

There will always be those who doubt ability to assess and differentiate audio devices by listening to them in controlled environment and comparing them with others. That's human nature – many people won't believe something until they have touched it themselves. But comparing different audio devices is a very good way to assess them. One should listen, compare and draw one's own conclusions – that's what our hobby is about, that's the best way to go about it.



So one might think that it should be a natural approach for sound and audio engineers, too. After all all of them create products (music or devices to reproduce it) to be used by people in their homes. But as it turns out it is mostly a wishful thinking, that has almost nothing to do with a real world. I've been receiving many emails from either engineers or future engineers that prove beyond doubt that these experiments (listening and comparing) are never performed by them, even talking about it makes some of them anxious. Basing on a knowledge from their books they negate a precision of such comparisons, and claim that the only way to assess audio device is to measure several parameters.

The whole history of science, also its electric and electronic branches shows, that very often it was an experiment that led to formulating some theory and later adjusting it if needed. Such experiments were repeated many times and if the results were not consistent with theory, it was either rejected or modified. This method always drove progress. It happens that some engineers who write us at „High Fidelity” are able to accept my point of view and allow experimenting, but they believe that results of these experiments are pre-determined as they must confirm their knowledge and their experience. The assumption that man's hearing is a very special tool that can be used to access sound is, for them, unacceptable.

Hopefully one or two of them might be convinced by the results of recent research described in „Scientific American” by Robert Cowen. A Polish version was printed in article called *Dane do sluchania* published in April's edition of „Swiat Nauki” (s. 51-53). This article started with a bolded text in a frame that said:

Ears are such terrific pattern finders that scientists are using audio data to detect cancer cells and particles from space.

As it turns out hearing is one of the most precise human senses because, according to Bechara Saab, a neurologist from Zentrum für Neurowissenschaften Zürich, when it comes to mammals signals from ears reach brain faster than perceived by any other sense, and our hearing is supported by, so called, Calyx of Held which is a particularly large synapse in the mammalian auditory central nervous system.

This confirms what many audiophiles already knew very well – listening session might deliver very precise data, that, if correctly interpreted, allow a very accurate assessment. If it could be done by taking measurements it would be perfect obviously. It would allow to eliminate a „human factor”, or, above mentioned, interpretation, or personal predilection. Unfortunately there are still many issues in audio that are still not properly explained nor understood, many things can not be measured, and even if they are measured we don't really know how to correlate results and how to interpret them.

Thus many audio products are still assessed using listening sessions. There is no better example of the conflict between common knowledge and what audiophiles learned through experience, than assessment of power cables. A common consensus that power cable is the most important one in the system, because it delivers current for speakers (signal from a source is just a „pattern” that modulates current and voltage from power outlet) does not really translate into appreciation of its role. And my experience proves that power cables can change sound of the whole system in the most incredible way.

Recent years brought a fast evolution of this branch of audio industry. More and more companies realize how important are power cables in shaping the performance of their products, so companies that design and manufacture such cables offer more and more refined models. Even such hardliner engineers working for companies manufacturing interconnects and speaker cables (like Chord for example) started to appreciate the role of power cords and today they are even convinced that PCs are key to the top performance of audio systems/elements.

As a result of this shift of attitude more and more money are spent for development of more refined power cords. I've been using Japanese Acrolink cables for years. This company makes cables for hospitals, army and even NASA. Each time new top model is released it replaces the one I've been using so far. Today I use 3 Mexcel 7N-PC9500, that replaced previous model called Mexcel 7N-PC9300. For the past 6 months I've been using also very expensive, top model from Crystal Cable, called Absolute Dream. It is made of silver and gold.

These four are not the only power cables in my system. I use also a few Oyaide products from the new Triple-C FM (more about this technology [HERE](#)) line, and for quite some time I've been using also another cable from Japan, made by Mr Kazuo Kiuchi's company Harmonix – *X-DC350M2R Improved-Version*. It looks like a cord for some household appliance, but it is a very special product. I bet you know about Mr Kiuchi, but in case you don't have a look at the review of his another product, a D/A converter *DAP-999EX Limited* released by his another brand, Reimyo. In this text you will find some basing information about this man and his idea for an accurate sound. You will learn that Mr Kazuo, who is one of the greatest masters of Kendo, a Japanese martial art, is also a co-owner of XRCD patent – a breakthrough technology that allowed Compact Disc, for the first time in history, to offer sound quality similar to the one of vinyl record. Kiuchi-san is also a producer of many XRCD24, including the whole series of Hi-Q Records. The whole process of creating XRCDs is divided into few steps, from A/D conversion, signal digital filtering (K2, and nowadays K2HD), and pressing of the discs. All the devices used in every of these steps uses Harmonix cables. Celebrating company's 20th anniversary Mr Kazuo Kiuchi prepared a limited edition of cables called „Million”.



