

Stage III Concepts

Magnus Prime Speaker Cables

Nicholas Bedworth

Introduction

Stage III, based in Pasadena, CA, builds their Magnus Prime speaker cables with an approach that's quite similar to that of their highly-regarded Magnus Prime analog interconnect.

Stage III's Magnus Prime speaker cables—one step below their Mantikor reference level—does the “heavy lifting” between the amps and speakers. For my system, Stage III provided a full-range configuration that connects the elegant Pass Labs XA 200.5 amplifiers to the



external crossover of the fabulous Perfect8 The Point dipole speakers.

Luis de la Fuente, the lead designer at Stage III, more than doubled the number

of AeroStrand Ultra palladium-silver alloy conductors—compared to their analog interconnects—from 6 to 14. And each individual ribbon conductor is also substantially larger at 1.25 mm x 0.55 mm. These 14 ribbons are organized as 7 pairs, which spiral around the inner core of granular damping material. At either end, large, cryo-treated solid-silver spade lugs effect the termination.

Typical for Stage III, there's great attention to detail even here: Instead of the usual utilitarian lug, these are finished with a bit of an artistic flourish. Luis added some curves and an arrow-like cutout to the design, which gives them considerable visual appeal.

Little touches like this differentiate his cables from other high-end offerings, which, sometimes, seem more like prototypes than production goods.

Like the matching analog interconnects, the cable itself shows extraordinary attention to detail: The tightly-woven sheathing is snug and carefully-aligned around the wire, and together with the custom, vibration-damping carbon-fiber break-out shells, these cables look complete, durable, and suggest they'll maintain their “as new” appearance indefinitely. Clearly, they're assembled with consummate care.

While some competitors rather appropriately name their cables after giant snakes (the manufacturer of the competing Anaconda speaker cabling shall remain anonymous), the Magnus



Primes are quite docile in comparison. All too often, very large speaker cables don't like being handled, and protest with various squeaks and creaks; their weight and rigidity place strain on the amp or speaker terminals, and over time, always seem to work themselves loose, one way or another. Quite often, they seem to have a mind of their own, and somehow tend to return to whatever shape is least convenient for the gear and the owner.

The Stage III's are relatively light compared to other cables in their class, and they're certainly easy to route. They won't cause any problems even if the speaker or amplifier terminals are a bit delicate.

Owners of high-end kit are likely to use monoblock amplifiers, which, ideally, can be placed fairly close to the speakers. Thus, the 2 meter lengths provided for this review should be appropriate for many real-world use cases. The length was perfect for my system, and of course, shorter lengths of speaker cable, as a rule of thumb, usually minimize whatever colorations there might be, while maximizing clarity and dynamics.

As is the case with the Magnus Prime interconnects, the mixture of silver and palladium definitely seems to hit the spot with respect to providing the delicacy and detail of pure silver conductors. At the same time, the silver-palladium conductors seem to avoid any sense of "haze" overlaying the sound, or "optimistic" timbre. While the latter coloration is certainly agreeable in many cases, the Magnus Prime seem to get out of the way and lack any obvious "flavoring" of their own.

The Sound of Silence

The Magnus Prime excel at dynamics, soundstaging and overall neutrality. There's never any suggestion that the cables are "in the way" or are otherwise constricting the flow of music. In other words, to get a sense for whatever limitations these cables might have, one

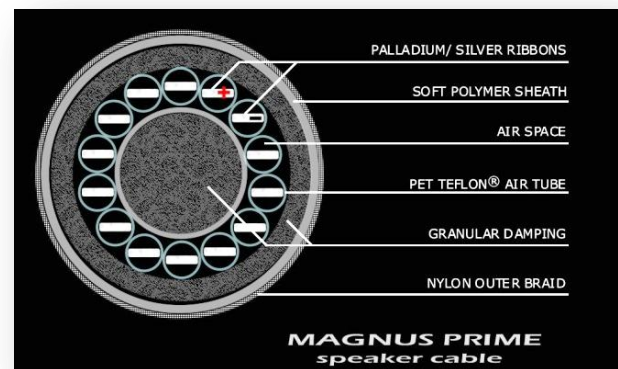
would have to resort to much more expensive cables to be able to make an informed comparison.

