

# audioquest

## Sky interconnects

as reviewed by George Papadimitriou



### GEORGE PAPADIMITRIOU'S SYSTEM

#### LOUDSPEAKERS

Green Mountain Audio Continuum 2i speakers, upgraded with Continuum 3 drivers and a Continuum 3 custom outboard crossover designed and built by Roy Johnson of GMA, Cardas Litz copper hook-up wire is used in the crossover and to the drivers, Cardas un-plated copper binding posts. Energy 22 Reference Connoisseur speakers with the piano black finish, the crossover has been upgraded with better parts and also the part of the crossover which boosted the high frequencies has been removed, thus resulting in a more balanced and even tonal balance.

#### ELECTRONICS

Jeff Rowland Synergy Ili line stage, Jeff Rowland Cadence

### A World Class Silver Interconnect

Silver cables ...I don't know what your experience is with silver cables, but I can tell you mine. Up to the point that I heard the AudioQuest Sky interconnect, I was definitely not impressed with previous silver cables in my system. Yes, there were definitely many positives: in general, silver cables have a clarity, a transparency, and a clearer view of the music. Micro-details are a lot easier to hear, and the sound is very open, spacious, and airy. On the negative side, all previous silver cables that I have heard had a mild to significant spotlighting of the upper midrange and high frequencies; this sounded like a resonance or ringing in the actual wire itself—or in the geometry of the cables. In addition, even though the sound was very clear and transparent, there was a slight yet noticeable graininess and harshness. They were also very weak and lean in the bass range. This left me very frustrated with silver cables because I could hear the potential of these silver cables—namely clarity, transparency and openness—yet, in my opinion the price to be paid for all the negative aspects was too great.. For this reason, I have exclusively preferred copper cables ...that is, up to the AudioQuest Sky interconnect—a silver conductor cable.

The AudioQuest Sky interconnect is the first silver cable which has tipped the balance. It is the first interconnect that minimizes the negatives to such a degree that the positive attributes of the silver conductors can be heard and appreciated.

phono stage, Counterpoint Solid 2A, a 200 wpc solid state power amplifier.

#### SOURCES

Analogue: Sota Sapphire turntable upgraded with Cardas Litz copper cable for the AC power wiring, zirconium ball bearing, "straight-through" bolting of the tone arm mounting board and a threaded record spindle to accommodate a screw type Oracle record clamp. Fidelity Research FR-64s tone arm internally wired with 33 gauge Cardas Litz copper tone arm wiring. Benz Micro H2 wood bodied MC cartridge. Magnum Dynalab MD-108t tuner, the new tuner with the all tube output stage.

Digital: Audio Electronics CD-1 CD player (a division of Cary), the audio signal wiring was changed to Cardas 2x21 gauge shielded cable and the output RCA's were upgraded to Vampire Wire/Sound Connections direct gold plated copper jacks, using NOS 12AU7 tubes, Marigo Tuning Dots.

#### HEADPHONES

Sennheiser HD 580 Jubilee headphones.

#### CABLES

Cardas Golden Cross phone cable, Cardas Custom Litz copper wire interconnects with Xhadow connectors, Vampire Custom Continuous Cast Copper wire interconnects with Xhadow connectors, Jena Labs Custom wire interconnects with Xhadow connectors, Cardas Custom Litz wire speaker cables, Cardas Golden Power Cords, Foundation Research LC-2 power cords. These cords have a power conditioner built in.

