

Audience Cables: Conductor e Series Interconnects, Speaker Cables, & PowerChord

By Anthony Nicosia

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Conductor e Interconnect RCA

Specifications:

\$391 for 1 meter pair

\$399 for 1.5 meter pair

Conductor e speaker cable:

Specifications:

\$601 for a three meter pair

powerChord e power cable:

Specifications:

\$674 for one six foot length

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Having heard wonderful things about Audience products, especially their cables, I have long since wondered what they would sound like in my review system. My keen interest in their products stem from a time long before I started writing reviews for *Affordable\$\$Audio* and I am

happy today to finally have a chance to satisfy my desire to explore some of the fine products. Audience has been around since 1997 starting out under the guidance of its two co-founders, John McDonald and the late Richard Smith. Although Audience is known for its fabulous cables they also make a new line of loudspeakers, power amplifiers, pre-amplifiers, power conditioners, loudspeaker drivers, a disc treatment system, and of course their famous high resolution capacitors. Having had the pleasure of talking to Mr. McDonald on the phone I can say he has both a wealth of knowledge and a great deal of enthusiasm for his products. He was kind enough to offer to outfit my entire system with Audience cables in order that I might get the full effect of using his products. I was sent four power cords, for the power conditioning strips and mono block amplifiers, a three meter length of speaker cables and three sets of interconnects. The company makes only one power cord so the choice there was easy. As for the interconnects and speaker cables, Audience offers three different models. The cables I choose were the entry-level Conductor e series. The next model up is called the Maestro and finally the most expensive is the Au24 e series. The "e" signifies the enhanced version of the product.

Looking at the Audience website I found the following explanation about the "e" series, "As of November, '07 Audience has developed proprietary technology to improve the conductivity of Audience Au24 cables, Conductor cables and powerChords that result in a more refined product. The basic musical character of the cable is unchanged; however they are enhanced. This technology results in the seeming removal of a veil resulting in the improvement of a world class product." Having not heard the original version, I cannot comment on its sonic capabilities and therefore this review will center on the "e" version.

One thing these three models of interconnects have in common is they are all designed for low eddy-current resistance to help reproduce music with more realism and an improved soundstage. The Conductor e cables were designed for those of us on a budget yet you need not worry for as you move up the line. The main difference is basically in the reproduction of resolution as the Conductor e and all the cables are said by Wes Philips of Stereophile to share a "family resemblance" in sound. The Conductor e interconnects are thin and easy to work with. Initially they had a very tight fit, which loosened up after the first application. This of course was not a problem and I felt this secure fit to be a big plus. I inserted the interconnects into the Rega Apollo CD player as well as the two Bryston 7B SST Squared C-Series mono block amplifiers then connected both to my Monarchy Audio M33 preamplifier/DAC (factory modified version upgraded from 20bit to 24 bit technology). From here I put on the CD by Jewel Kilcher *Pieces Of You* (Atlantic 82700-2) and started with the song, "Who Will Save Your Soul". Here I found a common trait, which was to be persis-



tent throughout the review. That was the ability these cables had of connecting you emotionally to the music. The beautiful voice of Jewel Kilcher comes across as smooth and spacious. This is one fantastic CD and the Audience interconnects certainly let you “feel” the performance. I sat back and listened to the music with a big smile on my face. The song “Foolish Games” opens with a solo piano piece where I felt the cables ability to give good depth to the instrument. Now this is not easy with a piano because being that it is so large makes for difficulty in creating the illusion of being with you in your room. Again the silence between musicians was evident and was welcomed especially during times when the strings played in the background, adding nicely to the songs overall emotional feel.



Time now to put on some Rock and Roll and to see what the Conductor e interconnects could do with more complex musical passages. Here I pulled out the Led Zeppelin's CD that was simply entitled *Led Zeppelin* (Atlantic 82638 2). “Stairway To Heaven” is a Led Zeppelin classic and certainly one to listen to for soundstage width as well as space between performers all of which the Audience cables had no trouble with. I did notice though that resolution was off a bit from some of the far more expensive cables I have had the pleasure to hear. However, that is what the Maestro and Au24 e cables are advertised for, to get that extra bit of resolution over the Conductor e series. If you were not comparing these cables to those costing two or three times their price I doubt you would miss the extra resolu-

tion. As for price versus performance these cables certainly scored big here. You could spend a lot more to get a little more but you really do not need to do so unless you have a very high-end system and are looking for every ounce of detail you can find. It would be interesting to hear what the Maestro and Au24 e cables bring to the table as the Conductor e series do so well at this price point and even beyond. This was definitely an interconnect that performed extremely well and one I could live with without ever looking back.

