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Give Me A Hand...Or Arm

For those who sport SME IV or V arms, Paul Rigby reviews the Black Rhodium Stylus cable.

Often ignored or missed in terms of improving the sound quality of your hi-fi, the cable from your turntable to the phono amp is a crucial part of the source.

The Stylus cable, says the company, utilises thicker insulation than is usual in interconnect cables, increasing the distance between conductors. It also features separate coaxial screened cables for each channel. The screens protect the sensitive low level signals from the turntable's cartridge from picking up high frequency noise and interference present all around. Further protection against noise and distortion is provided by placing both channel cables in an outer jacket, preventing the return conductors of both channels from acting as a 'loop aerials' for RFI.

The Stylus uses two silver plated copper cores, insulated in low loss PTFE dielectric, while termination is taken care of with rhodium-plated plugs. The rhodium-plated DIN connectors have been specially designed for use in Black Rhodium tone arm cables while the RCA end is terminated with Graham Nalty Legacy Range GN-3 RCA connectors.



SOUND QUALITY

I began with Bruce Brubaker's solo piano piece via his *Glass Piano* LP and the Philip Glass composition *Mad Rush*. From the first few notes of this track, this cable promoted a new found sensitivity. I felt that the Stylus was digging right into the core of the mix to excavate detail and bring it back up to my ears. There was a certain fragility of tone to the Brubaker piano. Each key struck was done so almost in trepidation, it seemed. There was so much riding each key. As if Brubaker was walking down a strange tunnel and was wary at what was about to jump out in front of him with every step. Such was the delicacy of the presentation from this performance.

Another immediate effect of the new cable was the sense of air. I felt that the Brubaker piano was now being played at the top of some high hill. The dynamics seemed to freely roam while the reverb tails hung above to then crash against that details of the next note, forming a cloud of music. The piano also sounded more, well, metallic. There seemed to be more notice paid to the actual strings, in terms of their physicality. I heard more, well, metal. Don't confuse that for a brightness, this metal sound was more of a texture than a sonic response.

I wondered how the cable would respond to the deeper bass and thump of a rock track. So I turned to the Electric Light Orchestra and First Movement from 1971. The Stylus offered quite a ride too! The big, bold, heaving bass remained but the Stylus cleaned it all up. Previously, there was a touch of blurring. Not a great deal and not enough for it to be a problem but the slight sonic smudges that were there did prevent bass from hitting hard. The Stylus shined the bass a touch, removing all blurring elements adding punch, heft and slam to the weight.

In terms of midrange and treble, the introductory Spanish guitar picking which flowed throughout the track was now even more precise, bouncy and accurate but retained the richness of the golden analogue elements of the organic instrument. More than that, the accompanying cellos not only produced a big and bold presentation but the subtle details such as wooden vibrating of the strings upon the body was now clearer and more noticeable, adding to the grandeur of the performance.

CONCLUSION

The Stylus allowed my SME IV to really come to life, the enhanced clarity and accuracy not only helped the music to deliver a sonically more interesting performance but the lower distortion and noise meant that I could now lower the gain of my phono amp and increase the gain of my pre-amp to achieve the same volume producing a more relaxed yet still vibrant performance. Is this the ultimate SME phono cable?

BLACK RHODIUM STYLUS SME ARM CABLE

Price: £350

Website: www.blackrhodium.co.uk

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Good: accuracy, low noise, tight bass, airy midrange

Bad: nothing at the price



RATING: 9