Fidelity

Scandinavian High-End Magazine

NOK 198

Fall 2017

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(PHOTO)

HIGH-END 2017:

DEATH TO BAD SOUND!

\*\*\* Cables for Magico

A few meters of cable?

During a test period, we used of our well known Respons cable to describe the sound of the Magico S3 Mk2 speaker. We’ve later had the opportunity to try several, more expensive, high quality cables to potentially find the finishing touch.

WRITER & PHOTOGRAPHER: KNUT VADSETH

During the approximately 4 weeks we tested Magico S-3 Mk.2, we experienced a considerable difference in the sound during the first couple of weeks, while the sound then “matured” at a somewhat slower pace.

3 months later, we still had access to the speaker, and a collective test panel could conclude, just as expected, that the speaker opened up further, especially the bass. But we found more significant differences by trying out other speaker cables!

We were still amazed by how well it sounded with the reasonable Response cables, but we had also gathered a bundle of cables, both old and new, which we had high expectations for.

All of them sounded clearly and unambiguously different on the ultra-dispersed S-3 Mk.2. But to conclude on which one is “best”, is somewhat more demanding. And remember that we’re not looking for the “best” cable, but the “best” for our current set up with Magico, Adyton and APL-rig. The point is, that the cable that works best in one set up, is not necessarily the best in another. The cable should be the finishing touch, the last adjustment to get the whole system to sound amazing…

TRANSPARENT AND VALHALLA

We don’t have all the answers, even with these restrictions, but we can at least reveal that we were amazed by how well a couple of ancient super cables still sounded. In “the old days”, we used either Nordost Valhalla or Transparent Reference as references. If the slim, but with high resolution Valhalla got too thin, all we had to do was connect to Transparent, which had much more “body” and foundation. Both were astoundingly good back then, with tremendous space and magnificent holography. And both were almost immorally expensive. Now, we retrieved these old and well used favorites again, brushed the dust off and repaired worn contacts with new WBT plugs in silver.

While I’ve had some reservations against Valhalla’s speaker cables throughout the years, I have experienced the balanced signal cables as both homogeneous, dispersed and pretty neutral. And it was just this that gave us a small shock when we tested the complete Doxa system. (See page ??) And it was this I used when I managed to tame the somewhat lively Transparent Reference speaker cable (Transparent + Valhalla = true) so the whole thing sounded shockingly well, but completely different from for example Jorma, also being pricey, but newer.

Anders and Jan were unfortunately not able to hear Transparent, but Trond has written an evaluation of this old favorite. Additionally, the Valhalla signal cable remained in the sound system during the entirety of this group test. The Valhalla speaker cable also turned out to be surprisingly good, even though the most recent model probably is even better.

However, second-hand can thus be an interesting alternative if you get the super cables affordable enough on Finn or Hi-Fi Sentralen. Our quote is based on a combination of the perceived sound along with a general assessment of today’s second-hand market where 20-30% of original price is normal.

BEST PURCHASE

But even at full original price, we find that Argento Serenity is an exceptionally good bargain if you already have joined the high-end wave. Everyone in the test panel feel that this is a remarkable allrounder which also is not too distinctive, so it will improve the sound in many different systems. We can’t do much about the fact that you get a couple or three meters for the same price as a good high-end amplifier. But, having said that, it can be worth it if you want the best sound possible.

But it is probably not twice as good as the remarkable cable from Respons. Not even that one…

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RESPONS (2x6 meters)

Price: NOK 18.000

Importer Andervik Audio

TARFALA VERTIGO (2x3m)

Price: NOK 31.250

Importer: Audioaktøren

Producer: Tarfala Audio, Sweden

NODOST VALHALLA (2x3 meters) (old version)

Price (used): NOK 35.000 (approx.)

ARGENTO SERENITY (2x3 meters)

Price: NOK 38.100

Importer: Norwegian Hi-Fi Center co/Audioaktøren

JORMA REFERENCE (5-6 years old- Biwiring)

Price (used): NOK 60.000 (approx).