The speaker cables are made with the same design philosophy but are slightly thicker in diameter than the interconnects, differing of course with the termination at the end. I opted for spade termination for the speakers and asked for their BFA connectors at the other end to connect to my amplifiers. Again, both had a very tight fit and worked well within my system. A tight fit is a good thing and very important when judging any cable, whether it be interconnect, power cord or speaker cable. After all, if the sound coming through the cable gets lost just before it passes onto the next component, then what good is it? I liked its slim black demur, which never called attention to itself because of its size or color and found it extremely easy to work with. Garden hose variety cables are all right but give me those thinner cables anytime as it pleases my wife to no end having cables that are less visible and less obtrusive into our living space. Esthetically speaking we liked them. Time to put on a little U2 magic with their CD *The Best Of 1990-2000* (Interscope/Island 4400633612) to listen to “The Hands That Built America” (Theme From “Gangs Of New York”). What better song to pick for a movie about Irish immigrants coming to America than one performed by an actual Irish rock group. Again depth and clarity were at work here as the synthesizer played giving off a nice background effect. But to see what the cables could do with bass impact I turned to “Numb”. If you have not seen the music video for this song, you should really check it out as it is quite interesting. Here the speaker cables let you experience the drumbeats bass impact in all its glory as it plays in a steady stream throughout the song. We of course also can hear the vocals of The Edge (David Howell Evans) with background vocals from Larry Mullen Jr. and Bono (Paul David Hewson) that are intermingled throughout parts of the song as well. Again the cables have no problem giving just that right amount of space between the three singers separating them just enough to allow



you to hear each with their own particular distinction. In other words the cables handled layering without a problem.

My next visit was with the CD by Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers entitled *Anthology Though The Years* (MCA RECORDS 088 170 178-2). If I had to pick one particular song from so many on this two CD collection I would listen to the hit song, "Free Fallin'". The opening guitar chords are captured quite accurately and the bass drumbeat once again is reproduced with correct timbre and the right amount of impact. Never did I once feel that there was too much bass. Some cables can emphasis the bass throwing off the balance of the performance but I felt the Conductor e series did it just right. They also did a great job of handling the decay of notes with the opening guitar cords and vocal content. Again I wondered what moving up the line to the Maestro and Au24 e cables would do in terms of resolution but at this reasonable price I found these to be very musical cables and I enjoyed listening to them. These speaker cables are high up on my list of those I would recommend to my friends not wanting to tap into their children's college money yet are still looking to get a high-end audiophile sound.



Moving onto the powerChord e power cable, which I found to be surprisingly flexible like all the above-mentioned cables. Flexibility of course contributes to the ability of the cable to be used more easily in the demanding situations we often find ourselves in, as we tend to weave our audio system into one cohesive unit. I for one have sometimes found it difficult to bend a thick cable in order for it to go around other cables in an effort to prevent the distortion that can be caused by cables touching each other. On the sonic end of it, Audience states that using a thick solid-core power cable can result in damage to the conductors if the cable is bent and therefore cause some degradation of sound. The powerChord is neither solid-cord nor is it shielded, in an effort to produce a clear, accurate fast sounding cable. The powerChord is a multi-stranded unshielded cable that comes standard with Wattgate IEC and Maringo plugs on each end. Staying with the Tom Petty And The Heartbreakers CD mentioned in the paragraph above I switched over to the song, "Runnin' Down A Dream", with all its fast paced energy and drumbeat bass slam. Let me put it simply, these power cords are fast and do not weigh down the sound at all, allowing music to flow freely through to your other cables and equipment. I would think you would need to spend a great deal more to improve upon this power cord, and I am not sure if it would be better, maybe just different. The Audience powerChord e is well built, easy to use and performs as intended. As with all the other Audience cables they were musical and a joy to listen through. I ended my listening session with two songs from Buddy Guy's CD called *Skin Deep* (Silvertone 88697-31629-2). This CD featured the famous guitar licks of Buddy Guy stealing the show amongst a host of other very talented guest performers. On the song "Out In The Woods" featuring Buddy Guy and steel guitarist Robert Randolph you could almost "see" them on stage in a battle of guitar very quick rifts coming from each side of the wide soundstage. The powerChord e seems to stay out of the

way of the music allowing it to flow through seemingly unrestricted providing a sound to the synthesizer that was natural and a drumbeat that expressed power. I was left asking myself what more can you ask for from a power cord.

