

Nordost Odin 2 Interconnect and Speaker Cable Supreme Reference Range

Mighty!

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At a recent Rocky Mountain Audio Fest, one of the most compelling demos that I heard was conducted by the Nordost cable company. Its representatives played a VPI turntable with stock tonearm versus one wired with Nordost cable.

Sitting in the row in front of me was one Andre Jennings of TAS, a turntable expert if there was ever one. As I recall, he along with just about every person in the room, shook his head at the difference between the standard cable and the Nordost. It wasn't even close. Now, if you're an especially stubborn type, you might dismiss that demonstration as a one-off. But Nordost's new flagship Odin 2 cable was also featured in not a few other rooms at RMAF and most of them sounded quite enticing—enticing enough for me to covet the opportunity to give them a run in my own system.

My curiosity was piqued not simply because of these demos or because I'm somehow a great fan of Norse lore (company tradition seems to dictate that Nordost name its cables after legendary Nordic heroes, with Odin being at the top of the heap). It was also prompted by Nordost's announcement of several significant technical advances in the construction of Odin 2. The company has changed and improved terminations for both its interconnects and speaker cables. The interconnects, Nordost reports, consist of ten silver-plated, 23 AWG 99.999999% OFC conductors, each utilizing proprietary dual monofilament technology and precise FEP extrusion. Odin 2 also features a patented, low-mass plug called the HOLO:PLUG. Nordost has also added more conductors to the speaker cables and one black and one white strip that are supposed to help suppress untoward resonances.

Apart from these technical advances, it's also the case that I was also curious about the sonic evolution of the Odin because of my familiarity with the company's earlier efforts. When I was an audio newbie, I used a combination of the Nordost SPM speaker cable and Valhalla cable. Then, about two years later, I reviewed Nordost's Valhalla 2 cable, which I felt in some ways exceeded the performance of the Odin cable. Now that Nordost was debuting an Odin 2, I felt more than a pinch of excitement about its prospective performance.



That excitement was more than merited. The more I listened to the Odin 2, the faster it became apparent that it greatly exceeds its predecessor in every parameter of performance. While the original Odin was a very fast and resolving cable, it continued to suffer from a slight thinness of sound—a tincture of bleaching in the treble. This is precisely where the Odin 2 offered a very different presentation. The startling amounts of inner detail and nuance that Odin 2 reproduces almost creates the feeling that a center channel has been added to a two-channel system.

One of the most striking attributes of the Odin 2 is its vanishingly low noise floor. When I'm driving my car, I often listen to the radio. If it's summer and the air conditioning is on, I like to play around with the settings. I

would liken the almost invisible scrim of noise that accompanies most playback to an air-conditioning system that you forget about for awhile. Realize air con is on, turn the setting lower, and the music emanating from your radio suddenly seems louder. Something similar occurs, I think, when you lower the noise floor in your audio system with a better preamp or cables. Odin 2 does this in spades. With the Odin 2, the notes seem to leap out of the loudspeakers with the tiniest, low-level details excavated with remarkable fidelity. On one of my go-to recordings, Beethoven's piano trio's played on the Harmonia Mundi label by Alexander Melnikov, Isabelle Faust, and Jean-Guihen Queyras, the Odin 2 played a vital role in bringing their magnificent performance to life. It did this by allowing the mi-

Equipment Report Nordost Odin 2

Specs & Pricing

Price: Odin 2 speaker cable, \$29,999/1m pr. (additional half-meter increments, \$3999/pr.); Odin 2 analog interconnect, \$19,999.99/0.6m pair (additional half-meter increments \$2499/pr.); Odin 2 power cord: \$16,999/1.25m

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cro-details of a bow scraping the string, the sense of touch on the keys of the 1828 Alois Graff fortepiano, to emerge with exquisite fidelity. You can almost visualize the descending thirds in the second movement of Trio No. 6 as Melnikov's hands cascade down the keyboard. At the same time, the Odin 2, because of the blackness of the backgrounds, provides a startling sense of dynamics. A *fortissimo*, preceded either by a pause or *pianissimo* passage, appears, more often than not, to emerge from nowhere. The ability of the Odin to convey the percussive effects of a piano may be unrivaled, partly because of the transient speed. All of this adds up to a sum of the parts being larger than the whole. The fact is that the longer I listen, the more I'm convinced that it cannot be sufficiently emphasized that micro-detail, particularly on classical or jazz music, is at the heart of creating a convincing simulacrum of an original performance. Then there is the sheer