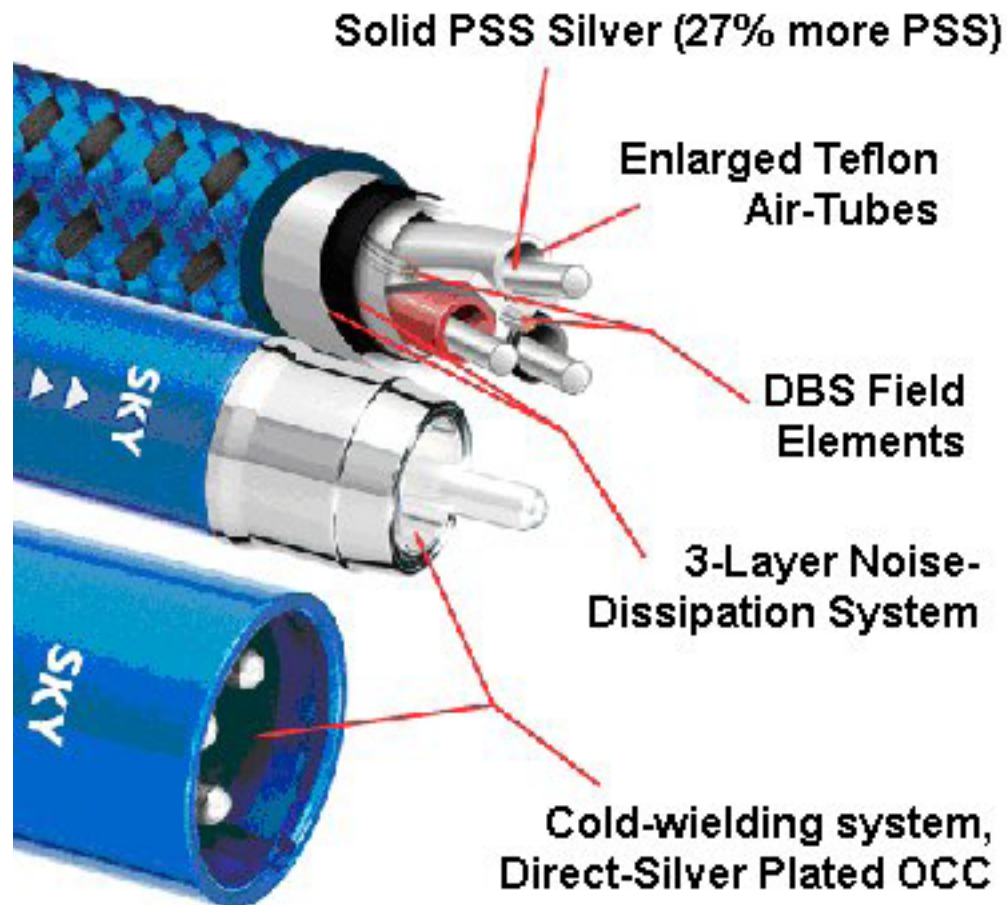
#### ACCESSORIES

Custom made hardwood equipment rack, home made capacitor plug-into-the-wall power filters, Nagaoka Kilo-volt No. 103 static discharge device for records, Last cleaning products, dedicated AC lines to the audio system exclusively with Hubbell Hospital Grade receptacles as well as Jena Labs cryogenically treated Maringo receptacles.

## Design and Technical Construction

The Sky interconnects uses solid silver conductors. AudioQuest calls these "Perfect Surface Silver" or PSS for short. There are three PSS 20-gauge solid core wires in the Sky interconnect. If the interconnect is used in the XLR balanced configuration, the three conductors correlate to the three pins of the XLR plug. In the RCA/single-ended format, the third conductor is connected to ground at both ends of the cable. Therefore, you have a single 20-gauge solid silver wire for the positive, and two 20-gauge solid core wires for the negative. This is what AudioQuest calls "triple balanced". The Teflon™ insulation is larger in internal diameter than the 20 gauge wires, meaning that most of the "insulation" around the silver wires is air—this significantly minimizes the time-smearing characteristics of the dielectric.

A Patented Dielectric-Bias System (DBS) is used in the Sky interconnect, as well as in all the upper models in AudioQuest's interconnect and speaker line. This system statically connects a 72-volt battery pack to the cable to bias the dielectric within the interconnect. There are two small wires inside the interconnect: a centre wire connects to the positive side of the battery and a second wire, located right next to the shield, is connected to the negative terminal of the battery. The two wires are not connected to each other, so therefore no current flows within the DBS circuit. The battery lasts as long as a battery normally lasts on the shelf. The cable is also fully shielded with a 22-gauge solid silver-plated drain wire which connects to the negative



Another impressive feature of the Sky interconnect is the quality of their termination. The plugs are made from Ohno Continuous Cast Copper (OCC). The Ohno Continuous Cast process yields some of the best and highest purity wires and connectors. The connection of the PSS conductors is not soldered onto the plugs as the majority of the cable manufacturers do, but the wires are cold-welded to the OCC plugs. There is no heat applied to either the conductor or the plug. The cold welding procedure is a type of crimping or clamping of the conductor to the plug.

This is a very well thought out interconnect: the Sky uses some of the best, if not the best wire, connectors, and geometry on the face of the planet. And even though the Sky interconnect is not an inexpensive piece of cable, you definitely get excellent value for your money. In comparison to other \$6000 to \$9000 interconnects from other manufacturers, based on all the above and how they sound, the price of the Sky interconnect is an absolute bargain.

### **But, How Does It Sound?**

There were several things that I noticed right at the start.

Firstly, the sound through this interconnect was very clear, very articulate, open and airy. Yet at the same time, it was smooth, stress-free, and easy to listen to - there is no listening fatigue with this interconnect. It is extremely rare in any audio component, much less an interconnect, that you have BOTH clarity, openness and articulation, and at the same time, have smoothness, liquidity, and an ease to the music.

The second thing I became aware of is “strand interaction” in other cables. Strand interaction occurs when the music traveling along the conductor goes from one individual un-insulated strand and crosses over to the next. Most cables have un-insulated multi-strand construction. When I first heard the solid core construction of the Sky interconnect, the strand interaction of other cables was clearly evident, and once heard, it was extremely difficult to go back to such a cable. Strand interaction causes a fuzziness of the sound stage, a lack of clarity, and a confusion within the interpretation of the music, as well as creating a slight harshness, brittleness, and phasiness of the music as well.

