

2018 ENJOY THE MUSIC

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Siltech Classic Anniversary Cables
Neutrality is the hallmark of a well-
designed product.

Review By Paul Schumann

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One of my favorite parts of "The Grinch" is when Mr. Grinch complains about Christmas and all the "noise, noise, noise". We live in a noisy world. Even in the middle of the night I can go out and hear the sound of distant highway traffic. Have you ever tried to listen to music when someone is watching TV in the next room or a noisy dishwasher is going? Impossible!

Our audio systems are noisy also. There are always the obvious demons of 60 Hz hum and high frequency hiss. There is the noise your system makes when one of the amplification stages are overloaded (clipping). I'm working on my own 300B amp right now and trying to minimize the noise is a real challenge.

Sources Of Noise

There are many sources to this noise. The AC we plug our equipment into certainly isn't a pure sine wave and seems to be getting worse every day. The latest offender to this problem is LED lights we're plugging in everywhere. You can spend a lot of money on AC power conditioners or battery systems to filter that noise out. Our systems are

subjected to all kinds of electromagnetic pollution. Every wire acts like an antenna picking up all sorts of stray signals. Shielding wires helps, but unless you build a faraday cage around your system, some is bound to get through.

Vibrations cause noise. Turntables and cartridges are so troublesome because they are designed to pick up vibrations from the record grooves, yet block out any external vibrations coming from the speakers. I'm just starting to realize how much vibration is created by a spinning disc during CD playback. Transformers vibrate. Tubes are microphonic. Speakers are a whole kettle of fish I won't even explore.

Even individual components generate their own noise. Resistors, capacitors, transistors, tubes, and transformers all create noise and introduce distortion. Some people are very picky about which components go into their gear. Why do you think some fancy coupling capacitors fetch hundreds of dollars?



Even dirty connections can add noise to a system. Every time I switch out connections, I clean them with Caig Deoxit and treat them with CaigProgold. I use a cotton swab to apply these magic substances and I'm always amazed at how seemingly clean connectors give the swab a dirty residue. Pure metals conduct electricity, the ionic solids they form (corrosion) don't.

Which leaves us with the wires themselves. Do wires create noise? Can one wire be "quieter" than another? Let's ponder that as we explore the Siltech Classic Anniversary Series cables.

About Siltech

Siltech has been in business since 1983 and the Classic Anniversary Series is an update of the original Classic line in commemoration of their silver anniversary. Siltech makes four lines of cabling. The Classic Anniversary Series is one step up from their lower-tiered Explorer line. The Classic Anniversary Series itself has three levels, the 330i, the 550i, and the 770i. All of the Classic Anniversary Series share a shielded twisted pair configuration and the conductors are a G7 gold-silver alloy. They also share EPTFE Polyimide Air FEP E-Silicon as an insulator. Both polytetrafluoroethylene (PTFE) and fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP) are insulators with excellent chemical inertness, excellent thermal stability, and unsurpassed electrical properties, including low dielectric loss, low dielectric constant and high dielectric strength.

The three levels differ in the gauge of the wire, the purity of the conductors, and the thickness of the insulation. Gabi Rijnveld of Siltech informed me that as you go up a model, the surface area doubles exactly, which halves the impedance. Also, the larger cross section lowers both harmonic distortion (less micro cracks per area) and distortion caused by leakage and ground current.

About Conductors And My Thoughts

Before I move on the cables themselves, let's talk a little about conductors. The schools of thought vary quite a bit on this. There is the more-the-silver-the-better approach (i.e. Audio Note). There is silver-plated oxygen-free copper (i.e. Nordost). The recently-reviewed Skogrand Cables (and many other companies) think just plain copper is fine and dandy. Last, but not least, are the companies that use exotic alloys to achieve their goals. Siltech is one of those companies. I am a Chemistry teacher so I know a little about alloys. Alloys are interesting substances because metals, in general, have an affinity with atoms of their own kind. Certain metals will cohabit with other metals because their atoms fit together just so. They don't really bond together in a chemical sense, they just cohabit. This can give an alloy some additional desirable properties that the pure metal doesn't possess.



Siltech cabling uses a gold-silver alloy. Because gold and silver atoms are similar in size, they form what is called a substitutional alloy. This is where the atoms can alternate depending on their percentages. Silver is considered the best conductor, while gold is the third. So why add gold? Gabi told me that "gold fills the micro cracks that normally occur during solidification as well as from handling (bending) during its lifetime". This is pretty cool stuff. I bet an electron microscope was used to determine this. Also, the high purity of this alloy makes corrosion negligible.

Now let's look at the cables in question. Siltech was kind enough to lend me 550i series of interconnects and speaker cables and the SPX-380 power cable. Since all these are designed to work together, they were reviewed as a complete system. The power cord plugged into the Linear Tube Audio ZOTL10 Mk. II amp. The interconnects were used between the ifi iDSD and LTA amp. The speaker cables were used first with my trusty Thiel CS1.5s and later with the Grail towers (review to come).

