

Product Review

Slinkylinks Silver Conductor Air Dielectric XLR Balanced Interconnects from New Zealand

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Introduction

Cable manufacturers are springing up all over the place on the Internet. As I have mentioned before, it is probably because everyone has their own ideas as to how to make the best cable, and they are lightweight so they are easy to ship.

Slinkylinks is one of the newcomers. They are based in New Zealand.

The Design

It is obvious that physics has a big role in design and development of DVD players, receivers, amplifiers, and speakers. But, you might not think that it is such a big deal with - what - just a wire? Well, it is *very* important.

Electrical conductors have DC resistance, capacitance, and inductance, as well as other things like skin effect (a tendency for high frequencies to travel near the surface of the conductor).

All of these factors get in the way of letting the electrical signal make it to the end of the conductor looking (and sounding) just like it did when it entered the conductor.

Because the effects of these factors on conductance are not absolutely clear, there are lots of cable designs based on various designers' thoughts as to how they should be controlled.

Slinkylinks takes a very simple approach: (1) Use silver as the conductor. Silver is a better (about 7% better) conductor than copper, and although they both oxidize, copper oxide is non-conductive while silver oxide is a very good conductor (e.g., silver oxide batteries); (2) Keep the conductors very thin. This minimizes the skin effect. In the case of the Slinkys, the conductors are only 0.25mm thick (250 μ), which is about the size of a human hair. For the RCA unbalanced interconnects, two conductors are assigned to the + and two are assigned to the -. For the XLR interconnects, two are for one hot lead, two for the other, and a fifth silver conductor lies between the smaller tubes and the outside sleeve, assigned to the -. With Slinkylinks speaker cables, there are eight conductors, four each for the + and -; (3) Use air as the dielectric. Teflon is good, but air is better. So, how

Specifications:

- Four 0.25mm Silver Conductors (Eight in Speaker Cables)
- Air Dielectric; Each Conductor in its Own PVC Tubing
- Typical Surface Area of Conductor Touching PVC Wall: 4% (96% in Contact Only with the Air)

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do you keep the conductor from touching something when it is suspended in air? You don't. You accept the 4% conductor surface area touching the surrounding insulation. You have to suspend each conductor in its own plastic tubing though; (4) Don't use metal shielding, because such shielding has capacitance that can smear the sound. Of course, this means you have to be careful where you lay the cables, so that they don't pick up any stray hum fields.



Slinkylinks Balanced XLR Interconnects



Slinkylinks Unbalanced RCA Interconnects



Slinkylinks Speaker Cables

By using silver, since the silver oxide is conductive, the dielectric is still the air, whereas with copper conductors suspended in air, the non-conductive copper oxide becomes the dielectric. Dielectrics tend to store energy and re-release it back into the conductor a fraction of a second later, smearing the sound. So, the lower the dielectric constant, the better. Air has a dielectric constant of 1 (defined as 1, with all other dielectrics compared to air).

So, it sounds simple doesn't it? Well, it is simple. Sometimes the simple things are the last to show up. Fortunately, it also keeps things relatively inexpensive to manufacture. No extrusions. No complicated windings. Just thin silver wire in plastic tubing. In this case, Slinkylinks have spiraled the conductors inside the tubing so there is a little slack when you bend the cables to install them.

The Slinkylinks are packaged in a small can for safe shipping.



The Tests

I tested two pairs of 1.5 Meter XLR balanced Slinkylinks. One pair connected a Classé CDP-10 Balanced Output CD Player to a Balanced Audio Technology VK-5i Balanced Preamplifier, and the second pair connected the preamp to a Balanced Audio VK-75SE Balanced Power Amplifier. Speakers were Magnepan MG1.6/QR. Speaker cables were River Cables FLEXYGY or Analysis Plus Oval 9.

I have seen a couple of reviews of this product elsewhere, and they said the cables sounded bright at first. I did not hear that. I was struck with an immediate sense of great detail. However, I used balanced interconnects rather than RCA unbalanced, and my reference components for this test are all triode tube in Class A. Tubes tend to have a smoother sound than solid state, so that may account for the difference. However, the other reviews stated that the brightness calmed down with time.

In any case, I loved the sound of the Slinkylinks. As I get older, and my hearing deteriorates, I appreciate all the detail that I can get, and the Slinkys gave me plenty.

For example, harpsichords make their sounds by a piece of leather that plucks the string (as compared to a piano that uses felt hammer pads). This plucking produces a hugely detailed transient that is difficult to reproduce. Any weakness along the way, and the transient goes flat. The Slinkys were definitely not a weak link in this process, and I heard everything that was there in the recording. In fact, it was a very big improvement over some generic XLR interconnects that I had in the system at the time.

The increase in detail made for a better soundstage as well, producing depth that is not there with lesser cables. Even if it is a single instrument, in my case classical piano sonatas, the soundstage depth improvement is still noticeable, because a piano has depth itself (e.g., a 12 foot concert grand piano). (I did not notice so much difference with a single human voice though.)

Orchestral pieces were rich and deep too. I listen to a lot of ensemble recordings, such as those that have four stringed instruments, or several strings and an oboe. All of my recordings sounded excellent with the Slinkylinks.

Jazz also was more exciting with the Slinkys. I am a drummer and very sensitive to the overtones of cymbals. They sure had me tapping my feet to the beat.

We only tested the XLR interconnects here. The Slinkylinks are so good, we plan to extend our tests to the speaker cables later on.

Conclusions

Proper use of physics, and innovative minds, have come up with a real winner in the Slinkylinks cable designs. They sound great and are relatively inexpensive for something that works so well and contains precious metals.

- John E. Johnson, Jr. -