speed of the Odin 2. Nordost cables have long been renowned for their alacrity but the Odin 2 takes transient speed to a new level. In some ways, the rapidity of the Odin 2 translates into its own form of dynamic power. The cable's ability to deliver commanding transients will leave even the most experienced listeners slack-jawed. Consider the cut "Secret Love" on the album *Love for Sale*, which features Hank Jones, Buster Williams, and Tony Williams. The opening drumroll sounds like an AK-47 is firing away in the front of my listening room. Or take the EMI LP of Shostakovich's Cello Concert No. 1 with the legendary French cellist Paul Tortelier and the Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Not only is the overall resolution off the charts with the Odin 2, but the timpani whacks sound like hand grenades exploding. You get the mallet whistling down, the impact, and then the explosion of air. Bass could hardly be more taut with the Odin 2. And it's not just that the cable possesses the ability to deliver a bullwhip quality in the nether regions. It's that the definition is also superlative. This isn't bass as a mushy, indistinct blob; on the contrary, every nuance and shading is delivered with ravishing finesse. On the opening cut "Café" on the Impulse! label's recording of the Art Blakey Quartet, Art Davis' bass plucks are perfectly enunciated and defined in space with not a hint of bloat or splashing. The sense of decay is spooky and there is simply no overhang with the Odin 2.

While it would be going too far to call it a refulgent

sound, Odin 2 endows instruments with a pleasing sense of body. A most impressive recording that I recently acquired in Los Angeles at one of the remaining vinyl stores, Record Surplus on Santa Monica Boulevard, is an EMI pressing of Benjamin Britten's Violin Concerto, which is played by Ida Haendel with the aforementioned Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra. Written in Canada in 1939, it is a deeply emotional concerto that, as the liner notes indicate, appeared "when the world was wavering on the brink of its second holocaust." The Odin 2 not only helps to set up an enormous soundstage, reaching into the corners of the hall, but also recreates the sweep of the orchestra. I had the feeling that the I was hearing not just the string section but the individual instruments that make it up, akin to the sensation of listening in a concert hall.

This precision means that the Odin 2 layers the instruments front to back, and left to right, with remarkable verisimilitude. On Chad Kassem's Analog Productions 45rpm pressing of Shelby Lynne's album *Just a Little Lovin'*, the cable helps to preserve the harmonic distinctions among instruments. The accuracy of the Odin is perhaps most notable in the treble region, where the greatest virtue of the new cable is likely its ability to soar into the empyrean. Treble appears endless. Whether it's vocals, saxophone, or the string section of an orchestra, the sense of purity and expansion in the treble adds a layer of air to the proceedings that is quite addictive. On an Erato CD compilation of popular recordings by the late French trumpeter Maurice André, I was taken aback by the extra pop and explosiveness that the Odin's ability to reach into the treble with ease imparted to his piccolo trumpet. On Offenbach's "Parisian Dream," the notes were enunciated from the bore of the trumpet with a delicacy and power that almost defied belief. Cymbals had a metallic crunch that showered into the air like a profusion of fireworks exploding on July 4th. At the same time, Odin's ability to convey the smallest swishes of cymbals was riveting.

Lest this sound like a dithyrambic paean to Nordost, I feel obliged to mention that there are pluses and minuses to the level of resolution provided by the Odin 2. For one thing, it will prove ruthlessly revealing of equipment upstream. This cable deserves to be allied with top-drawer equipment to really strut its stuff. It's also the case that some listeners may prefer a more sumptuous cable. I don't mean to imply that the Odin 2 is in any way sonically anemic. Nordost has handsomely overcome some of the deficiencies that constituted a kind of penalty for the speed of its earlier versions. It is emphatically the case that there is no hint of stridency with the Odin 2. In the crowded world of high-end cables, however, there are indubitably other competitors that will deliver more overtones around each note, a more overtly silky background and a grander bass.

In my view, Nordost deserves the highest possible commendation for building on its previous efforts to produce a statement product that is remarkable for its purity and resolution, transparency and clarity. If you get the collywobbles at the imposing prices that state-of-the-art cables command, then you look should elsewhere. But if you can shoulder the tariff, then the Odin 2 is worth every penny and more. Mighty Odin, indeed. **tgs**