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Created by [Duncan Designs](#)
Last updated: 30 September 2005

Crystal Cable CrystalConnect Piccolo *Thinner than thin*

René van Es

In a world where high end gear is routinely heavy, such as cigar thick interconnects that will pull unsuspecting preamps and sources from their shelves, Crystal Cable is a world-renowned and unique product. Having just recovered from the amazing properties of the loudspeaker cables and interconnects from this brand, I am standing with in my hands the new even thinner interconnects named "Piccolo". A name that suits them well due to the relatively diminutive nature of the instrument.

CrystalConnect Piccolo

The interconnects are not only thinner but differ on other points from previous series interconnects that have been part of my system for some time. The cinch connectors housings different connector which is even sleeker and slimmer than it's predecessor. Crystal Cable now adds an aluminum seal around the wire/connector junction. This has no effect from a sonic perspective but makes for an even stronger joint, always the Achilles heel of all interconnects. The packaging of the product is not very costly but is extremely elegant and differs from other cable blisters and boxes. Label and box are hard to obtain and difficult to make. These aspects form a protection against fakes. Crystal Cable has as much problems with piracy as many other manufacturers. A form of theft that is hard to stop. What makes things worse, the quality of the imitations is often bad, and then stories appear that products do not meet promised results. It looks good from the outside, but inside you find plain copper instead of silver and gold. I am convinced that I have the genuine cables at home or someone has even copied the packing slip! As mentioned, the cable is very thin, only 1,5 mm in measured outside diameter. The core conductor has a diameter of 0,3 mm and is made of a carefully kept secret gold/silver alloy. The capacitance of a one meter cable is 154 pF and the resistance is 224 mOhm. The low capacitance is ideal for connection of a record player with a magnetic cartridge as well as in virtually any other application. Crystal Cable has invested a lot of money into research of the influence of magnetic fields, coming from the outside into the cable (also the other way round), and how to makes cables immune. Measurements prove that Crystal Cable does not pick up radiation nor add any to its environment. An important fact, because this cable is far less dependent on unreliable and overly thick shielding utilized in many other brands.

In use

The Piccolo was used on many occasions in numerous different applications. Most recently reviewed gear was connected with these wires, including a Marantz SA-15S, a Lindemann SA-CD player and a PrimaLuna ProLogue Two amplifier. Further, the Piccolo was used to connect a Marantz SA8400 and a Magnum Dynalab tuner. Often I hooked up my Garrard/Pro-ject/Benz Micro record player with it to a Van Medevoort PHM3 phono stage as well as the phono stage to the (pre)amp. During a phono pre-amp shootout I choose again the Piccolo cable because of proven results in vinyl setups.

Reviewing

It is a difficult matter to review cables. Difficult because cables interact with the apparatus connected and you have to find a combination that sounds good. Often a cable can bring heaven or on the other hand can break a setup into loose pieces. This is funny because in basis it is no more than a piece of conductor and some isolation material. The flow of electricity is always the same, so if a change of sound occurs, there must be evidence in the form of measured differences in resistance, induction or capacitance or self-inductance. Even still, we hear clear differences as soon as we swap several brands of cable. Maybe this is the result of magnetic stray. Coming from baby phones, cell phones, light appliances, transformers and power cords. With a simple Supra test tool I find "leaks" near apparatus and I can track down badly shielded power sources or cables. I am convinced that an amplifier that receives, besides the music signal, high frequency misery generated by cell phones or light appliances, will modulate the high frequency information into the music signal itself. Result: distortion and commotion. Another cause of sound change can be due to the purity of the conductor and the choice of (isolation) material. Those are factors that hardly can be influenced by customers. Still one likes to read about cables. Although no one can predict how a cables behaves in your set and what it adds or subtract. But there is one exception.

Back to cable basics we expect a single thing from a cable: conduct without any change in the original signal. No more, no less. And that is when matters get worse. Cables can change the sound or timbre. I am not talking about resolution or signal/noise ratio, but of evident darker or brighter sounding of a hifi set. An add on tone control. And we do not like tone controls in hifi systems do we? Then why should we reintroduce one. Don't. A cable ought to be as neutral as possible. What reduces reviewing

of a cable to only three magnitudes:

1. is the sound neutral and pure?
2. how much does the cable suffer from stray fields?
3. what is the maximum resolution? In other words, how much musically dynamic information is lost?

