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Music Interface Technologies MI-330 Proline Shotgun Interconnects and MH-750 Shotgun Speaker Cables

by Jon Gale

Give a man enough cable….

In the world of high-end audio, one class of products stands alone in making the critical review process seemingly fruitless. An editor merely mentioning the word "cables" can strike fear and loathing in the heart of a reviewer. Why? Assigned the Herculean task of transferring the audio signal throughout a component-based system, cables lay at the heart of system interaction, symmetry and balance.

MI-330 Proline Shotgun Interconnect

MH-750 Shotgun Speaker Cable

In loudspeaker design, the one unknown variable the designer is given is the environment in which the speakers will be placed. (For the sake of this discussion, I'm leaving out the driving amplifier, as the designer can make strong suggestions as to the power/current requirements.) Even with this variable he can make certain placement and square-footage guidelines. But pity the cable designer. He has no say whatsoever in the components his product is connecting. His design will live and die by system distortions, impedance matching, ground loops, RFI, EMI. And pity the audiophile who, lacking an EE degree, is reliant on (hopefully) knowledgeable dealers, dubious "scientific" claims in advertisements, and of course the ever-present internecine warfare of competing manufacturers. Pity also the poor sap who volunteers to venture into the wonderful world of wire reviewing.

Given my preamble, there is no way the purchaser of a cable can receive anything other than a general idea of a cable's intrinsic sonic contribution to his system from a review. No way. In this context, I thought it would be very interesting to evaluate MIT's new offerings in an already tuned/balanced system wired with the company's previous generation of cable, namely my system. Hopefully this approach should afford a glimpse at the evolutionary progress of the new designs.

What it is…

I discussed my system with the ever-affable Joe Abrams (Equus Audio, marketing/consulting agency for MIT), and we decided upon the MI-330 Proline Shotgun (medium impedance) balanced interconnect. (one-meter and 25' lengths). The speaker cable chosen was the MIT MH-750 Shotgun.

What it was…

As stated, my system is presently connected with the previous generation of MIT cables. This includes an up-to-date digital cable (MIT Digital Reference), one-meter of MIT 330 Terminator interconnect (DAC to preamp), a 22' run of MIT CVO interconnect (preamp to amp). Speaker cables are the MIT 750 bi-wire. Not part of this formal review, but highly recommended, is the MIT Series II power cord (used on my DAC), a power cord that seems to love to be hooked to anything digital.

What it shall be…

MIT's latest development is in addressing component interaction, referred to as Input Specific Networks, ISN (interconnect), or Output Matched Interfaces, (speaker cable). This technology is aimed at removing the guesswork of component interaction. MIT feels that the load presented by a component in the signal path dramatically affects how the signal behaves within the cable. To quote from the design brief: "A component's input impedance has a great effect on the sonic signature of the cable. MIT's Input Specific Networks are designed to the component's input impedance to optimize the signal for that component. This allows the component to perform to its maximum potential."

Review Summary

Sound
"Newfound edge definition and low-level detail" along with a "surprisingly forgiving" tonal balance; bass is "more delineated and much more full" too.

Features
Matched closely to the electrical properties of the components with which they will be used; Iconn system of screw-on connectors for the speaker-cable ends.

Use
Remember to account for the interface boxes on each cable.

Value
They're expensive, so Jon "can only leave it to individual readers to evaluate the worth of these cables."

In choosing the proper interconnect, simply note the input impedance of your specific component and choose the proper value. The cables are designed for three main impedance ranges: low (10k to 47k), for super fast solid state amps and preamps like Spectral; medium, (47k-100k) for most other solid-state and certain tube components; and high (100k-200k), for most tube components.

The Output Matched Interfaces (speaker cables) are a bit simpler to choose. There are two versions addressing either solid-state (MH-750 Shotgun) or tube (MH-750 Shotgun Tube) equipment. Both are available in bi-wired versions.

Aesthetically, MIT has done a commendable job of improving the appearance of these products. The interconnects are now finished in a handsome glossy black weave with the interface boxes also finished in black. The speaker cable is now a neutral gray that should blend in to the background of most décors.

