

Harmonix HS-101 Improved S & CS-120 Improved Version

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Harmonix it is a brand owned by a Japanese concern named Combak Corporation, under the aegis of which many types of audio devices and many various accessories are made. The company is responsible for high-end Reimyo electronics, Bravo monitors, Enacom filters and a whole bunch of gadgets. In the catalogue one can find many different kinds of cable insulators, anti-vibrational platforms and feet, tapes improving the sound of cables, turntable mats and even special rings boosting the acoustics of the listening room. Prices which unambiguously suggest that Japanese accessories are designed for advanced in their disease audiophiles add piquancy to the matter. For example, turntable mat Tu-800Exi costs £269, but it is nothing compared with the above mentioned room tunings discs RFA-7800 which set (18 pieces) was priced at £1479. Compared with such products the price of the cables sound quite reasonable.

To make things even more interesting Harmonix has recently introduced improved versions of some cables and on that occasion has cut down the prices. The Japanese wanted to bring their cables closer to the wider circle of customers, so that they were perceived not only as high-end toys for the most affluent music lovers. Is really that special offer worth taking advantage?



Design and functionality

If you want to buy cables to impress your friends, Harmonix is a wrong choice. We got the Japanese set in the most common, cardboard boxes. Furthermore, the cables themselves look fairly inconspicuous. They have no colourful braids, thick snakes or transparent bands. Honestly speaking, they look somewhat like an iron lead cable or middle class HDMI cables which can be bought at a supermarket. Maybe I exaggerate a little, but if Harmonix has been making a career in the world of high-end audio, it is certainly not caused by their looks. Ideal cables for audiophiles who have to hide their expenses from the family. Only thick gold-plated plugs attract attention in HS-101 Improved S interconnect. Usually I am not very keen on such inventions but in that case the plugs turn out to be quite convenient to use. While connecting one must take notice of arrows informing about the correct direction. CS-120 improved Version looks even more modestly. Single strands enclosed by a protective braid, divide into two more flexible at the endings. They were marked with arrows showing the direction of the connection and spades without any decorative sleeves, plastic covers and other inventions. As far as I know it is the only available type of the cable end. It forced me to test the Japanese cables with an amplifier that does not usually work in the reference system I'm using. I am not able to connect forks to the Naim power amplifier so I had to use all-in-one T+A Music Receiver. To make the listening test more reliable, for comparison, I had to utilise all available cables in our editorial office. Details can be found in the test configuration.



Sound performance

Audio equipment and accessories can be divided into three groups. First are the products geared towards a model neutrality. How they cope with this task, is a different matter. The sound of the second group aims for a specific direction. It can for example be clear and dynamic or warm and dimmed. Basically, it must have unique characteristics. It is usually a more risky choice, though in the right setup giving more pleasure. Third group are the products that blend both worlds, mixing the opposites, sounding neutrally and characteristically as well. Warm but not muddy. Clear but not aggressive. Universal but not boring.

Finding such gear is difficult but not impossible and it does not always mean a search in the highest price range. For me, Electrocompaniet ECI-5 MkII can be a model product from the third group but I would have also include in it Pylon Audio Topaz 20 loudspeakers. The described cables belong for sure to this elite company. Last time I heard something similar when I placed Fadel Aphrodite series cables in my reference system. On the one hand we have brilliant dynamics and detail, and on the other - more peace and warm timbre in music. Cables which can deliver more details and by the way make the sound more compact and elegant are a real rarity.

When I write about products that bring us closer to the true picture of music, usually it is connected with a certain sharpening, cooling down or accumulation of details, but in a long run it is not always pleasant. In some cases audiophile sense of realism verges on masochism. In my life I have met many people who have been looking for a gear playing as ugly as possible, bringing the worst out of the recordings. I means that the sound is true, according to them. The Japanese cables show that the realistic sound can be fun, pleasant and captivating at the same time. Nobody goes to the concert because instruments sound ugly.



Build quality and technical parameters

The Japanese are crazy about resonances, what can be proved by the number of anti-vibration accessories available in the Harmonix catalogue. To find out more about this phenomenon they examined the sound of the best violins, measuring vibrations at different points. As it turned out, the sound was tuned to one frequency, regardless of the place of measurement. Apparently it let the designers to control audio equipments' harmonic resonances. What does it mean and in what way does it translate into the internal build of the cables? Unfortunately I do not know answers to these questions and I am not going to decide if the violin measuring stories have any meaning or not. According to manufacturer's data, high quality copper PCOCC is the conductor in HS-101 Improved S. Plugs were made of the same material and covered with rhodium (relevant contact elements) and gold (outer chassis and screw). In the speaker cable specification one can find only flowery descriptions of their sound properties. It is known that plugs were made of copper covered with the double layer of gold and rhodium. The sets of 1 to 3 meters of length are

available.



System configuration

Divine Acoustics Proxima, Naim CD5 XS, T+A E-Serie Music Receiver, Enerr Tablette 6S, Gigawatt LC-2 mkII, Audioquest NRG-2, Ostoja T1, AriniAudio Individual, Sevenrods ROD4, Equilibrium String, Albedo Geo, Argentum Sw-0,5/1, KBL Sound Hologram.



Verdict

I do not know if the secret of our Japanese cables lies in the resonance measurements, pure copper or good plugs but the result speaks for itself. HS-101 Improved S and CS-120 Improved Version is an offer not only for sophisticated audiophiles, who know that such combination of the opposites is real art, but also for sound lovers who want to find themselves closer to their favourite music and enjoy it at the same time.

Technical data

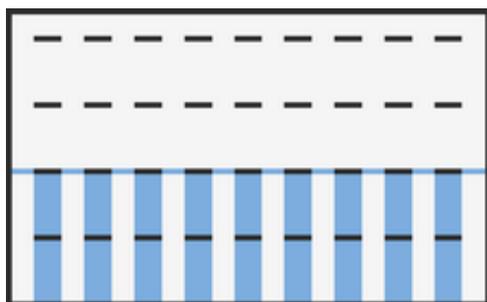
Cable Type: analogue interconnect, speaker cable

Available connectors: RCA, spades

Conductor: PCOCC

Prices: £699 (1 m interconnect), £679 (2 x 2,5 m speaker cable)

Tonal balance



Dynamics



Resolution



Sound temperature



Quickness



Coherence



Musicality



Soundstage width



Soundstage depth



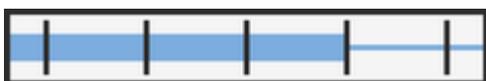
Build quality



Functionality



Price/performance ratio



Gallery

