

x-perience

Harmonix X-DC2 and Studio Master

Price: 550 and 1060 euros

by Michael Vrzal, Photos: Rolf Winter

The enchanting hour. A good red wine slips gently into the carafe. Pine logs on the open hearth collapse into red embers. Listening to music with Harmonix.

To put it simply, we are only concerned with just one signal: 50 hertz, 230 volts. It's rarely more than a meter from the outlet to the device. What's left to get after all those meters – no, kilometers – through the air, through the ground and through the walls? The plugs are entitled to have a certain effect on the acoustics – crimping, soldering and welding all result in understandably different material transitions. Then all you need is to increase the contact forces to keep transfer resistance low and the power cable is finished.

Wrong. Every little piece of wire is simultaneously an antenna. It sends and receives, and has capacitance, induction and impedance. Power cables have an easy job in contrast to NF cables, which are passive electrical components linking between the transmitting and receiving stages; and speaker cables, which actually need to be custom calibrated based on the muffling of the amplifiers and the impedance of the speakers. This too has to be done properly. And properly means above all: clean.

Virgil Warren, the head of sales for Germany, said: “Harmonix power cables are probably the cleanest power cords in the world.” Stray effects and self-generated interference are demonstrably far below those of the competition. “Well look what we've got here: measuring technology à la Harmonix, the makers of those coin-sized room tuners” – is what the laboratory-fixated moaner would say, who has always been suspicious of those Japanese accessories, which, though scarcely documented from a technical aspect, still earn overwhelming renown.

Nevertheless, those voluminous X-DC2 and Studio Master power cables don't make things any easier. Still we understand that copper of the highest purity is used and that the two cables are in fact insulated, but not co-axial. The plugs are from Furutech, although for a hefty surcharge of 100 euros the Rolls-Royce of power connectors from Wattgate is also available. Since soldered connections are frowned upon, all the connections are crimped. Harmonix remains silent about the exact nature of what is explicitly advertised as the “tuning” feature bestowed upon the cables during their manufacture – what they probably mean that it acts less like a spoiler for the acoustics than providing a harmonic balance among all the components that make up the cable. The lack of interference from the power supply that the cable ensures is supposed to have a positive effect on the life of the connected equipment. No electro-stress, no power-unit cardiac arrest, so to speak. In effect it is said that the longer the supplied device and the cable are used together, the greater the symbiosis between them.

The Harmonix power cable does without any sort of filtering provided by electrical components or material additives such as ferrite. They simply transport power from point A to point B. This is what makes the top model Studio Master so good that it is a part of the Japanese JVC mastering studio's equipment. In short, a professional tool – apparently Harmonix is finally wants to get out of the freaks' corner. Commendable.

In terms of sound, X-DC2 and Studio Master are among the most subtle that I have ever come across. At first it seems that nothing changes with them. So just sit back and wait and let the music play – this is no place for hectic plug changers.

After a while your musical subconscious reacts: It sounds so pleasantly unobtrusive. How did that happen? Oh, that's right. We've got a new power cable. Wonderful.

Later, other observations follow: The sound image has moved a little bit to the back. This increased space has a positive effect on the outline of the events taking place on the virtual stage. And aren't the musicians playing with a little more passion and the melodies not smoother? Most interesting.

Once again a piano recording is the most revealing. This time it's the Sony recording of Bach's *Goldberg Variations* with Murray Perahia. For me, the lyrical microcosm of a cleanly captured piano sound from the moment the hammer hits the string until the last trace of reverberation is, as they so wryly say, the litmus test of hi-fi components – and one that also works for the Harmonix cables.

For this cable I would introduce a category called "red-wine cable". Every sound is not only clean, defined and crystal clear, but is enveloped by a sort of acoustic aura that can only be inadequately described by such simple terms as "reverb" or "spatial dimension". Everything has to be on the sound storage medium – a cable is, after all, not a processor of effects. This is why I hesitate to talk about a sound effect. I would rather speak of the Harmonix as the master of embedding. And of pleasure. Sensually charged, not unlike a superb tube amplifier, the piano recording becomes tireless source of enjoyment.

Let me finish with a word of caution. The better the system, the more beneficial the effect of this Japanese cable. Investing in the X-DC2 and Studio Master is to dot the "i" of what should already be a meticulously operating high-end system of the finest caliber. It is senseless, not to mention totally wrong, to want to raise a basic set of components into musical heaven with the help of a cable. However for the perfectionist, those auricular Harmonix products are certainly worth sinning for.

| Test System Components | |
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| CD Player: | Meridian 508/24 |
| Integrated Amp: | Symphonic Line Klarheit 1 |
| Pre-Amp: | Naim NAC 82 NAC 202/NAPSC |
| Power Amp: | Naim NAP 180, NAP 200 |
| Speakers: | Wilson Benesch Curve, Dynaudio Crafft |
| Cables: | HMS, Purist Audio, Audioquest, OCOS, Naim, Chord |
| Accessories: | HiFi products "Das Regal", System Audio FS2K |

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| What we liked: | The lack of any tonal artificiality |
| What was missing: | A more bendable design |
| What surprised us: | That there is such a thing as aristocrats among power cables |
| What to do: | Try it out thoroughly at home |

| image infos | |
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| Power Cables Harmonix X-DC2 and Studio Master | |
| Warranty: | 24 months |
| Prices: | 550 euros (X-DC2), 1060 euros (Studio Master) Surcharge for Wattgate power plug: 100 euros |
| Warren Quality Systems Am Katzensteg 7 55578 Wallertheim Telephone: +49 (0)6732/936961 www.combak.net/de | |