

Gadgets, Gizmos & Goodies

CrystalSpeak Micro w/splitters (2 metre/semi-biwire) Speaker Cables
Sugg. Retail: \$2512.00 pr

CrystalConnect Micro Interconnect
Sugg. Retail: \$738.00 1 metre Pr

Distributor: Audio Basics,
3800 Steeles Ave. West, Ste 100E,
Vaughan ON L4L 4G9
(877) 92AUDIO (905) 303-9232
www.audiobasics.com
www.crystalcable.com



These very impressive, if tiny, cables are said in their literature to be the result of "advanced metallurgy perfected at famous German and Dutch laboratories" using "ultra-thin silver conductors with gold infusions to fill molecular gaps". Both interconnect and speaker types are coaxial designs, with compact RCA, XLR, and spade proprietary ends, with *WBT* locking bananas on the speaker ends of the speaker cables, on which this review will primarily focus.

As we begin a series of speaker cable reviews (long in the works, but always put aside by other more pressing concerns), I've put together a simple setup with our reference *Bryston 3B SST* and a pair of the excellent recently reviewed *Paradigm Reference Studio 20, Version V.4*, which allow easy bi-wiring with their excellent robust universal binding posts. In fact, I set them up last night (as I write) in place of the *Energy Veritas v1.8s*, which are trickier because of their tri-wire configuration, and then got up this morning and transferred an off-air concert from 15-IPS *Nagra IV-S* before I realized I was listening to these instead of the *Veritas* through the *Micro* cables. This underlines that the *20s* are very good compact monitors indeed, then, of course, enhanced by the addition of subwoofers and surround channels (These latter will not be employed in the listening tests of speaker cables, I hasten to add, the focus being on the cables at hand between this amp and speaker combination). But the new speaker cables here also more than held their own in if not a *blind*, certainly an *unknowing* test.

As an aside, whoever chooses to argue with the choice of speakers should understand that such a choice is not just a matter of excellent quality, but also compatibility with a broad range of cables, rather than a transducer having characteristics which might favour some over others. We will not decide here the question of whether any cables will be better suited to this or that speaker, but how they sound with a quite normal load in terms of impedance, capacitance, and inductance.

Well, as I've already noted, the *CrystalSpeak Micro* pair were sufficiently transparent acoustically for me not to notice them in place of the *Veritas*, but there's more to the story. Also removed from this audio chain were *Kimber Select 3035* (also silver, on tweeter) and the top grade of *Kimber BiFocal* (on midrange and bass). We were now going from what amounts to multi-thousand-dollar tri-wire (never mind the speaker swap!) to hearing the *Crystal* in what amounts

to a quasi-biwire configuration. What does *this* mean?

In a true biwire setup, the cables are split at the source end, this making the potential interaction path from woofer to tweeter as long as possible; this resistively minimizes woofer energy being fed back into the tweeter after they have been separated in the crossover all the way through the separate binding posts. So, in a sense, the *Crystal* bi-cables cannot offer that 2-metre isolation, being only a few inches near these speaker binding posts. They were designed more for convenience with bi-wire-posted speakers, and, of course, to

eliminate extra jumpers, making the signal path all *CrystalSpeak*, so to *speak*.

None the less, these cables delivered a level of audio resolution and dynamics that was very impressive. After transferring to CD the excellent sounding *In Performance* concert of 3 Harps, and jazz ensemble (very interesting music and superb FM sound from *CBC Radio 2*, but that's another story for another time), I put on a 96K DAT master of Ray Montford's guitar playing with just the *3B SST/CrystalSpeak/Studio 20* combination, and was again impressed, this time by more than just how little was lost in the elimination of all the other sonic elements.

Continued listening confirmed the excellence of these speaker cables, and I definitely did not feel deprived of the full biwire *Monty*. If you did want that capability, it can be done, but at quite a cost for the full double 2-metre run, or whatever your speaker/amplifier configuration requires. An additional biwire metre is almost \$800pr. So this cable is not inexpensive in any configuration, but I do feel it justifies its cost in superbly detailed, dynamic, and nuanced sound. They should work very well with high resolution tube or transistor amplifiers, brands that come to mind being *Audio Research* tubes or *Rowland Research* solid state, especially their new digital amps (review forthcoming at www.audio-ideas.com).

I listened to the *CrystalConnect Micro* interconnect between my *Fostex Model 20* professional recorder (the only one with RCA outputs, the *Nagra* and *Stellavox* using their own special Tuchels), and again started with some broadcast jazz featuring former recording colleague, pianist Miles Black (Chuck Israels Trio) in a recent *CBC Radio 2* studio session for the now-ended **Jazz Beat** series.

Again, *Crystal* seems an apt name for these cables, the sound very much what I've come to expect from my *Kimber Select* silver interconnects. The clarity was definitely there, revealing the extremely slight flutter of the *Fostex* (which is why I use it primarily for voicetracks), as well as its other good qualities of low noise and very clean sound. Unlike the *Select*, the *CrystalConnect Micro* is a coaxial design, so should have better isolation from hum, and none was heard while it was arrayed through a cluster of other signal-connecting, and AC and DC power cables in my studio. I could certainly live with these *Crystals*, too.

Both of these *Crystal* cables from Europe offer a very high level of audio performance in all respects, and come highly recommended, even at their premium prices.

Andrew Marshall, editor, Audio Ideas Guide
www.audio-ideas.com

