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More trade with Sweden

By Vidar Mørch, *Fidelity*, Vol.6, No.1-2004, pp. 26-27

No later did I repress the fact that I bought and reported about some absolutely splendid and cheap power cables from “the other side of the border” than I end up reporting about some more cables from the same source—this time outrageously expensive! I truly do not know what has happened to my integrity concerning cables and my demand for sensible pricing, but in any case I have again been caught by acute border trade fever. This time I had to dig deep into my wallet, but in return it warmed the heart of a music lover. My trustworthiness as a critic of Norwegian’s border trade with Sweden is damaged forever.

Jorma Koski, a member of the gradually increasing group of super enthusiasts, has devoted a lot of time to find the materials, components, and geometry that have the least damaging effect on the connection between our hi-fi components. The one-man enterprise Jorma Design is about to earn an international reputation as a producer of cables of extremely high quality. People who know his products mention them together with the expensive models by Transparent and Nordost.

I have always been critical of cables costing several hundreds of dollars per meter, and I’ve also been talking to a lot of small producers claiming they have found the source of eternal happiness with their miracle cables. Hence I was very sceptical prior to this test, in spite of my positive experience with the reasonable JPC 2.5 power cables from Jorma Design.

The fact that I am quite sceptical towards all sorts of “snake-oil” products in connection with hi-fi didn’t make my attitude more positive, as Jorma promotes Shakti Stones, Bullet Plugs, and Bybee Quantum Purifiers, to mention a few. The latter is a ridiculously expensive little lump, developed by the quantum physicist Jack Bybee to passively filter out noise without affecting the signal negatively. More about these at <http://www.bybeetech.com>, even if nothing about the material or technology behind them is revealed. Secret recipes for one voodoo phenomenon or the other are something hi-fi enthusiasts are used to, but without doubt some of them work. The reason for mentioning Bybee in particular is that these filters are mounted into the No. 1 cable, and are not an unessential part of the cost. The No. 2 cables are the same, though without the Bybee filters, but unfortunately I wasn’t been able to include them in the test. Sceptics are recommended to test both cables before any purchase.

Technophilia

Okay, now we’re getting to a part where the especially interested are becoming few in number, but here is a short description of what I have found out about the cable construction. The conductor is made of very pure copper, delivered from a European specialist producer at order from the designer. The cable is built up of 1-mm² conductors, which are built up by 126 0.1-mm² wires. A 3-metre bi-wiring set consists of 60 metres of conductor. The conductors are wound around a core made of thin Teflon threads. The geometry is carefully calculated to avoid skin effects, and to get all the frequencies in the signal to choose the same path through the conductors. In theory, all signals will be delivered to their goal at the same time. The purest form of Teflon insulation without any colour additives is used on the outside.

Jorma is very reluctant to use PVC, and therefore the tube containing the Bybee filter is made of PVC-free plastic, which also happens to be crush-proof. The plaited outer coating is also PVC and halogen free. A tightly plaited copper shield lies between the outer coating and

the conductors, which is not only for preventing noise and interference, but also as a stabiliser against micro phonics.

The speaker cables are terminated by high-quality WBT spades and the signal cables are fitted with either Neutrik (XLR) or the expensive but brilliant *Silver Bullet Plugs (RCA).

**** (The RCA connectors are from 2004 changed to the expensive and outstanding connectors WBT-0110 AG nextgen silver Signature)***

Customs

As Norway has declared that it will be a part of the rest of the world (read: outside the EU), it isn't easy to bring the cables home. This goes for our geographically closest neighbour, too. Either you have to take the postal processing into account to pay the Norwegian VAT, or you can cross the border yourself and use your imagination. If you drive through the red zone—which you should—count on funny looks from customs officers, more used to checking beer and ham, when you explain that the stumps of cable with an engraved brass plate and a complimentary black plastic box are more expensive than your car parked just outside.

