



CRYSTAL CABLE BRIDGE

Reviewer: Paul Candy

Financial Interests: click [here](#)

Digital Source: Rotel RCD-971 CDP as transport, PS Audio DL III DAC w/ Cullen Circuits Stage Three Mod, Shanling PCD3000A.

Analog Source: Pro-Ject RPM 5 turntable, Pro-Ject Speed Box, Pro-Ject Tube Box phono stage, Ortofon Rondo Blue cartridge

Amps: Audiomat Opéra Référence integrated, Audio Zone AMP-1, Wyred 4 Sound SX-1000 monos [in for review]

Speakers: Green Mountain Audio Callisto (on sand-filled Skylan stands), 2 x REL Q108 Mk II subwoofers, Hornshoppe Horns, AV123 Strata Mini, Hyperion HPS-738 [in for review]

Cables: Acoustic Zen Silver Reference, Audience Maestro, DH Labs Air Matrix & Revelation, JPS Labs Superconductor+, SilverFi Samarkand & Moonshadow interconnects, Auditorium 23 speaker cables

Power Cables: Audience, GutWire, Harmonic Technology

Stands: Grand Prix Audio Monaco four-tier rack

Powerline conditioning: BPT Pure Power Center with Wattgate, Bybee Quantum Purifier and ERS cloth options, Audience aR1p AC conditioner (digital only), GutWire MaxCon (digital only)

Sundry accessories: Grand Prix Audio Apex footers, Acoustic Revive RR-77, Isoclean fuses, Caig Pro Gold, Auric Illuminator, Audio Magic/Quantum Physics Noise Disruptors, dedicated AC line with Wattgate 381 outlet, Echo Busters acoustic room treatments

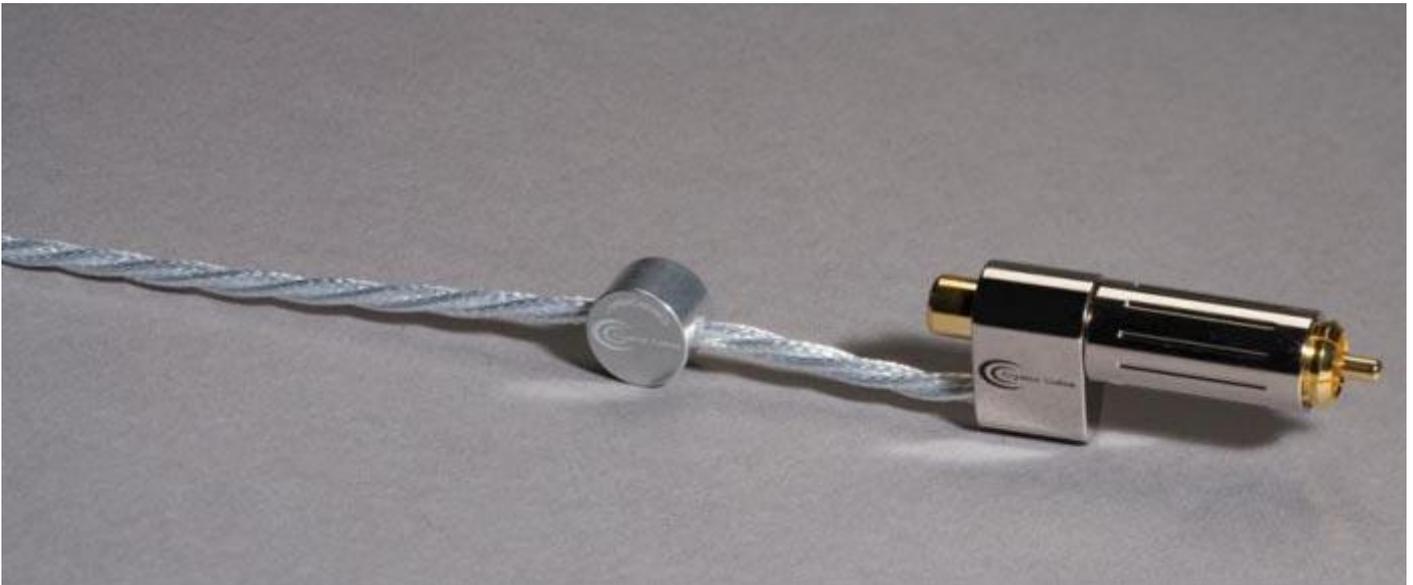
Room size: 11' x 18' x 8', long wall setup, suspended hardwood floors with large area rug, walls are standard drywall over Fiberglass insulation.