The second point can be measured with test equipment, point one and three are the ones you can measure with your own ears. Measurement is proven at the factory. In a strict honest test set up Crystal Cable shows that it has (objectively) incredibly low interference from outside influences. The thin interconnect on review has no radiation of its own. The tranquility in the system, the results reached with costly power conditioners and even more costly dividing transformers, stays intact. Without almost any care for interconnects and loudspeaker cables running besides power cords or nearby transformers. A point that also shows on listening tests. That leads us to point two: is the Piccolo cable neutral sounding? Suddenly we change from measured objectivity into the subjective realm and you have to believe me on my word. Based on listening sessions and based on try-outs in many setups I believe that the Piccolo, just as its more expensive brothers and sisters, is as neutral as is reachable utilizing technology anywhere in the world. A fact that does not make Crystal Cable completely unique, some other brands prove this, but for Crystal Cable it can be called a mission statement. For me, being a reviewer, that is the ideal situation. Connected apparatus keeps its own sound and does not take over the influences of the connected cables like a chameleon. For the consumer it is the ideal situation, because he or she can choose any component on the basis of its own behavior and does not have to worry whether the change of a component will break down a hi-fi system. Which can easily happen if the system is tuned by use of "sounding", or "tone-control" cables.

Third question: resolution. Again a subjective experience made clear by listening A-B on as much gear as possible and using many types of cable. The Piccolo has a high score. Not as high as its more expensive brethren, but much higher than to be expected in its price category. No matter if the ultra low voltage of a low output MC is at stake or the more robust voltage between pre and power amplifier. In the test with phono stages the Piccolo will let you hear exactly what properties these boxes have. Based amongst others on stereo image, pressure on low registers of subtle cymbal playing. The Piccolo shows it is a completely transparent medium. It was very easy to listen to every detail the superb Lindemann SACD player could extract from the digital domain. Or to experience how small the influence is on the final result or how little seems to stand in the way between the components. The use of Crystal Cable interconnects in the whole system and the use of Crystal Cable Reference loudspeaker cables supports the positive properties of the Piccolo's involved. The more cables of the same brand and preferably of the same type are used, the more will the system sound homogeneous. Crystal Cable has tremendous synergy within their own family of cables. Therefore you can choose a less expensive cable for less important sources (start with the Piccolo) to maximum results for your high end sources (up to the Reference series). The profit for cables positioned above the Piccolo can be described as the maximum resolution, the maximum amount of current the cable can transport and the maximum usable length. Not in the sound!

Result

This time, no examples of music played. No reference is made to types of music. Not naming tracks on CD or digging deep into the music performers hidden in the grooves of black vinyl. Not because record after record and CD after CD was rushed through the CrystalConnect Piccolo but because the Piccolo has no sound of its own. It is an honest and great cable for universal use. Ultimately neutral. Very well shielded, which is a quality to keep connected components free from distorted signals from the environment. With a high resolution that can be marginally bettered (but not at this price point). I advise you to use the Piccolo in hi-fi systems that play music on a medium to a high quality level or for applicable sources in a truly high end system. Combine with other Crystal Cables as much as possible. Should the use of more Crystal cable raise a practical or financial problem, be convinced of one thing, the Crystal Cable CrystalConnect Piccolo is so deliciously neutral that you never have to suspect it of negative effects. Crystal Cable deserves more attention all over the world, the Piccolo that costs only 299 euro for one meter can be the first step.

Prices:

CrystalConnect Piccolo 1 meter stereo pair 299 euro

Or 1,5 meter 425 euro

Plus 1 meter per stereo pair 250 euro

Distributor:

Web: www.crystalcable.com

Equipment used (among others):

Record player: Garrard/Pro-ject/Benz Micro, Blue Note/Jan Allaerts

Phono stages: Van Medevoort, Blue Note, Sphinx

Tuner: Magnum Dynalab

Digital: Marantz, Lindemann, Apogee, Roksan

Preamps: Marsh, Herron

Power amps: Marsh, PrimaLuna

Integrated: PrimaLuna, Marantz

Loudspeakers: Focal-JMLab

