain!

The big boy High-Output Power Cord is near perfect, with quiet, powerful, nuanced performance. I love it. The smaller, low-output version is best when ultra-high performance is not a requirement, and you need to save the bucks.

The Soundstring Gen II Interconnects and Power Cords once again capture the attention of top audiophiles, and demonstrate superb American craftsmanship and design. Well done, Soundstring! **Robert H. Levi**

**"SE" Special Edition Gamma 4-12 High Out-put (cable rated for 30 Amps) Power Cords with Furutech 120V-15 Amp Male and IEC-C13 Female Plugs**

Retail: 3 feet - \$1135; 6 feet - \$1345; 8 feet - \$1490

Interconnect Cables (single ended with our patented "Ultra Low Mass" RCA plugs all ends):

**Beta 2-22NS (Non-shielded and single ended) pairs with RCA's:**

18 inch - \$470

3 feet - \$510

6 feet - \$570

10 feet - 690

**Beta 2-22S (Shielded and single ended) pairs with RCA's:**

18 inch - \$500

3 feet - \$540

6 feet - \$600

10 feet - 740

Interconnect Cables (shielded & balanced with Neutrik XLR's all ends):

**Beta 2-22S (shielded and balanced) pairs with XLR's:**

18 inch - \$410

3 feet - \$440

6 feet - \$500

10 feet - \$640

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