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SOUND TO THE EXTREME

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Siltech Classic Series SQ-110 G-5 Interconnects, PH-8 G5 Phono Cable, and LS-188 G-5 Speaker Cables

Some years ago, a colleague titled an article "Why Reviewers Hate Writing Cable Reviews." His point, as I recall it, was that (1) such reviews are a pain in the butt to write, and (2) cables are applicable only to the specific system in which they were used.

Well, as Francis McDormand says in the movie *Fargo*, "I'm not one hundred percent sure I agree with that."

While wires are very system-dependent, once you pin down their main attributes and establish how they react with tube as well as solid-state gear, the results can be broadly useful.



Nor does the rear-end pain apply to the more obsessive among us who love swapping interconnects, a task complicated by the brevity of short-term aural memory. By the time wires or components are swapped, the sound may no longer be firmly fixed in your head. That's why salespeople save the component they really want to sell you for last -- it impresses because it's fresh while the other stuff is fast fading from your brain cells.

These musings were occasioned by the receipt of a new set of Siltech interconnects and speaker cables, and the realization that I had long steered clear of doing wire reviews. They were also spurred by the unalloyed pleasure occasioned by listening to the new Classic line of interconnects and speaker cables, which arrived almost exactly ten years after my first experience with Siltech.

I was then engrossed in what now seems like folly -- a comparative survey of wires offered at different price points by several major manufacturers of the day. Too bad I hadn't read my colleague's article before taking on an assignment that, for all its interest and its educational aspects, led to more rooting around in the rear end of my equipment rack than so sedentary a creature as myself would prefer. It was time-consuming and patience-testing, as well. Initial enjoyment had become too much like work.

About the time I thought I had a good fix on the wires in the study and decided I could move from copious note-taking to writing, a visitor arrived: Edwin van der Kleij, the soft-spoken Dutchman who's president, designer, and majordomo of Holland-based Siltech.

Edwin listened to my system for a while. Then he quietly, almost diffidently, asked whether I'd allow him to insert a short length of his FTM-4 Gold interconnect between my turntable and preamp. A good host, I readily agreed. As he reached into his briefcase for the wire he said what everybody says in a similar situation: "It really needs more break-in time, but this will give you an idea of how it sounds."

Did it ever! My first thought was that my whole system had suddenly come alive. Then came the grim realization that I'd have to go back to the drawing board and work the Siltechs into the article.

The Siltech experience

Since those days I've had other wires in my system; none better, a few as good, most worse. The Siltechs in their various upgraded models remained my reference wires, the ones that made my system strut, the ones I listened to for pure enjoyment of the music, as well as being excellent vehicles for reviewing speakers and electronics, whether solid state or tube.

So when Ethan Wood of Siltech America came by with a set of the new Classic Series cables, I was filled with anticipation and also with some doubt about whether these wires really would be an improvement over the FTM-4 G3 interconnects and LS-180 G3 speaker cables that were giving me continued listening pleasure. After all, today's "upgrade" is not necessarily an improvement; it's often a marketing device to keep up with consumers' endless desire for "the latest."

The Classic Series G5 went head to head against that earlier generation of Siltechs, and I also brought some wires to various friends' houses to get a fix on their performance in different systems. My home listening was done in a fairly large, well-furnished room. Analog was sourced via the Forsell Air Reference turntable with a Koetsu Rosewood Mk II cartridge, which fed the Plinius M14 phono stage through the Siltech Classic Series PH-8 phono cable. Digital sources included the Metronome T-20 Signature transport and C-20 Signature DAC, the [Reimyo CDP-777](#) and the Ensemble Dirondo. They were connected via SQ-110 interconnects to a Wyetech Opal preamplifier, a Conrad-Johnson MV60SE stereo amplifier, and Jadis JA-80 monoblocks modified with Siltech internal wiring. LS-188 speaker cables ran between the amps and Von Schweikert VR-4 Generation II speakers, and later [Von Schweikert VR-4 Gen. III HSE](#) speakers. Since a loaner G5 digital cable wasn't available to run between the Metronome transport and DAC, I used my older-model HF-9 G3 (the other digital sources were single-box players). Accessories included Vibrapod isolators under the speakers, Solid Tech footers, Shun Mook and Harmonix record clamps, and Harmonix footers.

Some flat-earth proponents continue to deny that "designer" wires are better than stock RadioShack products, but most audiophiles have reluctantly concluded that they're difference-makers capable of transforming a system. I say "reluctantly" because the sticker shock for an insubstantial-looking run of wire is considerably more acute than it is for a speaker occupying half a room or an amplifier too heavy to lift.

For the curious -- and the brave -- here's the price info. A one-meter pair of the Classic Series SQ-110 G5 interconnect is \$2100, a one-meter Classic Series PH-8 G5 phono cable is \$1200, and a two-meter pair of the Classic Series LS-188 G5 speaker cables comes to \$4000. The one-meter HF-9 G3 digital cable I used is \$500, and its successor, the HF-10 G5 digital cable, which should be available by the time you read this, will be \$600.

And the Classic Series isn't even the company's top line. That accolade goes to the Signature Series, whose prices I was afraid to ask about lest they induce cardiac arrest. Fortunately, Siltech's offerings are plentiful, and an earlier experience with a borrowed set from Siltech's lower end to link a modest office system transformed the sound from barely listenable to quite satisfying, suggesting a welcome consistency throughout the line.

That implies the rest of the Classic Series should deliver much of the results I got from the products under review, which represent the top of the Classic Series. The full Classic Series lineup includes three speaker cables: the entry-level LS-88 G5, the LS-110 G5, and the LS-188 G5. Interconnects include the SQ-28 G5, the SQ-88 G5, and the SQ-110 G5. There are also the phono and digital cables, and the SPX-30 power cord. They cover different price points, the variables being the amount of conductor included and the terminations.