Review component retail: CDN\$780/€450

"Hey Paul, why don't you take these home for the weekend and let me know what you think?" That was Rickey Yan of Aurora/Ontario retailer Audio Ovation while handing me a pair of odd-looking cables. "What is this? It looks like some kind of weird piggy-back cable." Ricky answered, "It's the Bridge from Crystal Cable. It retails for CDN\$780 and upgrades your existing interconnects without having to replace them with more expensive ones." "Huh? Why would I spend \$800 to upgrade my existing \$300 cables? Why not just buy an \$800 cable?" I also thought that running the signal through an extra set of RCA connectors would degrade the sound. Rickey just smiled while I took up his offer completely convinced that I wouldn't have anything positive to say upon return. Rickey also offered that sales of the Bridge had been brisk since Ovation Audio started carrying the Crystal Cable line. The fact that I subsequently contacted Crystal Cable for a formal review pair suggests that I was impressed. Indeed I was. My preconceptions henceforth received a sound butt kicking.

The Bridge is a patent-pending cable design from Crystal Cable that upgrades existing interconnect cables *without actually replacing them*. The Bridge's connectors have both the usual male sockets that plug into your components and female piggy-backed RCA plugs to receive your existing interconnects. What connects the plugs is a ground cable with an inbuilt "ultra high-speed filter >20GHz" at each end. This cable does not carry a signal. It is simply an enhanced ground or return that supplements your existing cable's ground. Confused? Check out the pictures. First, disconnect your existing cables, plug in the Bridge to your components and then reconnect your cables to the female connectors on the Bridge. Then sit back and prepare to be pleasantly surprised. Two models are offered, the Bridge at €450 and the Dreamlink at €1,500.

Crystal claims that the Bridge lowers system distortion and noise levels while improving dynamic range, micro dynamics and frequency response. Inside the cable's special RCA jacks reside what Crystal calls a HPSA filter made of 99.9999% silver/gold alloy while the higher priced Dreamlink boasts a 99.9999999% silver/gold alloy. Both the Bridge and Dreamlink are based on Siltech's Zero Ohm Link design. I am speculating here but the Bridge appears to function as a wide-band return shunt, which should reduce system RFI or ground loop noise. Via email, I asked Crystal cable's Gabi van der Kley to provide further background information regarding the Bridge.



"The idea for this innovation was born from the thought that the purity of the material is one of the major reasons for being able to achieve distortion-free musical cables. The low resistance adds enlarged dynamic range to this near zero distortion concept. Crystal Cable is using very high-purity silver injected with gold for the conductors. Making an extra ground cable from this advanced material with our exceptional isolators (Kapton, Peek and Teflon) allows the listener to upgrade his system without trading in the complete cabling. Connecting the Crystal Bridge or Dreamlink first, then plugging in the existing interconnects (of whatever brand) immediately results in a significant distortion reduction. The noise level drops while micro dynamics and sound quality improve dramatically. These 'super-ground' cables give any other interconnects a massive upgrade beyond the material choice. The improvements are also due to the built-in ultra high speed filter, which ensures perfect phase even at extreme frequencies."

Prompted by our Editor, I asked Gabi if the Bridge was related to Edwin's (Gabi's husband and founder of Siltech) research on amorphous conductors, which turned out to be fruitless since the material proved impossible to obtain in practical quantities. As an unexpected result of those experiments, Edwin had discovered that the last few centimeters at either end of a cable had a significantly greater effect on overall performance than initially thought. For example, take a standard OFC interconnect and replace the last couple of centimeters at each end with a higher-grade metal, say Siltech/Crystal silver/gold alloy. The resultant sound will be very similar to a cable containing this material all the way through. Frank Tchang observed the same phenomenon during his research, hence his Acoustic System Liveline cables tuck only a few millimeters of his expensive alloys (silver, gold, Platinum etc) inside the connectors while the rest of the cable remains ordinary copper and silver for hot and return.