New and worthy of special mention is the Iconn connector system for the speaker cable. The Iconn is a system of screw-on connectors for the cable ends. You simply thread on the connector you need (bananas or two sizes of spades) for the given component. And a beautiful system it is. The cable is actually terminated with a nicely finished threaded rod. The chosen connector has the corresponding tapped hole on the back end. I was a bit apprehensive about delivery of current after first reading the literature, but this proved pointless. There is very little "slop" in the threads (this must be a very nice die set), meaning that even if the threads only touch on one side of the "V," contact area is actually increased! The only caveat is that specifically for the speaker end you should twist the cable one revolution opposite the thread direction, so as the cable hangs, the tension will eliminate any tendency to loosen. In my opinion, the Iconn system should be made available to other cable manufacturers immediately. Very well done gentlemen!

One last note on the speaker cable. Someone in the MIT organization had a "why hasn't this been done before" idea. Two of the four bi-wire leads are longer than the others. Not only does this make hook-up far easier, the assembly (remember, we have a box on the end) hangs much straighter from the speaker. Give this guy an "atta boy" just from me.

Hanging myself…

If you are fortunate enough to have the resources to rewire you entire system with these MIT products, prepare yourself for nothing less than a paradigm shift in your perception of cables' contribution to the sound produced. After swapping cables, you usually notice a dramatic increase in transient definition, especially with the interconnects. Indeed, any struck or plucked instrument has a dramatic gain in realism with the way these cables handle the leading edge of a transient.

This definition is literally only half of the story, however. A transient is not defined solely by its rise time. Cable reflections, noise floor and frequency balance also play a part in the total transient energy. (A designer could easily increase the perception of transient fidelity by arranging a "spiked" frequency response.) The poor stepchild to the leading edge is the back half, or decay, of a transient. It is in just this area that MIT has dramatically upped the resolution ante. I believe there is so much more musically meaningful information held in the decay of a transient. With more manufacturers addressing this, the term "microdynamics" has come into common use. These cables handle this aspect of the signal so well, my listening room is now flooded with delicate low-level information.

Imagine a single note played on a piano. The initial transient seems to launch and define the space it is in. With the MIT cables, this spatial definition is retained well into the delicate decay of the note. When the pedal is lifted, you are sometimes startled by the abruptness. This total package of transient delivery is, in my opinion, responsible for the wonderfully lifelike imaging characteristics attributed to MIT products. Voice is particularly well served with these cables. With many close-miked recordings, I sat mesmerized many a night being able to differentiate clearly between a dead vocal booth (in which a singer is placed) with artificial reverb, or natural studio ambiance. Even more notable is the perception of not just chest resonance, but the very subtle low-level sounds of the oral cavity, (lip pops, tongue clicks, teeth chatter, etc.). While all this may sound like audiophilic minutia, you must remember that it is in this wonderful portrayal of low-level definition in which the music lies. This aspect of these cables' performance alone will have you nursing rug burns on your chin for many months.

Considering the newfound edge definition and low-level detail,the frequency balance of these cables is surprisingly forgiving. I continue to be perplexed at the dichotomy of the tremendous detail retrieval alongside such a relaxed presentation. Orchestral string tone is beautifully rendered, never seeming to highlight the strings or brasses over the rest of the orchestra. Noteworthy too is, once again, the relaxed presentation when the strings really dig in, never sounding in your face, but portrayed with all the bite and sheen of real life. The bass section seems to lose a rubbery texture, clearly delineating the vibrating strings activating huge wooden cavities. Lovers of popular music are certainly not left out in this performance increase. Overprocessed vocals seem to have at least half of the noxious layer of ice and grain removed. Well-recorded drum kits can be spectacular. The concussive impact melded with, and never apart from, a beautiful decay increases the drive and pace of most popular music.

This same two-handed juggling act extends well in to the bass frequencies. Bass information is tighter and "rounder" at the same time -- more delineated and much more full. It's definitely portrayed with more impact but with far less overhang. This delineation increases the realism of the recorded soundspace, notably in orchestral works. One area where home playback is decidedly inferior to live music is in the presentation of bass. In a concert hall, bass is a massive wave that travels past you. In the home, however, below room modes, it builds as pressure. These MIT components seem to give a glimpse, just a glimpse, of the wave traversing the hall. Once again, I believe this can be traced to the cables' handling of low-level detail.