I likened opening up the boxes for the cabling to a Japanese tea ceremony. Each box was sealed in shrink wrap. The boxes themselves were very sturdy and felt-lined on the inside. Each cable fit precisely in its box. Any exposed metals were covered in plastic to prevent scratches. The cables themselves were pristine. Every component box included a signed slip by the person who made it. Definitely the white glove treatment.

Connecting the cabling was a snap. The interconnects came with Siltech's own gold-plated RCA connectors and fit perfectly. The speaker cables utilized Siltech's rhodium-plated spades which hugged to binding posts securely. The power cord definitely needed

a little extra effort to push in at both ends, assuring good contact. All of the cabling was quite flexible, which helps when the back of your system looks like a spaghetti factory. After that, it's time to break in the cables. (I really need to build my own cable cooker!)



So while we are waiting for our cables to break in (conjure up an old movie image of a daily calendar tearing off sheets), let's explore one of the claims Siltech makes about their cables. Siltech says that their Anniversary Series cables are "10,000 times quieter" than the competition. What exactly does that mean? If you look where noise comes from with single-signal cables, there are several sources:

- 1) Electro-Magnetic Induction (EMI)
- 2) Electrostatic Hum
- 4) Handling and Microphonic Noise
- 5) Static
- 6) Ground Loops

Using a twisted configuration for your conductors reduces EMI. Proper shielding gets rid of electrostatic hum, RFI and ground loops. Good insulation reduces handling noise and static. The DuPont Kapton film used in the cables reduces microphonics. This film is extremely tough and prevents movement between the conductors, which causes microphonic feedback in the system. This feedback acts like a loop with delay: sound out of speakers vibrates the cabling, causing small currents long after the original signal has passed. As we can see, the Siltech Anniversary Cables address all of these concerns. Another concern might be the oxidation in the conductor itself, which Siltech has addressed in its silver-gold alloy. If you are 10,000 times quieter, how does that translate in terms of our noise floor? Siltech did a comparison with 17 other competitive products of similar/higher priced products. The total noise output was 43dB lower.



Now that the cables had broken in, what did they, as a system, sound like?

The first thing I noticed was the bass. Compared to previous cabling, the Anniversary Series gave more fullness to notes in the lower register. One of my "go to" pieces of music is Holst's "The Planets" [London Records 417 553-2]. I specifically listened to "Saturn" with its peddle bass organ and strong bass viola parts. This movement is supposed to evoke awe and wonder, and the Siltech cabling let it shine through.
















The second thing I noticed was a refinement in the top end. For me, one of the areas where audio reproduction of music falls down is the uppermost frequencies. In trying to reproduce those upper octaves, a lot of high-end gear ends up sounding harsh or etched, which takes away from the enjoyment of the music. This is noise. The Siltech cables were smooth and relaxed, without sounding dull; more like the real thing. Annie Lennox's vocals on "Medusa" [Arista - 74321-25717-2] lacked sibilance. The massed strings in Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto [Philips 464732] has the smoothness of the real thing. Phil Collins' cymbal work on "The Trick of the Tail" [Rhino R2 128700] was clear without ever sounding hashy. Considering the equipment I am currently using, this was a revelation. Bearing in mind this finesse, these cables would work well with speakers that have ultra-revealing tweeters like the PureAudioProject Trio 15 Horns I reviewed a little while ago.

The last characteristic of these cables I'd like to comment on is their ability to unmask low-level information. By lowering the noise floor, the Siltech cables allowed me to pick up on more of understated musical cues. Listening to The Beatles' "Abbey Road" [EMI 852667], I was struck by all the details I had never heard, no, experienced before (and I've listened to this album a lot). Subtle things like the changes in George's guitar sound with each lick at the end of "The End", how Paul's microphone is set up differently for every vocal, and the way the orchestra just swoops in during "Something". I know those things were always there, with the Siltech cables they gained more meaning.

Final Thoughts

Overall, I would consider the Siltech Anniversary cables as quite neutral. Ok, stupidly neutral. They did what good cabling should do, not attract attention to itself. I believe that this neutral quality is due to synergy of all the parts making up these cables. This is the hallmark of a well-designed product.

I know I will miss all of the subtle things these cables do, when I take them out of my system. Yes, I consider them quite an investment. The total cost of the equipment reviewed is close to \$6300. If you are looking to make an upgrade to your system to bring it to "the next level", you really need to give these Siltech cables a try.

Tonality	
Sub-bass (10Hz – 60Hz)	
Mid-bass (80Hz – 200Hz)	
Midrange (200Hz – 3,000Hz)	
High Frequencies (3,000Hz On Up)	
Attack	
Decay	
Inner Resolution	
Soundscape Width Front	
Soundscape Width Rear	
Soundscape Depth Behind Speakers	
Soundscape Extension Into Room	
Imaging	
Fit And Finish	
Self Noise	
Value For The Money	

Specifications

Type: Cables For High-End Audio System

Siltech Classic Anniversary 550i Interconnect (0.5 m) Price \$1250
Siltech Classic Anniversary 550i Speaker Cable (3.5 m) Price \$4200
Siltech Classic Anniversary SPX-380 Power Cable (1.0 m) Price \$800