Regardless of this, it is worthwhile to bring the cables home and experience the same results that I did. I have to mention that you must arm yourself with a lot of patience when breaking them in. It takes a looong time for the cables to sound as they should. I have never experienced a cable that sounds that much worse before playing them for a while. By the way, that goes for taking them out of the system as well - count on some 15 minutes before they sound good. A/B testing is virtually impossible with these cables, as they sound worse at first than all the other cables I had at hand.

This phenomenon might be related first and foremost to the Bybee filters. It is so bad that when I had my CD player disconnected and trimmed at Base Technology, I thought something was totally wrong with the player when I connected it to the system. It sounded like the Audio Physic Avanti had been replaced by little plywood shoeboxes made in some low cost countries! But then...!

Time to play

Jorma Design often cooperates with Måten Design, Bladelius/Advantage, and lately with exhibitors like EAR (Tim de Paravicini) at international trade fairs. All have in common that they are designs and designers that principally focus on playing the music. They all have their ears as primary catalysts, and focus on natural reproduction before measurable performance—although none of them lack in technical knowledge.

When you connect the Jorma Design cables, it is natural to see them connected to gear made by the abovementioned producers. The first thing that struck me was that the sound was unusually homogeneous, seamless from top to bottom! Maybe a bit slimmer bass than with some other cables, but in return I have hardly ever experienced such deep and tight bass in my setup.

But the magic really appears in the midrange. Gradually one has become accustomed to the fact that many manufacturers are beginning to get control over an extended treble, yet with high resolution. I believe that with the introduction of various “super tweeters,” something has happened to the production of cables that can handle the demands these create. On the other hand, not all can preserve the feeling of flesh, blood, and rosin in the midrange. No. 1

handles this excellently. I don't remember having heard any cable letting through so much of the soul and body of a singer.

Compared with some other good cables, it seems like the studio becomes a little larger and the singers breathe easier. Maybe Pavarotti became a little bit fatter—he does that in reality, too, but what does that matter when it gives more power to the performance? The piano of Pinetop Perkins sounded confusingly like it might have been tuned, and Tom Waits literally reeked of whiskey through the speakers. The feeling of having musicians made of flesh and blood (and sometimes a larger dose of alcohol) in your room came a step ahead yet one more time. The sound is under control over the full frequency spectrum, yet it sounds so relievingly unstrained and relaxed. At first I thought Jorma No. 1 played a bit slimly and too undramatic. Gradually, however, the impression grows that the cable creates a soundstage in which silence is blacker and the contrasts larger than I have ever experienced. There aren't any artificial vitamin shots in the form of distortion that give the impression of increased dynamics.

If it should be quiet, it is quiet. If there should be bang and drama, it's there immediately. And the overtones—man, the overtones! I was really satisfied with the tone, the overtone structure, the transparency in my system. Yet this is something completely different. It is more noticeable in the voice range, but also all the air and vibration in and around the instruments appears with a renewed realism when Jorma No.1 is in charge. BUT: Do not believe that this is a cable that can correct mistakes made yesterday. There is nothing to be had of added punch and speed or other spices, like other cables. If the system is bad or mid-fi, it will go on being just that—regardless of how much you spend on new cables.

Even if the 10%-of-the-total-value rule of thumb has been shown to have its flaws, there is little to suggest that such an expensive cable has anything to do in a system that doesn't exceed the cable price by at least four times. Only the psychological effect of having cables of the same value as the rest of the system should give rise to some healthy scepticism. But if you already have tweaked the last drops out of your setup, these cables can be a means to come closer to the goal.

Thank you and goodbye

It was thank you and goodbye to earlier references and to some of my savings—again! Unfortunately (or maybe luckily), one doesn't get one's hands on this sort of thing too often, so it might be just as well that the manufacturer is unknown, without any status, and in addition Swedish (the last one was a joke). It was about time that I had my prejudices about border trading set to a test!

Jorma No. 1 cable is expensive, sure, but still price worthy compared to, for example, Valhalla and other competing brands. Anyway, this will be the catch when the credit card bill lands, any minute now. This cable belongs to me, until my creditors hang me with it. Step aside—I'm going to play some music!

* () = *Comments from Jorma Design*