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Review Follow-Up

Siltech SQ-110 Classic Mk 2 Interconnects and LS-188 Classic Mk 2 Speaker Cables

by Marc Mickelson

Last year I wrote about two different sets of Siltech cables, both from the company's Signature series. To say that all of those cables -- Generation 6 [Forbes Lake and Eskay Creek](#) along with [Compass Lake and The Emperor](#) -- had a lot going for them would be a monumental understatement. They were the best audio cables I had heard up to that point, and they remain so today.

What's so special about Siltech Signature? The wholeness of the sonic performance. The Signature interconnects and speaker cables I reviewed managed to sound highly detailed, palpable, fast, sweet and perpetually lovely *all at once*. "Complexly satisfying and *complete*" is how I summed things up.



Siltech SQ-110 Classic Mk 2 Interconnects...

Unfortunately, such performance comes at a very steep price, up to \$9000 per meter pair of interconnects and \$26,750 for an eight-foot pair of speaker cables. *Yee-ouch!* Both sets of G6 Signature cables remain the most expensive interconnects and speaker cables I've reviewed. I mused that it would be nice to find a shoebox stuffed with \$100 bills to help defray their cost, and I asked Siltech, in only a half-joking way, to consider a leasing program. Such is the allure of Siltech Signature cables and the impediment of their prices.

Siltech's product line is very large, however, and includes the well-known Classic series. These interconnects and speaker cables use very similar silver-and-gold conductors to those in the Signature cables, but their prices are considerably lower than even the least-expensive Signature products. Earlier this year Siltech revised its Classic series, and the new Mk 2 iterations have many of the core features of Signature products, including Siltech's Dual Balanced Micro Technology: "Dual" for dual-coaxial construction, "Balanced" for two twisted coaxes, and "Micro Technology" for the use of solid-core silver-gold conductors.

The G5 conductors used in Classic Mk 2 cables address a deficiency in the structure of pure-silver (and pure-copper) conductors: a crystal structure that produces small distortions

when current flows through, which, according to Siltech, compromises signal transmission. Siltech adds 24K gold to high-purity silver to fill the gaps between crystals and thereby improve, in its words, "micro-conductivity." The difference between G5 and G6 silver-gold conductors, the latter of which are used in Siltech's latest Signature cables, is in what Siltech calls the inclusion rate: the amount of the crystal gaps that are filled with gold. The higher the inclusion rate, the lower the crystal-boundary distortions. G5 conductors have a 90% inclusion rate, while G6 conductors boast an inclusion rate of 99-100%.

In terms of geometry, Siltech believes that when conductors are at 90 degrees to each other, the magnetic field collapses. To facilitate this, Siltech winds the cable so tightly that the angle of approach between the conductors is very close to 90 degrees.

According to Siltech, all of this leads to cables for which impedance is decreased by 50%, speed is increased by over 50%, and distortion in the audio range cannot be measured. "Classic Mk2 cable is quite complex compared to previous models," said Edwin van der Kleij, president of Siltech.

For evaluation I received SQ-110 Classic Mk 2 interconnects (\$2600 per meter pair) and LS-188 Mk 2 speaker cables (\$5800 per eight-foot pair). These are the most expensive cables in Siltech's Classic line; two other interconnects and speaker cables also exist, both at lower prices. All Classic Mk 2 interconnects use WBT RCAs or Neutrik XLRs, while the speaker cables use WBT spades or bananas. WBT connectors are used for many companies' top-of-the-line cables, but Siltech's Signature cables use proprietary RCAs and spades, so the WBT parts for Classic Mk 2 are obviously used to keep prices down. All of the Classic Mk 2 cables are flexible, and their handsome looks are the equal of any cable short of Signature.

This last statement also nicely sums up the sound of Classic Mk 2 interconnects and speaker cables. What's most apparent about these new Classic Mk 2 cables is that they are able to sound full and sweet while displaying a detailed and spacious presentation -- very much like Siltech's Signature cables. Images don't lack for



...and LS-188 Classic Mk 2 Speaker Cables

body and density, but the presentation is not dark; the soundstage is open and big, but there is no hyped, zingy character that helps impart this. A deft melding of sonic ingredients defines the sound of all the Siltech cables I've heard and pushes them beyond those from other makers. They are the easiest cables I've used to simply forget about. They almost force you to do this, so utterly right is their presentation.

The piano trio is one of mankind's greatest inventions, right up there with carrot cake and wheat beer. The array of styles, in almost every instance defined by the pianists, is dizzying -- from the introspection of Bill Evans's greatest recordings to the muscular virtuosity of Oscar Peterson's trio work and the sunny interplay of Hampton Hawes during his best sessions. Leading the way among contemporary trio leaders is Brad Meldau, whose *Anything Goes* [Warner Bros. 48808-2] we named one of the best recordings of 2004. And so it is -- a musical workout that also happens to sound very good. With the Siltech Classic

Mk 2 interconnects and speaker cables in use, it was easy to concentrate on the constituent parts of the sonic presentation -- the detail and air of the soundstage, the force of the piano - - but it was their blending into a musical and intellectual whole that was most significant. As with the Signature cables, the sound of Classic Mk 2 simply made sense and discouraged analysis. It may be trite to say, but the music was primary, the sound secondary.

Where the Classic Mk 2 cables diverge from their Signature relatives is in the intensity of their effect. Signature has a correctness that is immediately identifiable and very difficult to question, especially with Compass Lake and The Emperor. Classic Mk 2 cables don't impart quite the same feeling, even if so many of the characteristics are the same. My memory tells me that detail retrieval is not quite as strong and that Classic Mk 2 has a more overtly mellow character, whereas this was only hinted at with Signature.

The mellowness can become an issue with electronics that are on the mellow side themselves, especially in the upper midrange, the trouble region for so much digital. With the Siltech Classic Mk 2 cables, a Blue Circle amp I have here sounded recessed in the upper midrange, a malady that went away once I swapped in Nordost Valhalla. In this case, the amp's grainlessness and Classic Mk 2's mellowness ended up creating a sonic presentation in which too much of a good thing was, well, too much.

But this was an isolated instance. With every other product I had on hand -- three digital sources, two sets of mono amps, and two sets of large speakers -- it was easy to appreciate Classic Mk 2's most obvious contribution: a naturalness that required *no* acclimation. You can find interconnects and speaker cables that have greater high-frequency brilliance, and there are cables that portray images with slightly more heft and fullness. But the balance of Classic Mk 2 can make such traits sound like aberrations to various degrees.

Thus, even though they are not cheap, Siltech Classic Mk 2 interconnects and speaker cables represent good value for audiophiles who long for Signature, as Classic Mk 2 gets most of the way there for a fraction of the price. There are competing products worth considering -- certain AudioQuest, Nordost, and Stereovox interconnects and speaker cables come quickly to mind -- but none that I've heard gets as close to the sound of Siltech Signature, the pinnacle to my ears, as Classic Mk 2.

In the end, if you can afford a full set of Siltech Signature interconnects and speaker cables, you can afford the best audio cables I've heard. For the rest of us, Classic Mk 2 is a satisfying consolation prize.

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Siltech SQ-110 Classic Mk 2 Interconnects and LS-188 Classic Mk 2 Speaker Cables

Prices: SQ-110 Classic Mk 2 interconnects, \$2600 USD per meter pair; LS-188 Classic Mk 2 speaker cables, \$5800 per 2.5-meter pair.

Warranty: Lifetime.

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