

Shunyata Research Omega SP signal cables

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We have been taking a run-up to this review for some time. Starting with the Everest 8000 power conditioner in Issue 210, followed by the Omega XC power cords in Issue 212. Now, it's the turn of the newly released loudspeaker and interconnect cables in Shunyata Research's top line.

With all the discussion over Shunyata Research's power products (particularly

how reducing background AC-derived noise aids medical imaging), you could be forgiven for thinking the company only makes power products. In fairness, our coverage of Shunyata's range reflects that, as we have concentrated almost exclusively on the power cords and conditioners in the brand's line-up. However, the same combination of innovative, yet still profoundly science-led, research coupled with a level of detail that 'borders' on the obsessive applies equally to Shunyata's signal cables.

Johnny Mnemonic

Shunyata Research has categorised these research-led developments by useful mnemonics and acronyms. KPIP (Kinetic Phase Inversion Process) is common to all Shunyata cables, which addresses the issues partially resolved by burning in and cryogenic treatment in other brands. KPIP remains a closely guarded secret in the same underground bunker where the Ark of the Covenant and the recipe to – and correct pronunciation of – Worcestershire Sauce are kept. >>



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» Both also share Shunyata's patented 'Zi-tron' design, developed to limit dielectric absorption and re-radiation in signal transmission.

Shunyata claims that Zi-tron "requires a special type of conductor with two signal paths and an electric field compensation circuit that creates a cancellation signal that prevents the insulation from developing a charge." The loudspeaker cable has an even more advanced version of the Zi-tron design, allowing the technology to dovetail with other developments specific to the Omega cable.

Both loudspeaker cables and Omega XLR interconnects use Shunyata's VTX layout, albeit using the VTX-Ag layout for the loudspeaker cables. VTX deploys conductors in a concentric ring around a hollow core, while VTX-Ag also includes a central conductor at the centre of that core. On the other hand, the RCA interconnects use Shunyata's ArNi layout, which follows a highly improved coaxial layout.

In both interconnects those conductors are made from high-purity Ohno-cast monocrystal silver, with a

95% coverage silver-plated copper shield. The loudspeaker cable has a pure silver centre conductor, with an outer ring of copper conductors.

All Omega cables have a Transverse Axial Polariser (or TAP) device fitted in line, while the signal cables add a common-mode filter ('CMode'). Meanwhile, the loudspeaker cable extends the research into 'current drift' and audio frequency-related current resonance started by Caelin Gabriel, Shunyata's resident big brain. HARP is a way of diffracting current resonances that act like standing waves in a room. Unlike the single circuit in other Shunyata speaker cables, Omega HARP uses a four-element circuit.

Enter the Möbius

Designed specifically for the Omega speaker cable, the Möbius cable suspension system features five polymer bands that sandwich the speaker cable and connect to a wheel-like arrangement that encircles it to raise the loudspeaker cable up. In so doing, Shunyata suggests they "dissipate vibrational energy that travels along the surface of the cable and

through the floor." Eight Möbius wheels are supplied as standard, with an additional one every half metre.

I'm going to hit one caveat at the outset. This is not a 'Pick 'n' Mix' cable design. Use this with other cable brands and what it does so well fades into the background. This contrasts with the power-side cables and conditioners, which play nicely with most brands. Put it this way; if you are coming at this from Shunyata's power products and backfilling your way through your system, don't even think about a piecemeal change. If you like what Shunyata did for your power, Omega does the same for your signals, so step up and make the change throughout.

With your system fully Omega-fettled, there's a profound change to the sound of your system. There are no spotlights or highlights, lumps, bumps, or impediments. There's just a lot of music being played. It's like the electronic hash that sits behind your recordings just got pushed aside. Not attenuated or kicked into a different frequency band. It's like that hash got given its marching orders. »



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» That's not the clichéd 'inky black silences', although background system self-noise does seem reduced. Instead, it's like your audio system was told to tidy up its room, get its life together, and start a fitness regime. Music is more cogent here; while that doesn't mean I spent a few hours tapping my foot to Ligeti, it makes more sense of challenging music. Difficult passages of modern classical music often appear more like disparate musical sounds.

I often use John Pickard's 'The Flight of Icarus' [BIS] for that 'musical cogency' reason. It's a piece written about the Apollo Space Program. It should sound magnificent. However, it often sounds like bombastic incidental music from Planet of The Apes and can sound like a flange of baboons started hitting instruments. The better the system, the more organised it sounds. And with Omega in place, the Apollo theme is so clear, I went hunting for my space helmet.

The real world

Of course, just saying 'it sounds musical' or even 'it sounds cogent' probably isn't enough to justify the price of admission. And no matter how important that overarching musicality and absence of electronicky 'hash' sound, we live in an audio world that judges sound by specific quanta, so here goes. Each aspect of the frequency response sounded 'right' in absolute terms and relative to the overall performance. The bass is stentorian and well-controlled. Notes are deep and thunderous when called upon by Trentemøller and Mahler alike. The midrange was articulate, transparent, detailed, and equally well-controlled. Singers had their physical space in the soundstage, and their

diction – even those to the extremes of the stereo mix – was first-rate. The treble was precise, inviting, detailed and well-controlled. This isn't a cable for those who mistake zingy, shrill treble for detail, but the clarity of those higher frequencies was never in doubt. Overall detail, coherence across the frequency range and the soundstage's size, shape and solidity were all in the very top league.

Often, when wrangling extreme audio equipment, there is a requirement to have similarly extreme audio equipment. Using expensive cables with more attainably priced audio is usually an exercise in over-analysis and the limitations of the rest of the equipment are highlighted. Not here, Omega is the tide that raises all boats. As Omega doesn't either stress the system or accent the performance, it lets you see just how good the equipment can be. And that can be a delightful surprise. Granted, nobody is putting Omega between a 30-year-old NAD 3020 amp and a pair of AR18s that have seen better days, but that ability to bring out the good in all things audio does make Shunyata's Omega sound really, really nice through the widest range of systems.

It also makes the best of less-than-optimum recordings. OK, it won't pump up lost dynamic range for casualties of the loudness war or invent detail or depth, but it will prevent those recording limitations from overpowering the performance. Once again, it sounds really... nice.

'Nice' could be seen as a pejorative, but it's entirely positive here. That absence of electronic hash and self-noise gives music its 'shape' and does so through an extensive range of systems. It's a grown-up sound for

those more attuned to the satisfaction of beguiling musical integrity than shrill, leading-edge detail.

The Alpha and Omega

Aside from curiosity about what acronyms like 'HARP' mean, how it works, and the physicality of the loudspeaker cables with their Möbius wheels (you aren't hiding those away), I have nothing but respect for Omega. It's a perfect match for Shunyata's top-end power products, works extremely well and makes music sound more like music than many of the etched, hyper-detailed sounding cables at the top end. That it also sits so comfortably with a wide range of high-end systems adds to that.

I think many will follow the path I mentioned. Those who have recently discovered the joys of Shunyata Research's power products – especially the Everest 8000 and Omega XC power cord – will be just as surprised and impressed by the performance of the signal cables that carry the same name. Just don't be surprised if – sooner or later – every part of your system features Shunyata Research's Omega cables! +

Price and Contact Details

Omega RCA/XLR interconnect cables £9,500, \$9,500 per metre pair.

Omega SP loudspeaker cables £24,995, \$24,995 per 2.5m pair.

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