The third thing is that with the Sky, the break-in time was virtually non-existent. I am not saying that there was no break-in time, but it was very, very short ...less than 25 to 50 hours. Because of the DBS system, you can immediately enjoy 95-98% of the sound of this interconnect right off the bat.

This was also the first silver cable that I could listen to for hours and days with absolutely no strain, harshness or glare that is so common in most of the silver cables that I have heard. One interesting, and yet unexpected benefit of the Sky interconnect, is that the individual drivers of my speakers were much better integrated. They acted more as a whole than previously experienced with any other interconnect in my system. Both the Vandersteen 3A Signature speakers, which I am reviewing, as well as the Green Mountain Audio Continuum 2i speakers which I own, are time and phase coherent. On time and phase coherent speakers it is very easy to hear the increased cohesiveness of the drivers, as well as the better integration of the music within the entire frequency range.

The Sky interconnect has very good sub-bass—a first with silver cables in my experience. Although the sub-bass region is not quite as good as the Purest Audio Design Anniversary Aqueous cable - which is state of the art in this region - it is nevertheless very good being THE best silver cable I have heard in the sub-bass region. The Sky interconnect also has an excellent mid-bass presentation. The kick drum in “Hotel California” on the Eagles’ Hell Freezes Over CD was quick, tight, and punchy. The perfect surface copper conductor Audioquest “Panther” interconnect, which I also had on hand, has a slightly punchier sound with a little more impact in this region. Which sound is correct will greatly depend on your personal preferences, and even more importantly, the sound of your associated equipment.

In the mid to high frequencies, the Sky is the first silver cable that I can listen to that does not have the spot lighting and glare resonances ...in my experience this is a major accomplishment. The high frequencies were very open, very airy, and extremely extended, and YET, at the same time, sweet, effortless, and as smooth as a baby’s bottom. The high frequencies of the Sky are much airier than the copper “Panther” version. The high frequencies, even though they have great air, extension, and articulation, have no stress at all. The whole presentation is vivid and brilliant in the best sense of these words ...with absolutely no irritating detail-itis.

This Sky also has great detail and quickness—without the detail “jumping out” at you. Again it is more open than the PSC copper “Panther” version. The Sky also has greater attack and

excellent decay characteristics. You can very easily hear the reflections off the back and side walls of a recording space. With first-order cross-over network speakers like the Vandersteen 3A Signatures and the Green Mountain Audio Continuum 2i's, the attack and decays are absolutely exquisite. They are a joy to listen to in any recording.

Another characteristic of the Sky is that the cable is absolutely dead quiet. Because of this very low noise floor, the cable allows greater resolution to come through your system without any etch, highlighting, or "detail for detail's sake". It is absolutely amazing to me how this cable allowed for the finer musical nuances and the articulation of the musicians to pass through without a hint of stress or strain whatsoever. All the while with a sweetness, smoothness, and total relaxed ease. By far the best I have heard in this arena.

The soundstage with this cable is extremely open, spacious, and airy. There is excellent air as well as space around each of the instruments in a band or an orchestra. At the same time, all the musicians play cohesively like a "very tight" band. This is especially so with time and phase coherent loudspeakers; the imaging and the sound stage are virtually faultless. There is more depth, more width, and even greater height to virtually all my recordings. The imaging is very clear and precise; as if "the band is in the room". There is great clarity to the music with no opaqueness or fuzziness—which is typical for most non-insulated stranded cables. The soundstage is more three dimensional and holographic in nature ...truly, a delight to listen to. It is so easy to over-listen late at night through this cable and deprive yourself of sleep for the next day. I should know; I've done it very, very often.

### **Summary**

Overall, this is one very impressive interconnect. It is thus far the only interconnect I have heard that has clarity, articulation, transparency and airiness, and at the same time combines this with smoothness, sweetness, liquidity, and an effortlessness that allows one to listen right into the soul of the music.

There are some cables out there that do some things better than the Sky interconnect. For example, the Purest Audio Design Anniversary Aqueous interconnect has a better sub and mid-bass. Overall, however, this is the best combination of positive features put into ONE CABLE that I have heard, period.

I have bought, at my own expense, four sets of Audioquest Sky interconnects to be used in my own system. That, my friends, says more than anything else in this review. I am reminded of how lucky and happy I am to have purchased them at least once every time I listen to music through them. If you are looking for an interconnect in this price range, you would literally be a fool not to listen to the Audioquest Sky interconnect. That is how good it is. No question ...truly a World-Class interconnect ...period. **George Papadimitriou**

### **Sky Interconnect**

Retail: 1 meter pair US\$2500, 2 meter pair US\$3900

### **Audioquest**

2621 White Road Irvine, Ca 92614

TEL: 949. 585. 011

email address: [info@audioquest.com](mailto:info@audioquest.com)

web address: [www.audioquest.com](http://www.audioquest.com)