Gabi responded: "Actually, Srajan is right. The Bridge principle was born out of the observations Edwin talked about. These Bridge cables only make a ground connection but in the connectors, we have those last few centimeters, which increase the performance. However, the ground connection too is made of our silver/gold mix, which has an even more significant effect so these cables are a kind of combination which works fascinatingly well." Just to clarify, the filters and materials utilized are not at all similar to the filters/circuits used by MIT or Transparent. Crystal Cable has a worldwide patent pending on this new design.

The Bridge came packaged in a nice box and cloth bag. As you can see, build quality is quite solid and looks very professional. I removed the JPS Labs Superconductor+ currently running from my Cullen Circuits modified PS Audio DL III DAC to my Audiomat Opera Reference amp, plugged in the Bridge with their unique tightening RCA connections and then reattached the JPS cable.



Even without any burn-in time, I noticed a significant improvement right away. Music emerged from a quieter background and it seemed that I gained a dB or two in volume. Overall presentation became more forward and visceral. I was surprised by the subjectively lower noise levels as the Superconductor+ (which sports a solid copper shield) supposedly has 120dB of noise rejection already. The effect of the Bridge was not unlike that of a good power conditioner - minus the weird tonal shifts or occasional reduction in dynamics.

Over the first two weeks of use, the performance traits noted above continued to improve. After a month, I thought I had reached the Bridge's optimum performance and started to experiment with various cables, from \$30 Radio Shack wires to the most expensive ones I had on hand, the Acoustic Zen Silver Reference and SilverFi Samarkand, both of which retail close to \$1,000 US. All sounded better with the Bridge. The bass became deeper with greater weight. Subjective volume increased. Higher frequencies were smoother yet also displayed greater delineation of detail. Dynamics and the overall pulse of music became more defined and incisive. Instruments and voices were clearer with greater weight and presence. The rich texture of a cello or the upper range of a soprano were more tactile and convincing.

As crazy as it might seem, the Bridge had a dramatic effect even with Radio Shack's cheapies. However, I think you would be better served by obtaining better interconnects than the Radio Shacks before considering purchasing the Bridge. I thought the most cost-effective combination was the Bridge and a decent \$200-\$300 cable. Matching the Bridge with the mid-priced cables from JPS Labs, DH Labs or SilverFi handily beat the more expensive Acoustic Zen Silver Reference or SilverFi Samarkand running solo. Surprisingly, while I could still hear the unique sonic characteristics of each cable, their differences were not as apparent. The Bridge clearly possessed the most dramatic and pronounced effect. It is mere speculation on my part but perhaps the differences I noted between cables had more to do with each cable's geometry and connectors than the conductor material itself.



Most if not all cable manufacturers will tell you that all cables degrade the signal to some degree but that the best ones almost get out of the way completely. If that's true, then I don't believe I have ever heard a cable more benign to the musical event than the SilverFi Samarkand with the Bridge. And while I have not tried any of Crystal Cable's regular interconnects in my system, I suspect that the Bridge, apart from lowering perceived system noise, also offered me a fair taste of the Crystal Cable house sound.

After several weeks of swapping in various cables, I am convinced the Bridge will improve the performance of any interconnect regardless of pedigree and do so without adversely altering the sonic character of your existing cable. Music playback was more resolved, vibrant, dynamic, *there* and ultimately more real with the Bridge.

I admit that \$700 for a cable upgrade or even just a regular cable seems a stretch. Perhaps it is but I will leave the value judgments to you. Suffice it to say, the Bridge works as advertised. It's a very impressive product and definitely worth borrowing from a willing dealer. But don't bother if you can't afford to not return your loaners.

Paul Candy ..