Producer: Mårten Audio, Sweden

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**Photo: Expensive speaker cables is the snake in the HiFi paradise! According to many, Argento Serenity is also unreasonably expensive, but remarkable for Magico S-3 Mk.2.**

\*\*\* Cables for Magico

What does the test panel say?

**Jan Myrvold**

RESPONS

Delivers the music in a large, well defined and open sound panorama with exemplary holography. Clear, swift transients. As for the sound, pretty neutral, but will probably fit best with speakers that has more resonance and body. These cables does not manage to remove the indications of grinding in the presence area around the actual voices in Chesnokovs “Spasenyie Sodelal” either. But there is probably no other cable with reasonable quality that will do that, as this probably stems from the actual recording, Reference Recordings, none the less. Shows very steady pin-point placement of performers during Rutter’s “Lux Aeterna” from the same CD, where soprano Nancy Keith is actually standing five meters and sixty-two centimeters in front of the rest of Dallas Women’s Choir inside of the editor’s living room.

Probably feels a hint round and swelling on the bass string’s preliminary strokes in Joni Mitchell’s classic, but I would also here put most of the blame on the recording. Have, however, heard just this aspect a little tighter. Otherwise absolutely not much to point out regarding macro dynamics, something they demonstrate remarkably during “Moten Swing”.

TARFALA VERTIGO

Immediately feel that the space itself has been slightly contracted in comparison to Respons, especially in Chesnokov. Shows thereby a little more information on the Rutter-track, and gradually also on Jodi Mitchell’s. All in all slightly softer in the edges than Respons, while it fills the sound image with more body from the middle notes and downwards. Great macro dynamics here as well, in “Moten Swing”, but not as crisp and clear in the micro details as its more reasonable compatriot.

NORDOST VALHALLA MK.1

Airy, clean and clear like few, and conjures up a multitude of tiny details you usually rarely notice. Suddenly, Turtle Creek Chorale has been expanded with half a dozen voices, just like that! Impressive also with particularly focused placement of the different instruments in larger orchestra pieces. Everything in front of the evenings’ absolute clearest and darkest backdrop so far. The whole in a particularly homogeneous way, without any degree of accentuation anywhere on the frequency scale. Here, everything of piece and order is maintained. Really puts the cabinet in place so to speak with Joni Mitchell in the CD-drawer, while it also confirms that the slightly swelling and disorderly bass we heard earlier is in the recording itself. If there is any cable that could have created a miracle here, it’s probably Valhalla.

Fantastic dynamics and contrast to “Moten Swing”, with a wonderful, life- giving edge and rasp in the brass section and generally massive flick and drive in the middle bass. Even if this cable is getting on in years, it’s doing everything right in my ears.

ARGENTO SERENITY

Wonderful! Fantastic calmness and order in the sound image from the very beginning. Also excels with utmost clean details, without being sharp in any way. Great balance between resonance and clarity. The evening’s most “accurate” on Chesnokov, where the mentioned rasp in the overtone structure is less palpable than in the previous, without letting any of this diminish transparency or holography. Splendid depth, but possibly slightly less precise than Valhalla in regards to placement of the different performers. This being relatively insignificant, as the general feeling of stillness in the sound image is increasing. Maybe it also has the most distinct definition and articulation in the Joni Mitchell cut. Here, nothing is missing in general dynamics, and the music is flowing lightly, relaxed and at the same time very rhythmically. Briefly said, an astoundingly good speaker cable, with pronounced, organic sound. For undersigned, without much doubt the one that all in all seems like the most “proper” in this set up.

