

Crystal Cable Micro and Piccolo

This is a story even the Romans could learn something from. Crystal Cable has been on the market for barely two years now and it already has the whole world on its feet (or in this case her feet).

And it happened with giant steps forward.

A bit of the 'Veni Vidi Vici' story, completed with laurel wreaths shaped in 'national and international awards' which all state that this a fantastic product. The worldwide representation is very well structured into a finely meshed network and is very widespread, with importers in countries like Venezuela, Mexico and Brazil.

In total we are talking about 32 countries and there seems to be no end to the march. Furthermore the concept is very well thought out with packaging that one immediately associates with Chanel for men!

Crystal is in the midst of her second year in the market and according to a conversation with Gabi van der Kley the first year has primarily been a matter of sowing.

The Crystal germ is widespread and in this second year it's already possible to reap. However the beginning has been more difficult due to the prejudices she had to fight against from the many male colleagues but that has just made her stronger.

Very quickly the professional musician (which in fact she is) has mastered the material. So for a change this is a company lead by a woman and that itself doesn't have to imply anything. In this case however it does but I can only consider it being an addition to the value. Women are generally able to see what role something will play in the bigger picture, without some of the audiophile "machismo" exhibited by some men.

Wrist thick cables aren't warmly recommended and certainly no items to surprise your wife with on her birthday. A tasteful little box however, in which lays the ultimate cable, is something everyone can enjoy.

Crystal cables are relatively thin and easy to put away, something I value highly, especially in the living room. I am messy myself and if I, on top of that, start filling the room with very ostentatious strips than all calmness would disappear very quickly. That's the main reason for having a listening room on the second floor for ten years now. A place where the door can be shut and the whole floor can be strewn with cables. That's not allowed in the living room.

A more complete picture of Crystal shows that this company is very much on its way to provide the customer from A to Z with a wide range of products and thus spoil him or her with its collection. A year ago it was the Reference series and now it's added with the Piccolo series which is being tested here. The intention behind this series is, just like the last one, to produce a high-quality product for domestic use. That is why this cable has been consciously kept small and flexible. But this does not mean it gets in the way of professional use. To my knowledge there are several well known recording studios in the world that use Crystal Cable for their recordings (MA Recordings, Azazzello Studios, Chesky Records etc.). And with splendid results.

It's not just the audio world that is being served, Crystal also provides you with high-quality video connections. So this also means video and HDMI. This brings me back to the part in which is stated that the male world works differently. Men also make attractive products but in a much more simple way. You can look up various manuals but it all comes down to the same thing. Usually it's a combination of robust and large. So, a robust product in a large box which should create an instant reaction along the lines of: "what a great big cable!" In some stores, they even embellish it by giving passive components several aspects like low distortion, huge Wattages etc., these are all things the average customer is deluged with in an attempt to overcome an innate desire on the part of the significant other to look creatively in a different direction.

With Crystal this is totally, and I mean absolutely totally different. The cables are as said before very refined and the package....well that's a completely different story. Each product of the Micro-series is presented in a pretty black paper package reminding of the earlier mentioned Chanel. Once you open this package you will find a beautiful box in which lies a little cable much like a piece of jewelry on velvet. Sometimes, like with the speaker cables, there's a cloth enfolding a blue velvet bag in which the actual jewel resides, 'lives in' sounds to ordinary in this case.

Micro and Piccolo

As their names suggest these are not the most impressive looking cables on the market. They are very delicately constructed around a gold & silver conductor, around which the dielectric and mechanical shielding is placed directly on the surface consisting of a triple layer wrapping of Kapton foils. Over this shield is the 99.9999% pure silver "return leg" of the cable, which also functions as a secondary shield. The final layer, namely Teflon is clear and has distinct shielding and electrical advantages. This provides fantastic conduction coupled with fantastic shielding. In it self these cables resemble the previous tested Reference series a lot so I will not deal with this part too long. However I would like to point out some issues like, among other things, the many practical possibilities this product has to offer. First of all the cables are very small so easy to put away and very flexible that never again will you need to worry about your cables being so stiff/heavy that they will pull lightweight equipment off their shelves.