All share Siltech's proprietary G5 metallurgy and X Balanced Micro Technology. The former refers to the unique blend of silver and gold as conductor materials. High-purity silver is preferred not just for its conductivity, but also because it creates silver oxide when it oxidizes over time. A fortuitous process, since silver oxide is an excellent conductor that doesn't degrade conductivity. In this it differs from high-purity copper, which creates copper oxide as it ages, an excellent insulator but a poor conductor. That gives high-purity silver the edge -- both materials always undergo oxidation, but only high-grade silver

will retain its conductivity.

But why gold? Siltech says that the natural crystal structure of both copper and silver produces small distortions generated by boundary effects on the signals. So after purifying the silver, at a point between the melt and solidification processes, 24-karat gold is added. This gold alloy fills the empty spaces between the crystals, boosting signal transmission, improving the signal-to-noise ratio, and dramatically lowering distortion.

Explaining Siltech's X Balanced Micro Technology process is beyond my capabilities, but suffice it to say that it refers to the geometry that occurs when conductors are wound so tightly that "the angle of approach" is close to 90 degrees. The approach angle apparently determines the strength of a cable's magnetic field, claimed by Siltech to be up to 2000 times less than that of "the typical audio cable."

In plain English, that means sound free from baddies like EMI, RFI, and other unwanted guests. While I'm in no position to judge Siltech's quantified claims, as a cardholding member of the Cynic's Circle, I'm willing to say that the Classic Series wires I've been listening to are indeed the quietest I've ever had in my system, including the older Siltechs. In fact, my first impression was that backgrounds had become several degrees blacker, low-level listening more detailed, and big orchestral climaxes more impactful -- all expected results of a lower noise floor.

The improvements I heard after the arrival of the Classic Series wires held constant throughout changes in system hardware -- several CD players, an amplifier, and a new pair of speakers arrived for review while they were in the system. In friends' systems, which included all-tube electronics to solid-state, floorstanding speakers to bookshelf models, the Siltechs had uniformly positive results.

The sound

Initially, I was concerned that whatever technical wizardry went into taming noise issues might also tame Siltech's traditional fast transients and extended frequency range. I needn't have worried. If anything, the dynamics on Don Byron's *A Fine Line* [Blue Note 26801] were even more stunning than before. Cassandra Wilson's voice on the fabulous rendition of Sondheim's "Ladies Who Lunch" from this album had all the body and density one could ask for.

Soundstaging on the brilliant transfer of Benjamin Britten's *Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra* [JVC JVXR 0226] was wonderfully natural, and while percussion transients were lightning fast, I was even more entranced by the realism of the string sound. Another great JVC reissue, the Fritz Reiner/Chicago Symphony disc of *Bartok's Concerto for Orchestra* [JMCXR-0007], was rendered with a deeper, darker lower-string sound than I'd remembered, along with impressive tonal density in flute and in the harp's plucked bass notes.

I had a similar reaction to the new album by The Persuasions (*A Capella Dreams* [Chesky 251]), heartening because vocals are an important part of my daily musical diet. On the track "Peace in the Valley," the voices were compelling in their realism. The detail coming through the Siltechs allowed me to hear how well vibratos matched, as it also allowed the handclaps in "The Saints Go Marching In" to startle.

A final surprise came in the form of an unclassifiable trio of musicians whose mixture of jazz, rock, country, and more gave me reams of listening fun, along with an enhanced appreciation for the way the Siltechs make transients and difficult-to-record instruments shine through the audio chain. The album is Tin Hat Trio's *The Rodeo Eroded* [Ropeadope 93134], and a typical track is "Fear of the South," where violin, guitar, and accordion rip over an oom-pah-pah-ing tuba bass line (I said it's unclassifiable, didn't I?). These are difficult instruments to record and play back, even tougher to keep in balance, but the engineers succeeded. Ditto for another track, "Holiday Joel," where an array of percussion instruments were slid, swished, squeaked, scraped, and tickled. Here, even at low levels, the Siltech response to lightening-fast transients was along the lines of "Gimme more. I'll show you how fast I can get."

Conclusion

Manufacturers know what works best with their products. The Classic Series wires came my way because an amplifier maker suggested using them in my review of his unit. Others, in arranging to ship review samples to me, asked about my system, and when I mentioned that the Classic Series as my reference wires, they expressed approval. One even said it was his reference, too.



Should it be yours? You'll never catch me telling anyone to buy a product on my say-so. What works in my system and with my ears may not work for you. I have friends with wonderful-sounding systems who use other brands of wires. But I won't hesitate to say that the Siltech Classic Series, specifically the interconnects and cables discussed in this review, should be on anyone's short list of wires to audition. Nor will I shrink from saying that the G5 line is a step up from my previous G3s. It has all their virtues, with the added benefit of a lowered noise floor.

I've heard too many wires whose balance is tipped up to yield a "hi-fi" sound that can make a system sound shrill, and too many others whose fattened roundness appeals at first, then annoys because their euphonic colorations falsify the music. Siltech cables have always struck me as a neutral passageway for recorded sound. They've always brought out the best in my hardware without hiding its defects, never more than the current Classic Series. Like all audiophiles, I know there's something even better around the corner -- Siltech's Signature Series is a tempting example -- but I've lived with the Classic Series for months and the prospect of continuing to do so puts a very happy smile on my face.

...Dan Davis

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Prices: Classic Series SQ-110 G5 interconnects, \$2100 USD per 1m pair; Classic Series LS-188 G5 speaker cables, \$4000 USD per 2m pair; Classic Series PH-8 G5 phono cable, \$1200 USD per 1m length.

Warranty: Five years parts and labor.

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