JORMA REFERENCE

Jorma opens the music in a large panorama saturated with a galaxy of details. Goes very tight on the different instruments and voices, with a very rich and defined sound palette. Very breezy and refreshing in the presence area without being aggressive in the ear. On the other hand, undeniably fuller and rounder downwards, which means that the preliminary bass sting strokes are woollier and less articulated both in “Moten Swing” and with Miss Mitchell. Otherwise, it generally plays with a lot of drama and exemplary macro dynamics. Very entertaining, but I would prefer Argento over this one in this set up. Though still a top-of-the-line cable. Unfortunately for a downright crazy price.

**Anders Rossnes**

RESPONS SPEAKER CABLES (2x6M):

The sound sits on the Magico’s, and seems now more relaxed and slightly fuller in the sound with the Respons Cable than I remembered. The sound image is big, open and breezy. And holography and three-dimensionality is by far approved. And with excellent attack and dynamics. The cable is still slightly bright on Magico, as it’s tailored for the dark sound of the Respons speaker. But honestly: There’s not much I really miss and I can’t find any actual flaws. Looking at the low price, this is a find for many, but to the Magico’s I would probably also have tried some more expensive stuff after investing so much money in the speakers.

TARFALA VERTIGO

This is also a Swedish cable, but very different than Respons. It’s also a little dark, but very articulated and defined with natural voices and a generally fabulous middle note, but drops a little in both of the frequency wings. May therefore be experienced as if it lacks a little air on top and punch in the deepest bass. But it is very comfortable to listen to. A very pleasant acquaintance with unusually homogeneous sound. And pretty reasonable compared to most.

NORDOST VALHALLA, MK.1

Here, the sound image opens up considerably, detailed and flattering with an enormous space which still emerges both in front and in the back of the speakers. But it is an amazingly defined and precise cable, and surprisingly good. This is an early version that hasn’t been in use for too long. But it also had a possible advantage since we utilized a balanced Valhalla signal cable in front? Still a big surprise! Very good!

ARGENTINO SERENITY

This cable was ready for a short test when the editor decided that we just as well could try it out along with the others on the Magico’s. The cable looked expensive, but it was claimed that is was reasonable compared to the new Transparent and Nordost Valhalla. Either way, in the course of a few seconds we perceived this cable to so far be the evening’s best. And that with an almost perfect balance between full sound and crisp details along with an enormous, but still clearly defined space. The reproduction can just be described as completely wonderful, and the depth perspective almost infinite. Also entirely superior in the bass. Here, there’s really body and gravity along with an exceptionally ingratiating sound of violin. And what a resolution: I really got startled when we turned on our usual Joni Mitchell disk and we for the first time could really hear her draw her breath through the complex orchestra intro before the intonation.

JORMA REFERENCE

This horribly expensive cable, also Swedish, was an important part of the Mårten Coltrane 2 set up that Fidelity utilized as reference speakers for several years. But we have never really done any test of the cable with other speakers. Now, we suddenly got the opportunity with our old bi-wire cable, but in mono configuration. And what a magnificent sound image; and with much more color and drama than any of the others! The middle note was still not perceived as crisp as with Argento. Some will still claim that Jorma sounds less “HiFi”, but at least as realistic as this one. And what a homogenous resolution through the whole, wide frequency range! Here, more details might me experienced than with the other cables.

**Trond Torgnesskar**

TRANSPARENT REFERENCE

(Not exactly newest edition)

Rich, broad-shouldered, relaxed, open and warm middle tone, direct and dynamic, even if it probably is quicker on the uptake than it seems initially. Generally has a warm streak, which makes the systemplay with a sort of inner calmness, without being behind. Very good at sound colors and instrumental character, majestical drive in the middle bass. Anything but anemic and mechanical, to put it that way. If it had a tad more resolution upwards and a little more definition in the deep bass, this would have been a solution easy to live with. But more grandiose as a whole than surgical precision.

TRAFALA VERTIGO

**The reference cable from the deep (?) Swedish woods**

Fluent, fine-grained, homogenous, detailed, the resound is very good, dynamic, natural. Immediately something very organic, accurate and naturally coherent. The first minutes, it probably doesn’t seem so remarkable, but then it emerges with brilliant timing, relaxed transparency, resolution, sound and natural totality.