SOUND

Recordings used during test (a selection):

- Art Tatum, *Piano Starts Here*, Columbia/Sony Classical 97 22218 2, „Zenph Re-Performance”, SACD/CD (2008).
- Diana Krall, *All for You*, Impulse!/JVC 532 360-9, XRCD24 (1996/2010).
- Grateful Dead, *The Best of Grateful Dead*, Rhino 2795598, 2 x HDCD (2015).
- Jack de Johnette & Foday Musa Suso, *Music From The Hearts Of The Masters*, Golden Beam Productions GBP1112, CD (2005).
- John Foxx, *The Virgin Years 1980-1985*, Metamatic Records METAS2BX, 5x CD (2014).
- Krzysztof Komeda, *Ballet Etudes/The Music of Komeda*, Metronome/Be! Jazz Records, BE! JAZZ 6087 CD, CD (1964/2014).
- Nat „King” Cole, *Penthouse Serenade*, Capitol Jazz/EMI 94504, „Super Bit Mapping” CD (1952/1998).
- Ornette Coleman, *The Shape of Jazz to Come*, Atlantic Records/ORG Music ORGM-1081, SACD/CD (1959/2013).
- The Montgomery Brothers, *Groove Yard*, Riverside/JVC, JVCXR-0018-2, XRCD (1961/1994).

Japanese issues available at [cojapan](#)

The X-DC SP Million Maestro cable belongs to the top line of Mr Kiuchi's products. A year ago it seemed that it would never come to Poland – that's one of the most expensive cables in the world, a limited, handcrafted edition. Polish market must have been developing and „maturing” really quickly recently as more and more most expensive audio product are now available here, some of them even premiered in our country. That's what happened with interconnect (currently under review), also Ayon's S-5 [HERE](#) player working in DSD-direct mode premiered in Poland (see [HERE](#)). The most compelling example was priced at 135 000 GPB British amplifier, Naim Statement (review for „EnjoyTheMusic.com” [HERE](#), and „High Fidelity” [HERE](#)) as we conducted the very first review, way before any other audio magazine in the world. Mr Kiuchi's cable finds itself in a particularly noble company.

What is really important is a broader context. As I already mentioned, I am a great fan of Acrolink products, I also have a high regard for Crystal Cable brand. I know, like and use their top models in my reference system. What's more, each time I have to replace one of these elements that I feel so connected to, I feel frustrated and irritated. These cables play a double role: they are tools that I used in my everyday work, but they are also an important element of my life that revolves around music. So when comparing other cables to them I need to take into consideration how used I am to particular properties of my favorite cords (I mean both – their pros and cons).

When I started to listen to the new Harmonix I soon found out that in this particular case the above mentioned resonance was not needed. It offered clearly different sound than any Acrolink or Crystal Cable I compared it to. The key difference was the richness of the sound. It took me quite a while to conclude that the difference was most significant in the lower midrange that sounded much richer.

The improvement was significant in both, qualitative and quantitative sense. For me the scale of improvement was quite shocking, although I think that those less experienced with top-high-end products might not appreciate this improvement fully. I don't mean to discriminate anybody, but in every perfectionist area democracy and equality lead to nowhere. Anybody an express an opinion, but it doesn't mean that each opinion will have the same value. When it comes to high-end the key to understanding it is learning through experience. For those who know what is really good, Harmonix performance will come as a shock.



Anyway, with Mr Kiuchi's cable in the system music seems to sound more serious, more natural. System seems more resolving, but it is not achieved via more distinctive presentation of details but rather by delivering more information on these details than I heard before with Acrolink cable. Another element is particularly energetic upper bass. Same compositions played with Crystal and Acrolink, when later played with Harmonix seems to be reborn, the sound starts to energize the whole room.

Switching to Harmonix does not increase volume. If anything I would say that with „Million” sound level seemed even bit lower. Why? Because of increased dynamics, with it one can play louder without a feeling of going too far. I guess each of us have such a volume level that when crossed causes irritation. It will differ for every system, every room, even every recording and every listener. With Harmonix it will surely move up the scale. It's like one opens to the whole new range of sounds previously masked, causing noise. Now the same sound will be presented in an orderly way, well differentiated and thus there will be more music in music.

Since the effect I described, i.e. richness of the lower midrange (tonal richness), change of its energy level (dynamics and power) is so significant one might think it would cause system to sound darker than with Acrolink, or even with Crystal, that is remarkably smooth power cord. But one might think that only for a few seconds as the treble is more open, density of cymbals' tones is increased, one gets much information in this part of the range. In direct comparison 7N-PC9500 seemed more dull! And it is still a remarkable cord – nothing could change its class, but head-to-head comparison is everything in audio, it will always clearly prove that no matter how good particular product is a better performance is always possible. One has to pay triple the price for that, but it is achievable.