The moment of truth arrived when I assembled these three types of cables together and placed them in my system to work in synergy with each other. Here I will use the proverbial phrase, "my jaw dropped". When first hearing each individual cable, interconnect, speaker and power cord, I must admit to being impressed. When, however, I listened with them inserted together in my review system they seemed to play upon each other to create something that sounded greater than the sum off all their individually parts. I truly was astounded by the "new" sound coming from my speakers. Starting out with some Stevie Ray Vaughan & Double Trouble I grabbed hold of the CD, *The Real Deal: Greatest*

Hits Volume 2 (Epic/Legacy). Here the complete setup of Audience cables allowed me to connect with the song as Mr. Vaughan gave a very soulful performance when singing "Ain't Gone 'N' Give Up On Love". Here his guitar notes were reproduced with all their lightening speed and the ending notes hung in the air when called to. As for the drums I could feel their strength as they sounded strong and clear. The width of soundstage was exceptional as musicians could be distinguished one from the other within it. Next up was the Luther Vandross *The Ultimate Luther Vandross* (J Records/Epic/Legacy) and the song, "Take You Out". In this song the cymbals sounded just full enough and not too high pitched the way lesser cables tend to portray them. Once again I felt a strong bass impact come through my speakers from these speaker cables and interconnects that were so very thin in diameter. This tended to surprise my audiophile friends as they expected cables needed to be large in order to give off such a strong bass presence. In reality the cables do not need to be thick but rather just constructed properly. If you listen to this CD try not to overlook the song "The Closer I Get To You", which is a duet with Beyonce Knowles. Here the voice of Luther Vandross comes across as natural and smooth as the duet between the two of them made me believe they were indeed lovers pouring their emotions out to each other in song. Near the song's finish I was treated to a wonderful layering effect between the background singers and Beyonce Knowles as they overlapped yet remained distinctly separate.

For the final musical piece I thought it would be a pleasure to listen to Yo-Yo Ma's CD *Yo-Yo Ma & Friends Songs Of Joy & Peace* (Song Classical 88697-24414-2). It took only the song *Here Comes The Sun* sung by James Taylor, and written of course by George Harrison, to realize how amazing these cables were. With Yo-Yo Ma playing his cello, James Taylor on guitar and vocals, as everything was joined together with Audience cables, this song was a joy to hear. You could feel the natural wood sound of Yo-Yo Ma's cello as well as the singing voice of James Taylor in all its original glory. This song was quite heartwarming and hearing it through the Audience cables was certainly a pleasure.

My summation of this review is quite simple really, buy them all together as a set and never look back. Working in unison they tended to create a sound I could live with and not want for anything more. Not that you can not find better, but at this price point you are getting a lot more than you should. I would though be tempted to move up the line to see what the Maestro and Au24 sounds like, just to see how much difference there is between the three. As for now I am listening to the Conductor e series and powerChord e cables, as I am writing this review, enjoying their natural open sound. So unless you want to spend a lot more, to get a little more, maybe you should be content to buy the Conductor e and powerChord e cables from Audience. Then you could sit back comfortably and relax as you just listen to the music.

The Listening Environment:

The listening room is 18 foot 8 inches long by 13 feet wide. The room's cathedral ceiling starts at 8 feet high then slopes upward to 13 feet at its peak in the middle. Flooring is a soft hardwood covering with an oriental rug placed dead center in between (but not under) the listener and the audio system. There are no doors that open or shut into other rooms also there are two large openings one facing the speakers and the other to its side and slightly in front of the right speaker. There are two Acoustic Revive RWL-III Panels, one behind each speaker, as an acoustical treatment for my room. As for my audio equipment it is tucked nicely inside of a Cherry Synergy Twin S30 Salamander audio rack.

Review equipment:

Bryston 7B SST Squared C-Series mono block amplifiers
 Monarchy Audio M33 Preamplifier/DAC (modified)
 Rega Apollo CD player
 Oracle Delphi Mk I turntable with custom made interconnects
 Grace 707 tonearm with Denon 301 II MC cartridge
 Whest PhonoStage.20 + MsU.20 power supply
 Legacy Focus 20/20 loudspeakers
 PS Audio UPC-200 Power Center
 PS Audio Power Port Receptacle
 Acoustic Revive RTP-2 Series Power Conditioner
 Blue Circle BC86 MKIII power line pillows (2)
 Anti-Jumper cables for Legacy speakers
 Cherry Synergy Twin S30 Salamander audio rack