Widescreen aplenty. A sleeper!

NORDOST “OLD SCHOOOL” VALHALLA

Open, fast, with visibility, transient focus, surgical precision when it comes to placement and outline. Fascinating enough, but gets slightly too slim here. Here, it’s more airiness and more carved out details than there’s resonant substance, and it seems faster and more explosive than each and all of the competitors in this specific set up. May function as a solid energy booster in set ups that needs it.

ARGENTO SERENITY

An absolutely remarkably elegant balance between the music’s natural warmth, speed, visibility, nature of space, acoustics, depth, placement and level of detail. Nothing sticks out, it sounds just impressively natural and astonishingly homogenous. Intensely luscious instrumental sound. Like Transparent, it’s probably more dynamic than it seems initially.

JORMA

Completely extreme space and perspective, deeper and livelier than I have heard in Knut’s living room before. Alarmingly organic and natural instrumental sound. Here, the musicians, instruments and notes breathes, vibrates and lives in a stronger sense than with the other cord stubs. They populate the room. The choir recording with Turtle Creek was unforgettable.

**What this cable liberates in this set up, God knows, but it works! It would be pathetic to talk about bass and treble. This really sounds “live”!**

**Conclusion Magico S-3 Mk2/cables:**

**Double check in the attic**

We have, in this informal “test” of various cables been very conscious of the fact that our experience with Magico and various cables specifically applies to our regular set up with Adyton, APL and also Magico (and with an older Valhalla balanced signal cable) and shouldn’t be taken out of this context.

BY **KNUT VADSETH**

It’s one of the problems with cables; sound wise, they don’t always respond as expected with other equipment in other settings. That’s why I chose some of the most interesting cables and listened to them in the movie-attic with the multiplayer from Electrocompaniet as signal source, Krell dac/pre, EC AW250 amplifier, Respons balanced signal cable and Respons Magna Musical speakers. As the acoustics influences the sound more than in the dining room and the equipment in addition is of the exact same standard as downstairs, I had expected certain difficulties differentiating between the cables. But the most important part was, after all, to see if the tendency was more or less the same. And it was, to the most astonishing extent!

Maybe with the exception of when the Swedish Tarfala Vertigo, that we in the dining room experienced as having a little timid treble, and that we assumed would get even a little darker and less distinct with the somewhat warmer sound from the combination AW 250 and Respons. Oddly enough, it didn’t, it sounded splendid, resolved and holographic also in the attic and seemed most of all like the sonorous and homogenous sound we experienced downstairs with the expensive Jorma cables.

VALHALLA, ANCIENT MODEL

Another cable that amazed a bit, was Nordost Valhalla, which just as expected functioned particularly well with lots of details compared to the somewhat more closed acoustics in the attic, but which - despite some additional assistance from the rich sound in the Responses - almost in the same extent as downstairs - lacked a tad “gravity” in the area of the fundamental notes. But gee, what a bargain if you get this used and cheap. It is without a doubt even better in version Mk.2, but then for a price well over NOK 100.000.

That the Respons cables sounded great, was also expected, as they are developed exactly for this speaker. But the sound characteristics, the dynamics and the three-dimensionality was either way astoundingly similar to what we had heard downstairs, especially in regards to all the other aspects influencing the entirety of the sound. If you either way need cables with the length of 3-4 meters or more, this cable with its consistent 6 meters is probably one of the most affordable “high-end” purchases you can make.

But our favorite cable in the dining room, Argento Serenity, (only Trond felt that Jorma was remarkably better), also broke through in the attic with exactly the same great characteristics we also experienced down there! Never before have we experienced sound as good as this in the attic! And it was the biggest improvement since we changed multiplayer from Oppo to EC.

**Then, we shall put a fly in the ointment by reminding of the fact that the relatively “reasonable” high-end cable stub still costs more than Oppo and the EC multiplayer put together…**