That's not the case at all with this series of cables. They are however so delicate that they are easily entangled. For this Crystal came up with a solution. Around each cable there's a little weight that completely disentangles the cable by moving the weight over the cable's total length. This may come across like a small matter but it prevents a lot annoyance and you need extraordinary ingenuity to come up with something like this. A second cleverness is the possibility to extend the speaker cables. Every cable has a standard length and ends on a tube. On that tube one can couple the extra piece or for example a bi-wire set. That comes in very handy with moving house or a change of speaker, one meter extra is no problem. Bi-wiring instead of two loose wires is not a problem as well; everything is available and affordable too. Some prices: one meter Piccolo RCA costs €299, a Micro power cable costs €349 and a couple of Micro LS cables cost €1499. A bi-wire splitter is relatively cheap at €159.

Listening

The cables were connected to several sets, including some sets in which the Reference series of the same brand was represented already. Therefore an immediate comparison was easy to make. And I have to say that the 'family connection' was very obvious. Crystal's general characteristic is a splendidly colorful sound with finely drawn images without influencing a certain frequency. The width

and depth are proportionally more than just fine and it also scores on matters like exceptional macro- and microdynamics. When using a very revealing system, you will notice how Crystal easily contributes to an even better, deeper and more colorful coherence in the sound. It is not the cable but the system that will determine the boundaries. Considering on top of that the vivid naturalness and a very strange conclusion floats into my mind. This cable is not only capable of many things but what it does, it does very well indeed. And that is a difference between many of its competitors. I often use cables as a sort of flavoring. If I'm looking for something with a fine reproduction of the human voice, for example, I chose Fadel Art cables. Should I desire absolute neutrality in a set that is tuned somewhat too warmly, I would choose Harmonic Technology. But with Crystal it's nearly always immediately good. Although these little sisters do not ooze authority, they are able to do an awful lot. To make absolutely sure I put some classics in the cd-slide: 'Heaven Down Here' by Tuck and Patty. A composition which especially excels by fine dynamics and positioning. Immediately it's on high level and indeed very close to the level of performance by the older brother; the Reference. The next step is Diana Krall with some Tom Waits interpretations. Just like her colleague Holly Cole she also creates something very special. However with this I lack a bit of lowness so I switch over to a speaker with which bi-wiring is a realistic option. And this reveals Crystal's hidden powers. Within a few seconds the double wire is replaced by four separate ones and the now bi-wired speaker can play on. And the result is directly noticeable. The lowness gains more depth and it gains authority. That authority is now nicely analyzed in a better shaped lowness which makes the speaker much more accessible. The voice too gains nuance and guttural sounds are more perceptible. This is often the effect when the low sounds neatly do what they ought to do. A slight hum underneath often masks the rest of the information and this is best noticeable with the voice.

Shame on you

'Well now, dear men's world, it's actually a bit embarrassing that a lady has to teach you how to create a product that's so flexible that the customer can make use of it longer' (little connectors on the speaker cables). 'Or how to prevent your cables to look like a spaghetti dish' (little weights). And all this with such a quality of sound that in fact exceeds its price range. As a customer, please don't be deceived by the thickness, I have seen these cables (Reference) play on a couple of Halcro mono blocks leaning towards Wilson Watt Alexandria. Here too people questioned whether the cable was too thin but my spoiled ears weren't deprived of anything. And that's even without mentioning the packaging which didn't make me feel like I had spent money. No, it was a sense of having acquired something valuable. Having gone through all these points I believe we have a serious candidate for the title: 'Product of the Month'. This title is given for the first time but **I don't think there's a more complete product on the market.** And this time for a change at very acceptable prices. I am curious about Mrs. Crystal's next stunt. I believe there are enough plans for the future because after spending two years in Elst the company has grown out of the building and takes its residence in the World Trade Center Arnhem/Nijmegen. I hope beautiful things keep on coming.

Jo Mullers