Using MIT products has caused me to re-evaluate some opinions concerning soundstaging. If you think about it, this realization has been under our noses all along. I'm speaking of the contribution that proper decoding of transient/low-level information has in the re-creation of the soundstage. Over and above microphone directional patterns, speaker-radiation patterns/time alignment, it is just these transient/decay queues that define aural space. If a component can't retain this very delicate information (specifically the decay), it will never get the soundspace correct. What these cables do more than anything else is get this factor correct. The transient, where the majority of the directional queues lie, and the decay, which defines the "acoustical mapping" of the recorded environment, are played back with seemingly all of this delicate signal retained. I would like to stress that I'm not speaking in subtleties here, as most cable substitutions are measured in degrees of change. This is of the no-brainer, oh-my-goodness variety.

Associated Equipment

Loudspeakers
Vandersteen 3a Signature, Vandersteen 2W-Q subwoofer.

Amplifier
Bryston 4B-ST.

Preamplifier
Balanced Audio Technology VK-3i.

Digital
Enlightened Audio Designs T-1000 transport, Camelot Technologies Dragon Pro-2 Mk. I digital processor, Theta DS Pro Gen. III DAC.

Interconnects
MIT MI-330 Proline Terminator, MIT MH-330+, Kimber KCAG, van den Hul The First.

Speaker cables
MIT MH-750, MIT-MH 750 Plus.

Power cords
MIT-Z Cord II, Custom "Andy Man" AC cables.

Power conditioner
Audio Power Industries Power Wedge 114.

Room treatments
ASC Tower Stouts, Super Traps, Tube Traps, and Flat Traps.

Back in review context now (the comparison of the new models to my reference), I was expecting the change to be just a matter of degree. Indeed, in regard to the interconnect, this is what was observed: more of the venerable MIT performance generally refined. If you already have the earlier version of the interconnects, I'm not so sure an upgrade would be worthwhile (although you could inquire as to any trade-in policy).

The MIT 750 Shotgun speaker cable is another story entirely though. To my ears, they seemed to distill all the MIT traits and kick them up a notch. Specifically in the area of soundstaging, these cables laid waste to my reference (earlier) version of this cable. Edge definition, image depth and, more importantly, a general "evening" of lateral spread found me sitting in silence after the close of a piece many a night. If you already own MIT speaker cable, or don't, consider an audition mandatory.

In regard to system synergy, I've been rather lucky. The limited electronics I've had connected with MIT ranged from preamps (BAT VK-3i, B&K Sonata), amps (McCormack DNA-1, BAT VK-200, and my reference Bryston 4B-ST), speakers (Audio Concepts Sapphire IIti, Coincident Technology Triumph, Alón 4, Von Schweikert 4.5 Gen. II, Nova Applause, and Vandersteen 3a Signature). All electronics seemed to mate very well indeed. The Nova Applause and Von Schweikert 4.5 were not particularly well served with the MIT, and this should not be read as an indictment for any of the mentioned products considering the lack of interface standards. The Vandersteens did exhibit a better mating with the older MIT 750 speaker cable though, which has me scratching my head.

Conclusion

While I can unhesitatingly recommend these cables, even I gasp at the prices being asked for top-flight cables nowadays. I can only leave it to individual readers to evaluate the worth of these cables. I can say this: I purchased my reference cables at consumer prices a few years ago, gradually adding to the rest of my system. A system synergistically wired with MIT delivers a wonderfully natural, unforced presentation of musical realism. When you audition a set, throw away any preconceptions and your audiophile check list, and discover music again. Isn't that is what it's all about anyway?

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Music Interface Technologies MI-330 Proline Shotgun Interconnects and MH-750 Shotgun Speaker Cables
Prices: MI-330 Shotgun interconnect, $699 USD per one-meter pair;
MH-750 Shotgun bi-wire speaker cables, $1199 per 8' pair.
Warranty: One year.

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