



Nordost Valhalla 2 cable system

by Alan Sircom

Nordost has put a lot of faith in mechanical tuning recently. The company discovered that a cable's mechanical properties (including its physical length) are vital to its sonic performance. The results of this investigation transformed the Leif and Norse 2 lines, but wait until you hear what it does to Valhalla!

If you set aside that mechanical tuning ethos, the difference between Valhalla and Valhalla 2 are still noteworthy. The interconnects have one extra extruded FEP-wrapped conductor per side, while the thickness of the silver plating over the 7N pure oxygen-free copper conductors increases from 70 to 85 microns. Although the interconnects look

physically different to the original Valhalla, the most noticeable change is in the loudspeaker cables; with the Valhalla 2 now featuring four groups of seven 22 AWG solid core conductors in a dual mono-filament layout instead of 40 single mono-filament conductors, making the new Valhalla 2 look (and perform) more like Odin than original Valhalla. All the new cables feature the sculpted wooden resonance control blocks only hitherto seen on Odin cables in the Nordost line.

However, scratch the surface (not literally) and the biggest intellectual change between Valhalla and Valhalla 2 is the way the cables are terminated, calling on that aforementioned mechanical tuning ethos. Nordost has long been a proponent of precision termination and choosing the optimum length for ▶

▶ any given cable, but Valhalla 2 takes this to its logical extreme. The company's new Holo:Plug connectors are custom designed for the cable, using an extremely precise triple-plated termination ring for accurate grounding, and a full 360° contact termination to limit eddy currents. Nothing is left to chance.

I used a liberal scattering of Valhalla 2 (interconnects, loudspeaker, and power cords) through an equally liberal scattering of electronics devices and loudspeakers, and several things immediately come to mind. First, if there is a more elegant argument for the whole idea of using cables from the same family, I've not encountered it. Valhalla 2's presentation is at its best in the context of at least a full Nordost setting and ideally a full Valhalla 2 cable network. There's a sense of inevitability about this; you'll find yourself migrating toward the full Valhalla 2 system and pushing the other cables out to the edges of the system. It also doesn't matter where you come at this from, whether you are a 'from the power cords' proponent, a 'change one thing' advocate, or a follower of the 'changing the biggest cables makes the biggest difference' ethos; eventually you'll begin to discover

why people talk about 'looms' or 'families', and you'll begin to explore. A world of Valhalla 2 waits.

Nordost has always been about leading-edge precision, and Valhalla 2 is no exception. But where Valhalla 2 moves beyond the Nordost norm is it adds significant depth and texture to that leading edge. The un-Nordost fraternity criticises the Nordost sound as being 'all' leading edge and bright or 'etched' as a result. But, Valhalla 2 doesn't do 'etched'. It does striking, jaw-on-the-floor detail and speed, but it also brings out the grace and the architecture of the music. Put another way, the music is presented unimpeded by the technology used to reproduce the music itself.

This creates an interesting philosophical diversion. Good cables are the type that colour the sound in one of many manners, and ideally you pick the one that is most pleasing to you. Better cables strive to reduce that colouration, to leave more space to show those things the system does well. But the very best cables (in which company Valhalla 2 stands proud and tall) introduce an additional factor; they make the products they are connected to perform better, which in turn ▶



► makes them perform better together. This makes describing the sound of Nordost Valhalla 2 very difficult, because it's the sound of your system, just more so.

Electronics and loudspeakers are generally compatible with one another today, so that most of the basic aspects of system matching fall to getting the right speaker for the room and the right amplifier for the loudspeaker, and most systems tend to work tolerably well together. The more care and attention spent on installation, the better of course. But this is where Valhalla 2 comes in; 'tolerably well' is not an option when spending tens or hundreds of thousands on audio equipment, and Valhalla 2 is the glue that holds your components together, lifting their sound above the constraints of merely performing 'tolerably well'.

This can be an unnerving exercise; you find what you wanted from that original system is either not what you want today, or that your system is actually doing different things than you thought. Valhalla 2 can take the blame for unbalancing the system. Ultimately, if you hear that system before, during, and after putting V2 in place, you'll begin to realise where the system was going, and where it was going wrong. V2 simply lays bare both strengths and weaknesses.

With a well-sorted system, the crucial indicator for this is night listening. Late in the evening, when the suburban lights are dimmed and the TVs, phones, and Internet connections of the land fall silent, the quality of a good hi-fi can be fantastic. During the evening, however, that wireless hash we are all constantly exposed to permeates the system and undermines performance. Music sounds flat and a little lifeless on even the best system. Valhalla 2 redresses the balance. It's like moving to the country, building a faraday cage inside your room, and wearing your little hat made of silver foil, but without the risk of enforced medication.

Of course, all of this does make it somewhat difficult to pin the sound of Valhalla 2 down in pithy terms, because the terms are filtered through the system it is liberating. Yes, it is detail-packed, more focused, more clean, more dynamic, more precise, possessed of better inner detail, better microdynamics, and all the things that audiophiles find themselves drawn to, but more importantly it shows you what you liked about your music played through your system, in a more polished and professional presentation.

The cost of V2 is steep, but put this into perspective. I know people who have spent the cost of a fairly expensive house flailing around the high-end world, trying endless variations of amplifiers or loudspeakers or sources. All of these products go in, out, and through listeners' systems with alarming rapidity, yet without bringing lasting contentment.



TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Conductors throughout: multi-Mono-crystal silver-plated copper core, FEP dielectric. Valhalla 2 interconnects use custom Holo:Plug connectors

Prices as tested: Valhalla 2 loudspeaker cable £10,799/3m pair (additional £1,200 per 0.5m). Valhalla 2 interconnect cable £7,599/2m phono/XLR pair. Valhalla 2 power cord £4,599/2m

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They also often decry the idea of 'exotic' cables because they went through that phase long ago. If they were able to break the 'hungry ghost' cycle and give Nordost's Valhalla 2 a try with whatever pretty good system they had at the time, they'd actually find the need to churn through a dozen DACs was significantly diminished, because the system just hangs together 'right'.

I've shied away from the term 'coherent cable loom' here, but Nordost Valhalla 2 is the very model of coherence. It ties systems together in an holistic manner often sought, but rarely achieved. Short of Nordost's Odin, I can't think of anything that does this so dramatically. +