

DR Acoustics

Closer to the music

## Blue Moon S/PDIF cable, Red Moon USB cable, Blue Moon interconnect cables and Red Moon Shadow speaker cables.

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Electricity is the power that makes our audio systems possible. From the millivolts generated by a turntable's cartridge to the amperes delivered to the loudspeakers, ultimately, we're listening to electricity. It is only logical then that the electrical connections between components of a high-fidelity system should receive the same degree of care in their design as the components themselves. Electrical connections have a vital role to play, transmitting the signal intact and uncontaminated. For music, the signal is intact if each part of the sound spectrum arrives at destination at precisely the same mo-

ment, and uncontaminated if it arrives free of interference from electromagnetic or mechanical forces.

### DR ACOUSTICS

In his previous career, Daniel Robidoux, a music lover and the founder of **DR Acoustics**, specialized in telecommunications engineering, notably high-speed wireline communications. Among other accomplishments, he developed equations defining the maximum transmission capacity of a signal in a given channel, or wire. In 1989, he founded a company that became the world leader in communica-

tion by modems, faxes and ADSL. Like many music lovers at the start of their audiophile journey, Daniel Robidoux didn't believe that "audiophile" cables could improve the performance of a high-fidelity system, until the day that he experienced for himself the difference that good cables can make. Inspired by this epiphany, he began investigating acoustics and electrical conduits with an engineering approach that sought to answer the question, "What is the maximum transmission capacity of a wire and why?" The answers proved to be the same as for the field of broadband communications, where signals are encoded on phase changes. For Daniel Robidoux, preserving phase is as crucial in audio as it is in telecommunications.

Since its inception, DR Acoustics has developed a range of cables in which several approaches and technologies are applied to ensure this phase accuracy, and to maximize immunity of the cables to external and internal vibrations whilst shielding against external electromagnetic interference.

Assembled by hand, **DR Acoustics** cables are easily recognizable by their sheer size, a result of the liberal use of an external microsilicate quartz layer held in place by a braided nylon sheath. Why quartz? Simply because this material provides excellent vibration damping, a property used to good effect in the double walls of some upscale loudspeakers. To my knowledge, this is the first use of quartz as a vibration control device in audio cables. Interestingly, the quartz layer damps not only external sources of vibration, but also the vibration generated internally by the flow of current in the conductors. The idea is not as crazy as it might seem, because audio cables transmit not only electrical signals, but can also act as conduits for transmitting external vibration from one audio component to another. Some manufacturers apply great care in battling this source of vibration, for example Naim Audio, who goes as far as to mechanically decouple the connector pins in their high-end DIN plugs. DR Acoustics continues this approach by applying damping to the entire length of their cables. The other signature of DR Acoustics cables is the use of strain-relief sleeves manufactured by 3D printing. These metallic sheaths protect electrical connections at the cable terminations against mechanical damage and lend a high-tech look to the cables. Each cable also includes a 3D printed metallic triangle whose function is aesthetic, apart from the USB cable, where the metallic triangle covers a set of filtering circuits.

DR Acoustics uses selected connectors from manufacturers such as Furutech and Oyaide, known for the reliability and musical performance of their products. The company offers a very wide range of cables. At last count, their website listed thirteen power cables, nine interconnect cables, six digital cables (S/PDIF or AES-EBU) and two USB cables. For speakers, the company offers four cables with single terminations and two with double terminations for bi-wiring.

For this review, we selected one S/PDIF digital cable, one USB cable, an RCA to RCA interconnect cables and one pair of speaker cables. Cables were tested in the context of two high-fidelity systems over a five-week period, alterna-

ting with reference cables, to gain an appreciation of their musical value.

### BLUE MOON S/PDIF DIGITAL CABLE (1M/\$695)

The Blue Moon Digital cable is shielded against electromagnetic interference (RFI/EMI) and damped against vibration by a triple layer system that DR Acoustics calls a "Multiple Shield Dampening System (MSDS)." In this structure, a first layer is specific to radio-frequency fields, a second specific to vibration damping and also the RFI/EMI mitigation, while a third is dedicated to vibration. The third layer consists of a braided metal sheath corresponding to the military standard Mil Spec AA59569A. The sheath has no electrical contact and moves freely relative to the inner and outer layers, preventing coupling with internal or external sources of vibration. The electrical



signal, in this case a square wave in the lower end of the radio-frequency spectrum, is carried on multiple conductors arranged in a configuration baptized “Multiple Tunnelling Technology” (MTA).

