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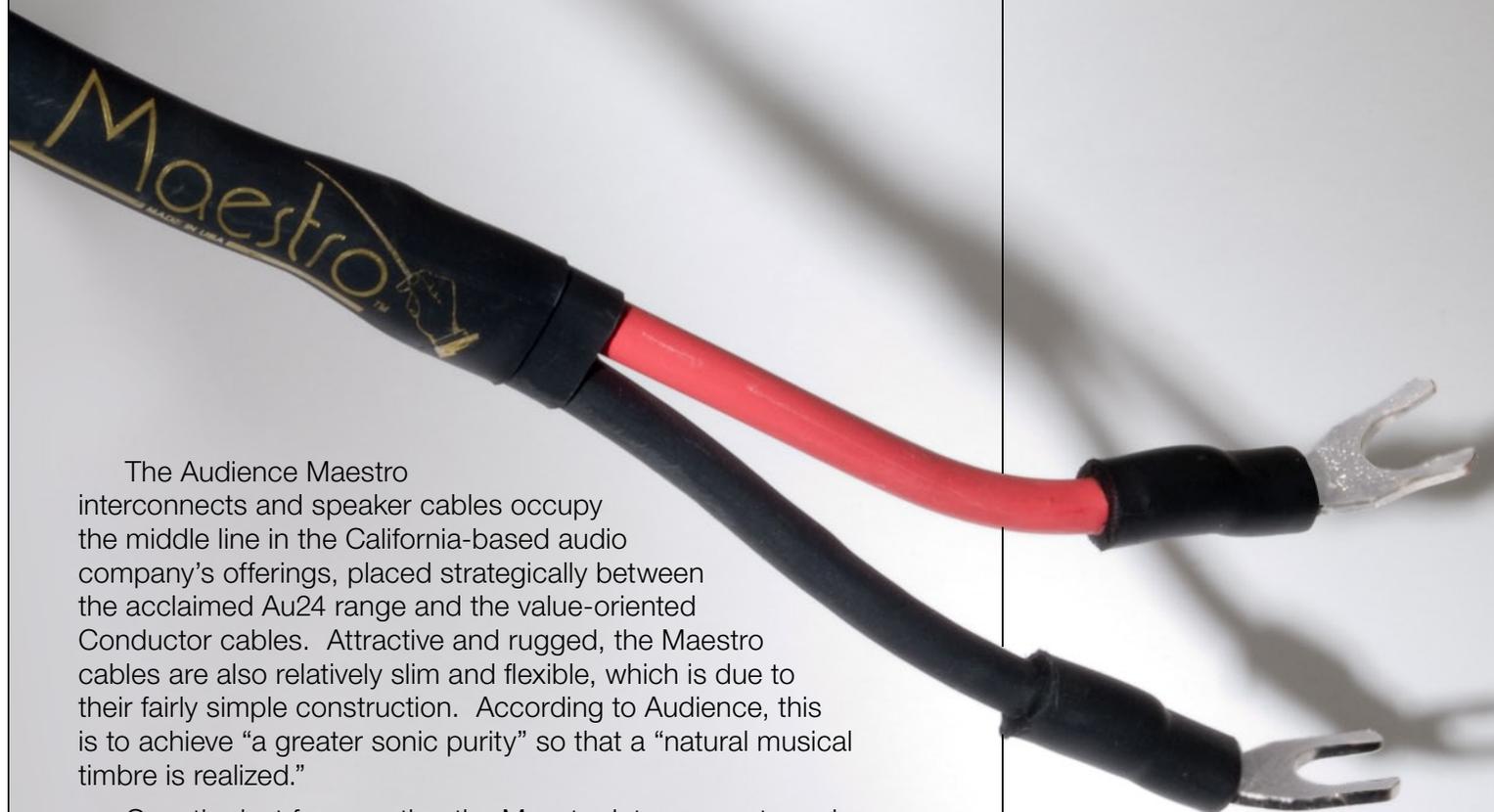
The Maestro And Conductor:

A GREAT PAIR FROM AUDIENCE

By Marc Phillips



The Audience Maestro interconnects and speaker cables occupy the middle line in the California-based audio company's offerings, placed strategically between the acclaimed Au24 range and the value-oriented Conductor cables. Attractive and rugged, the Maestro cables are also relatively slim and flexible, which is due to their fairly simple construction. According to Audience, this is to achieve "a greater sonic purity" so that a "natural musical timbre is realized."