In isolation, the Magnus Primes are remarkably free of character: It's hard to describe what, if anything, they don't do as well as they could. They're certainly not bright, and one thing for sure, though, they sound "open": It's easy to observe that the soundstage, the dynamics and timbre are presented in a natural, unrestricted and complete manner.

Especially in the mid-bass and below, there's a remarkable sense of spaciousness and air that brings to mind a real instruments and performers in a concert venue: The sonic images are not flat or solid; they're three-dimensional, and one definitely gets a sense that in the case of the larger stringed instruments, they're of course quite hollow and enclose a considerable volume of air. There's a sense of sound radiating from both the front and back.

Soundstaging is excellent. For truly stereophonic recordings in real acoustical spaces, the volume of the venue floats between the speakers. The various reflections contributed by the side walls, back of the stage and ceiling is often easy to discern.

The overall positioning of the sound field, at least in my room, is perfect: It's neither forward nor recessed. The orchestra and chorus are painted quite correctly from one side of the room to the other. The classic, iconic Proprius recording of "*Now the Green Blade Riseth*" takes a naturalistic, minimal



approach to miking, and is an excellent (and highly enjoyable) reference piece for evaluating gear. The youth choir is in the middle of the sound field, along the back; solo instruments (lute, bass, flute) are forward, in the left and right. All are captured with purity, clarity, and proper dimensions. And the detail is truly amazing: One hears the solo musical lines slowly fading away into the much more complex choral stanzas. With lesser cables, one can't appreciate this interplay to nearly the same degree.

The Reference Recordings "*Dick Hyman Plays Duke Ellington*" shows off the Magnus Prime's wonderful portrayal of

complex timbre and chromatics across the entire and very broad pitch range of the piano. The bass has “bite” and “growl”, the treble is sharp without being metallic or piercing, and the inner resonance of dissonant chords catches one’s attention. And the attack, decay and pedal work comes across in an entirely convincing and revealing manner.

For studio creations, which are all-too-often multi-miked mono, with a stereo ambience added in during the mix, the effect is still quite convincing. In some cases, you’ll probably become much more aware than you’d like of the little secrets of current production practices. Diana Krall’s *“Temptation”* is a compelling musical experience that grips you in a literally visceral way. Sure, it’s a somewhat artificial presentation, but who cares? It’s also great music and never ceases to stun visitors who are more accustomed to life in the iPod and car radio lane.

Conclusions

The Magnus Prime speaker cables are certainly worth a long listen with borrowed kit from a cooperative dealer. You may well end up deciding you can’t part with them. Unlike some high-end cables, that possess numerous virtues, but are also a little neurotic, so to speak,

these are very easy to take, and in addition to all the things they do extremely well, the Magnus Primes are markedly free from annoying aberrations that eventually could become bothersome with familiarity. To me, they’re well-balanced, highly detailed, dynamic and accurate, while also sounding natural, compelling, intriguing and effortless.



Manufacturer’s Web site

www.stage3concepts.com

Pricing and general specifications

Stage III Concepts Magnus Prime speaker cables; \$7300 for 2 meter full-range configuration with spade lugs.

Review system details

Sources: Antelope Gold DAC with Voltikus power supply; Audiophile01 USB-S/PDIF transport-processor; Toshiba Qosmio laptop; HP HDX 18

laptop; Seagate 1.5 TB external digital media storage.

House clock: Grimm Audio CC-1 word clock.

Power management: Tesla PowerCell 10 SE Mk II, Quantum Line Strip QLS 9, Galileo Mini Power Coupler, Tesla SE Hologram A power cable, Tesla SE Hologram D power cable, Tesla SE Precision AC power cable, Enigma Active Shielding Tuning Circuits, MiG Mechanical Interface Grounding, BiG MiG.

Amplifiers: Pass XA 200.5 monoblocks.

Speakers: Perfect8 The Point Mk II dipoles with powered subwoofer.

Software: J. River Media Player 17.

Audio cabling: Stage III Magnus Prime full-range speaker cables; Stage III Magnus Prime analogue interconnects; AudioQuest Carbon USB cables.

Room 1: 18' deep, 12' wide, 8' to 11' ceiling