Everything about Harmonix performance seems well thought through, refined, neat. With it sound become more dynamic, more immediate and yet it also seems richer and bigger in scale. The latter causes a perspective that listener observes music from to change a bit. A direct head-to-head comparison between Mexcel 7N-PC9300 and Mexcel 7N-PC9500, that took place during the 90th Cracow Sonic Society meeting lead to replacement of all older cables with newer model in Janusz (the host of the meeting) system, and later also in mine (see [HERE](#)). The older model seemed, in comparison, brighter, harsher, and lacking incredible depth of its successor. Harmonix „Million” bring similar changes as „9500” brought then, but without lowering overall tonal balance.

All acoustic recording and vocals sounded incredibly well. But this is not a perfect all-rounder. I could understand fans of rock, or powerful electronic music who would rather choose one of Acrolinks (most likely the Mexcel 7N-PC9300), or one of top Furutech models for their systems. Harmonix is capable of extracting lots of information from mids and upper bass range that other cables rather mask. I believe that these are mostly issues that were not removed from the recording because sound and mastering engineers did not realize where there. Sometimes it is about prolonging certain sounds, about more chaotic presentation, or vagueness of the sound. Other cables filter these elements out, but Harmonix will show them all. I don't mind it at all, as the music still sound better than ever, but less experienced listeners might find such presentation controversial.

Summary

Absolutely amazingly wonderful sound. I have no idea why or how power cables are able to cause such a dramatic changes in system's performance. But I hear what I hear, so yes, they do. Harmonix delivered even more beautiful music to my ears. And music is exactly what this audio hobby is about, isn't it? It is one of the most expensive, or maybe even the most expensive power cables in the world. But I have no doubt – it is also the best one.



GOLD Fingerprint is awarded by „High Fidelity” to the most remarkable audio products. It is our way of recognizing a product and its creator – in this way we pay tribute to the his work, sometimes to his lifetime achievements. Kiuchi-san deserves this award like no one else. He could have, as well, received it for his D/A converter with K2 processor, anti-vibration elements from „Million” line, or his XRCDs.

Power cable Harmonix X-DC20SM „Million” Maestro might be his top achievement, a great summary of this great artist's life's work. It simply performs better than any other power cable we've listened to so far, it allows music to live, and makes us crave for more and more. That is exactly what our hobby is about.

TESTING METHODOLOGY

The cable under review was compared to the reference cables in a series of A/B/A comparison, with reference cables as „B”. I used three different cables for comparisons: Acrolink Mexcel 7N-PC9500 (2 m), Crystal Cable Absolute Dream (1,5 m) and Harmonix X-DC350M2R Improved-Version (2 m). All were plugged into the same power strip, Acoustic Revive RTP-4eu Ultimate, and the power strip was connected with Furutech outlet using 2,5m long Acrolink Mexcel 7N-PC9500. My system is powered from a separate power line using Oyaide Tunami cable.

I divided listening sessions into two main part. During one I used Harmonix with my Ancient Audio Lektor AIR V-edition CD Player and with RCM Audio Sensor Prelude IC phono stage (combined with TechDAS Air Force Two and Miyajima Laboratory Madake). During second part Million powered my Soudation 710 power amplifier.

I also spent a lot of time with a minimalist system with Ancient Audio CD Player (with Harmonix) delivering signal via RCA Siltech Triple Crown interconnect to Bakoon Products International HPA-21 headphone amp that drove HIFIMAN HE-6 cans.

DESIGN

Million power cable is made by hand upon order. It's looks are impressive and quite characteristic too – once you've seen it with its yellow, red and black stripes intertwining along the whole length you'd never confused with with any other cord. To be honest when I first saw it it reminded me a power cord of my iron. It is much thicker than it uses massive, Rhodium-plated Wattgate 390i-RH Rhodium and 350i-RH Rhodium plugs. To improve their mechanical characteristics they were elongated with wooden elements. Mid-length of the cable one finds another element made of the same type of wood – Mr Kiuchi uses this solution for all his cables. This cord is available in two lengths: 1,5 and 2 m, using slightly different symbols (respectively): X-DC15SM and X-DC20SM.



The wire material is the purest, directional PCCOC. The oxygen-free Pure Copper by Ohno Continuous Casting is a very special kind of copper. It is a single-crystal copper cable that is continuously cast (not cold-extruded) and then slow-cooled over time to give it an optimal dense conductive structure in process called after its inventor, professor Ohno-san. Then this cable goes to Mr Kiuchi's company Combak, where it is handcrafted to ensure that the density of a crystal core is not subjected to the enormous stress that is characteristic for machine processing. Mr Kiuchi claims that it takes up to 80 hours for one technician before 1 piece of power cable is ready. This type of material and a handcraft are both extremely costly in Japan.