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Over the last few months, the Maestro interconnects and speaker cables quietly became my cabling of choice for my reference system for that very reason. Presently I have quite a few choices in my home when it comes to cabling, but the Maestros have spent more time in my system because they are so easy to work with. The Maestros were simply a dream to use because I was able to maneuver them into the tightest of corners without having to rip apart my entire system.

For example, the Paradigm S1 Signature speakers have binding posts that are recessed rather deeply into the back of the cabinets. The Maestro speaker cables were the only cables fitted with spade lug terminations that truly fit the Paradigms with a minimum of fuss. I had a similar challenge with the Stirling LS3/5as and their somewhat unconventional binding posts. The bi-wiring rods are a bit obstinate and can prevent proper tightening on spade lugs. Through careful positioning, I was finally able to achieve a secure fit with the Maestros.

My only issue with the interconnects is that they are a bit thick just prior to the termination points, which can be a problem with some of my favorite British integrated amplifiers. The LFD Zero that I reviewed this issue was a bit too tight of a fit as well as a few others. Ninety-five percent of the time it's smooth sailing, especially on current US made gear, which usually allows plenty of room for audiophile cabling. *(continued)*

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I've never been an audiophile that chooses convenience over sound quality, so the Maestro's are a perfect fit; they offer superb sound and a relatively modest price. Though sonic neutrality isn't the end all for me, I prefer a cable that doesn't inject much of its own flavor into the mix if at all possible. I have my favorites to use as tone controls, but I preferred the Maestro cables when everything sounded "just right" and I didn't want to alter the tonal balance.

When I used the interconnects between the Conrad-Johnson ET250S power amplifier and the Nagra PL-L line stage, and the speaker cables on the Harbeth Compact 7-ES3s, I experienced some of the most enjoyable sound I've ever had in my listening room. Substituting similarly-priced cables into the mix always seemed to shift the overall voicing toward one extreme or another. In fact, when I placed a rather expensive pair of interconnect in place of the Maestros, the balance became so hot and harsh that I removed them after just a couple of days (I had already put a number of hours on them in another system, in case you were wondering.) The Maestros restored balance and order to the system.

Speaking of balance, I did have a chance to use Audience's Conductor balanced cable with a few different power amplifiers as well. Mind you, the Conductor is from Audience's entry-level line. Again, I had been using a much more expensive XLR cable, and while the Conductor certainly didn't trounce this lofty competitor, it was a bit more difficult to make a clear decision. *(continued)*

The other cable provided a bit more clarity and detail, and seemed altogether more relaxed, but the price difference between the two made me seriously reconsider if these subtle gains were worth it.

While this decision would be strongly dependent upon the amplification being used, I'd recommend trying the Conductor first before you lay down the green for something that may not offer the same value.

The Audience Maestro and Conductor cabling was ultimately so satisfying and suited to my needs that I'm very curious about the upscale Au24 line. All three Audience cable lines are designed for low eddy-current resistance and neutral tonal balance. Thanks to their compact physical dimensions, they are extremely easy to place and use, which is a big bonus. It was easy to see the family resemblance in sound between these two, so I am anxious to try their top of the line Au24 cables next and see what improvements they offer. ●

The Audience Maestro

Interconnects:

MSRP: (1 meter, RCA) \$299.00

Maestro Speaker Cables:

MSRP: (2 meter) \$499.00

Conductor Interconnects

MSRP: (1 meter RCA) \$239.00

MANUFACTURER

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