

# Black Rhodium Overture/ Polka/Stream cables

by Jason Kennedy



In pro audio the answer to the question what's the best cable? Is "the one that is the right length to make the connection." In domestic audio, as we know, it's not quite that straightforward! We appreciate that getting the whole signal from A to B without losing crucial information along the way is far harder than it should be. This is why many call cabling the weakest link in the system, the place where more losses occur than anywhere else. Graham Nalty – one of the UK's cable pioneers with Sonic Link from the 1980s – has long understood this. He has been refining his Black Rhodium cable range since 2002, when he started telling the world about the benefits of rhodium plating for audio connections. Since then, Nalty has developed a range of audio and video cables including power cords and musical instrument leads.

This review looks at several new cables in the Black Rhodium range, Overture interconnect, Polka speaker cable, and Stream power cable. Overture is a hand-built interconnect that comes in RCA and XLR balanced forms and uses pure silver

conductors (99.99%) in a dielectric of air and PTFE, which is described as "a layer of air separating the wire from the inner wall of the insulation along its length", which sounds like a loose fitting tube to me. These have a braided screen to minimise RF interference and the conductors are "wired in opposing direction for lower noise floor," which means they are oriented differently for send and return, although how this lowers noise is not clear. As with all Black Rhodium interconnects, they are twisted to reduce RFI; a technique that is generally – if not universally – accepted. The RCA plugs are Graham Nalty's own GN-4 types with rhodium-plated connectors and a single earth connection in a plastic collar, an arrangement not dissimilar to the Eichmann Bullet plug.

Polka speaker cable also has anti-RFI screening using a braided screen that protects 4mm square copper conductors in a "thicker than usual" version of Black Rhodium's preferred silicone rubber insulation, the extra girth chosen to keep conductors apart. It's a conveniently flexible cable with a woven external sleeve around the twisted conductors; each length is terminated in rhodium plated 4mm banana plugs with an easy to use locking system, although spade connectors are also an option.

Stream power cable looks much like Polka as it has the same fabric outer braid, but it comes in the somewhat more specific length of 1.7m, which was chosen on the basis of listening tests and which apparently "aligns very closely with the quarter wavelength of 50Hz mains frequency" (in the UK). So it's a good thing that they are quite flexible because having so much cable could get in the way where circumstances are tight. Stream has silver-plated copper conductors in a low-loss silicone rubber insulation, chosen for both its low dielectric absorption and mechanical damping capabilities. This too has a

*“Good detail definition, especially when it comes to cymbals and other upper midrange sounds. And it times well.”*



- ▶ tightly braided screen and comes with rhodium plated 13A (or Schuko) and IEC plugs. There is also Powerstream which has a higher quality IEC plug that's not unlike a Furutech in appearance for an extra £100.

Using the signal cables first with Overture between the Chord DAVE DAC and ATC P2 power amp and Polka from there to Bowers & Wilkins 802 D3 floorstanders I was greeted by a relaxed and natural tonal balance that seemed dynamically a bit weaker than I'm used to, but with good depth and well-defined vocals. The treble is appealingly clean, which means you can play at higher levels without discomfort, yet the soundstage is not restrained; quite the opposite is the case as the soundstage expands out into the room. With Radiohead's 'Decks Dark' [*Moon Shaped Pool*, XL] the vocals are right there in the room. It's not the most detailed of presentations, but musically there is a lot to enjoy and there's no shortage of bass power where required.

Taking the Polka alone its smooth, natural balance isn't quite as coherent as it could be, it lacks the realism and definition of nuance that can be achieved at the price, but in its favour is an effortlessness that encourages you to focus on the music rather than the sound. Overture interconnects are closer to what I'm used to with good detail definition, especially when it comes to cymbals and other upper midrange sounds. And it times well but without any undue emphasis on leading edges. Putting both Overture and Polka in the system and replacing a more affordable (Russ Andrews Power M) mains cable with a Stream on the Innuos Zenith server (the power to the source being the most critical in the system) resulted in a quieter, calmer presentation with better focus, depth, and overall transparency that gave way to improved timing, a worthy upgrade. Switching over to Powerstream produced a more realistic drum sound on James Blood Ulmer's 'Crying' [*Live at the Bayerischer Hof*, In+Out Records] and a bigger soundstage for this excellent live performance where vocal definition and the sense of hall acoustic was much clearer.

Black Rhodium also supplied a six outlet power strip with Stream cable and adding this proved beneficial as well; using it between the wall and the Powerstream on the Zenith added more power to the kick drum and greater overall dynamics. I also gave the standard Stream a spin on the ATC P2 power amp and there the sound got more open and bright (after another Power M cable) and had cleaner highs. Switching over to the power strip helped as well, bringing out greater dynamic resolution and depth in the soundstage.

Graham Nalty has clearly learnt a thing or two about what makes a decent cable in his time at the coalface. He has been particularly successful at getting rid of the high frequency noise that can muddy the sound of a good system and this can be heard with any of these cables, but especially when used throughout the system. There's no shortage of competition in this arena of course, but if you are after a natural and musical sound in a revealing system then the Black Rhodium route could well be the answer. +

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

### Overture

**Type:** Analogue interconnect with RCA jack terminations

**Length:** 1m pair

**Conductor:** High purity silver

**Dielectric:** PTFE, air

**Shielding:** High optical cover braid

**Capacitance:** Not specified

**Resistance:** Not specified

**Inductance:** Not specified

**Price:** £1,200

### Polka

**Type:** Loudspeaker cable with RCA jack terminations

**Length:** 5m pair

**Conductor:** Copper

**Dielectric:** Silicone rubber

**Shielding:** tightly braided metal screen

**Capacitance:** Not specified

**Resistance:** Not specified

**Inductance:** Not specified

**Price:** £1,700

### Stream

**Type:** Mains cable with 13A and IEC connections

**Length:** 1.7m

**Conductor:** Copper

**Dielectric:** Silicone rubber

**Shielding:** Tightly braided metal screen

**Capacitance:** Not specified

**Resistance:** Not specified

**Inductance:** Not specified

**Price:** £450 (Powerstream with upgraded IEC £550)

**Manufacturer:** Black Rhodium

**Tel:** +44(0)1332 342233

**URL:** blackrhodium.co.uk