The cable was provided with silver-plated BNC connectors so that I could connect my Naim UnitiServe hard-disk player to the Resonance Mirus Labs DAC converter. I cued up “Green Grass” by Tom Waits, followed by Madeleine Peyroux’s “The Way of All Things” and ending with Xavier Rudd’s “Full Circle.” In all cases, the Blue Moon Digital cable provided more definition and impact, greater listening ease and the impression that the music lasted a little longer than usual. This latter phenomenon is, in my view, a clear indicator that we are a step closer to reality. I’ve experienced it with Naim’s SuperLumina interconnect cable, but never before with a digital cable. I attribute this effect to an increased definition, so a greater density of information perceived by the ear-brain system. At the same time, there is a decrease in background noise, all leading to a real increase in listening ease. As proof, I could listen through the difficult eight-minute mark in Xavier Rudd’s “Full Circle,” where he really lets fly on his twelve-string electric guitar. There was no need to lower the volume here, which is unusual for this extract. There was also an impression of enhanced vividness, better defining instruments and voices in their respective areas of the soundstage. Even when listening at low volume, music managed to sound more interesting, another good indicator. From a musical point of view, this cable establishes a new reference point for me. Any downsides? The strain relief casings on the cable ends are longer than normal, requiring greater clearance behind components (5 to 6 inches) so that a sharp curve is not imposed on the cable.

### RED MOON USB DIGITAL CABLE (1M/\$995)

The Red Moon cable also uses the “Multiple Shield Dampening System” technology described above, with the conductors arranged in the “Multiple Tunnelling Technology” configuration. The Red Moon cable has a passive circuit (CleanPro system) with three filters in a “Pi” configuration (Pi filter). One filter is designed to reduce noise in the 0 to 100 kHz bandwidth, a second act on radio-frequency waves up to 300 MHz, whilst a third manages frequencies above 300 Mhz. According to Daniel Robidoux, the passive circuit acts to reduce the noise floor by 80 dB at 600 MHz. The connectors appear well made and are gold plated.

I installed the Red Moon cable between a MacBook Pro and the USB socket of the Creek Evolution 100CD DAC/CD player. With Audirvana Plus software as music source playing 44.1 kHz/16 bit WAV files, listening began with the Grande Symphonie en mi bémol majeur by François Joseph Gossec (Guy Van Waas and Les Agremens). Here, as with the Blue Moon S/PDIF digital cable, there was a clear gain in listening ease and an increased vividness to instruments. The violins stood out, beautifully balanced and considerably closer to what I hear at concerts. Listening to this work, I was struck by the impression of being at one of the baroque concerts I regularly attend



at Bourgie Hall in Montreal. The tension, power and impression of the musicians’ physical presence were all substantially enhanced.

A side trip to the Tidal streaming service, now integrated into the Audirvana software, allowed me to reconnect with Emerson Lake & Palmer’s epic work “Lucky Man.” The Moog synthesizer solo that ends the track transported me to 1970, the first time I heard this music. Here, the contrast and novelty of the synthesizer sound (it was one of the first uses of the Moog) surprised as much as it did all those years ago; the goosebumps were back! I continued with a Tidal playlist of Paul Simon’s music. Pure joy! The sound quality of Tidal in CD mode is frankly astonishing, despite

the occasional breaks, but this is not the fault of the cable. I also assessed the Red Moon cable, using it between the MacBook Pro and the Resonance Mirus Labs converter, with the same findings as to its musical qualities.

In summary, this cable successfully transformed my MacBook Pro into a completely captivating source, if the duration of the listening sessions are any indication: two hours with no aural fatigue. The key strength of this cable is its ability to focus attention on the music, as opposed to the sound.

### BLUE MOON INTERCONNECT CABLES (1M/\$1,095)

Employing the identical MSDS damping system and the multiple tunnelling conductor arrangement, the Blue Moon Inter cable uses 99.99% oxygen-free copper conductors. Here again, the objective is to cancel external electromagnetic influences and vibration. The cables are terminated with Cardas silver-plated connectors.

Once installed between the Naim converter and the Naim SuperNait2 integrated amplifier, listening began with Sandy Denny's "Who Knows Where the Time Goes" from her album *I've Always Kept A Unicorn*. The Blue Moon cables delivered excellent lateral dispersion of the sound stage and a slight warmth to the presentation. Sandy Denny's voice gained in smoothness along with her guitar, but with a truncation of note attacks, compared to my reference cables. There was less a sense of the physical presence of the musician, the cables showing a little less of how Denny was playing her guitar. In return though, the sweetening provided by these cables helped out greatly during some of the most strident passages of this recording. Continuing with the gruff voice of Fred Neil and the track "Send Me Someone to Love" (on the Sessions album), the bass that opens the track was solid and warm; Fred Neil's voice enters from the left, well positioned in space, but missing some of its rough edges. Listening was easy and satisfactory despite the slight loss of micro-inflections in his voice. Moving on to the baroque and the cello virtuoso Anne Gastinel, Bach's "Suite for solo cello in D minor, BWV 1008 - Allemande" also gained in smoothness; following the musical discourse was easy despite the less vivid image. Tested with several other types of music and at different times during the review period, the findings remained the same: these cables provide gains in sweetness and warmth, but with a slight decrease in vividness.

### RED MOON SHADOW SPEAKER CABLES (2.5M/\$1,495)

For the Red Moon Shadow speaker cables, **DR Acoustics** employs a unique application of the MTA technology, using silver-plated, 99.99% oxygen-free copper conductors, each carrying part of the signal, recombined at the cable ends. According to DR Acoustics, the combined conductors are equivalent to a 10 AWG gauge wire. The MSDS technology is also leveraged here to counter vibration and electromagnetic interference. Terminations here are the 9 mm banana-style connectors made by Acrolink, with rhodium plating and a carbon fibre barrel.

Listening began in CD mode with the track "A Desalambra" from the compilation of Cuban music *Che Guevara : Chansons Révolutionnaires Latino-américaines*. The Red Moon Shadow cables gave the impression that the volume was slightly higher, bringing more presence and vividness to the bongos that drive the tempo of this track. It was the same with the enchanting "Nada Mas" from this album, here sounding clearer and stronger. My focus had shifted though to the sound instead of the music, due to the increased vividness. At first listening, this increase in vividness seemed like a slight exaggeration, much like enhanced contrast on a video display, with a consequent loss of subtlety. But I had fallen into a trap, because in my experience a sonic change will usually draw attention to itself and away from the music, but the effect is temporary. On returning to the same tracks the next day, now accustomed to the new sound, my





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focus was back on the music. Listening again to the same musical extracts, I found as much detail as I could ask for, along with subtlety and that feeling that the music stretches out in time. Turning to the track “Cobalt” by the Norwegian composer Øystein Sevåg (on the Bridge album), I was simply overwhelmed by the beauty and power of this ethereal music, the tension and emotion fully conveyed. To test the spatial capabilities of the cables, I cued up Edgar Bori’s *Dans ce monde poutt-poutt*, simply because Bori is a master at

creating 3D sound spaces. In the eponymous track, the Red Moon Shadows bring a better definition in the lateral plane: it is almost possible to see the horizontal movement of the xylophone notes that open the track. The cymbals and brush work gain in realism, less imbued with the metal edge that can sometimes be exaggerated. On the track “Les lundis” Bori teases the listener while moving in a virtual circle created by playing with the phase and timbre of the sound. With the Red Moon Shadow cables, the depth of field is such that his voice passed right behind my head; the effect is very successful. Listening continued with Greg Howard, a master of the Chapman stick, a hybrid derivative of the guitar with eight, ten or twelve strings separated into a melodic part and a bass part. The bass notes that open the “Ojos Verdes” track were rendered with great body and definition; I could almost feel the physical presence of the musician. The image was larger, with gains in treble accuracy. Listening was, in a word, easy. In summary, the Red Moon Shadows are superbly well balanced tonally, as no part of the sound spectrum is artificially highlighted. Allied to their high spatial ability, these cables transmit music intact and really do a good job of bringing the listener closer to reality.

## CONCLUSIONS

The importance of controlling vibration and electromagnetic interference in high-fidelity audio equipment is well understood by many manufacturers. Expose a digital-to-analogue converter, a preamplifier or an amplifier to vibration and you’ll generate resonances of components within these devices. These resonances will colour the music signal through microphonic or electrical effects on transistors, tubes, capacitors and other components, with a resultant blurring of the musical message. It’s no surprise that well-designed audio support furniture and accessories can provide important musical gains.

As for cables, the electrical lifelines between our high-fidelity components, few manufacturers address the issue of vibrations. And yet, cables can also act as very good conduits for transmitting vibration. It is good to see companies like **DR Acoustics** address this problem, as it is far better to prevent the injection of vibrations at their source than to try to treat them once transmitted into a component.

Among the cables reviewed here, the Blue Moon Interconnect cables are well worth a listen if you’re looking for a little more softness and warmth in your music, but at the cost of a slight loss of vividness. Both of the digital cables (the Blue Moon S/PDIF now gracing my system) and the Red Moon USB, along with the Red Moon Shadow speaker cables, set themselves apart by their ability to significantly reduce the gap between reproduced music and reality. For that, they are worthy of a strong recommendation. Note also that DR Acoustics offer a 30-day money back trial period, a nice touch and one that shows their degree of confidence in their products.