



OePhi Reference cables

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Once upon a time, a very good friend of mine had a cat with the 'somewhat' pretentious name of

'Ophelia'. This is an impossible name for a pet (just try calling 'Ophelia' six times across a garden to call the cat back for food), so it got shortened to 'Oofy'. So, you can imagine, no matter how many times I hear the name of this cable brand, I can't help but associate it with a cat named after Hamlet's wife. Especially as OePhi is a Danish brand designed by engineer and enthusiast Joakim Juhl.

The company began with its Ascendance, Transcendence, and Immanence lines of cables, all of

which were notable by their distinctive wide and flat black sheathed cable layout. But, with the company's new Reference line, the secrets beneath the sheath are revealed. Reference looks unlike any other cable, and it makes a good case for being the sound of no cable. But without all the pseudo-Zen philosophical banter.

Yet there be method in't

Sharing little more than a cotton-damped air dielectric, unlike previous cables in OePhi's range, the Reference interconnects and digital cables use pure silver conductors while speaker and power cords use copper. In fact, presume every sentence for a while begins with 'unlike previous cables...' because the OePhi Reference breaks a lot of new ground for audio cables.

The correct spacing geometry is a big issue with the OePhi Reference and wooden spaces are placed at regular intervals across the whole length of each cable. This means entirely separate conductors and the nature of the outer braiding makes these grey cables look somewhat skeletal next to the giant audio hawsers from other brands.

This is amplified (pun intended) by the limited strain relief used in the custom connectors of Reference. Juhl maintains that one of the biggest limitations of a cable of this calibre is at the termination points, as the method of connecting conductor to terminator and the terminator itself can often have more impact on the sound quality itself. The best terminator would be the cable itself, but that's completely impractical. >>



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» Instead, OePhi went for terminations with the softest and most conductive metal in the termination itself. This means the plugs – and especially the banana plugs in loudspeaker cables – are less robust than in other cables (even other OePhi cables), but the results can be heard for themselves.

This, however, is one of the few marks against the OePhi Reference. To hear them at their best, they need to be handled with the sort of care that no demonstrator (or reviewer) can give long-term. The Reference can be provided with regular connections of any kind, but that somewhat defeats the object.

It also means the prospective owner must accommodate the cables rather than the other way around. If your equipment is too close to the rear wall, or the bend required to mate component to component is too acute, you risk damaging the cable or connector. But if you are thinking this all sounds like ‘deal breaker’ material...

To thine own self be true

...guess again. Of all the cables I’ve heard in my system, I heard the OePhi Reference the least. Many other high-performance cables could be classed as, ‘your own system, but with more...’ Some are more detailed, some are

faster, some are more expressive and so on. The OePhi Reference is simply ‘your own system’, ungarnished, unalloyed, and untouched by the vagaries of cable ‘sound’.

What then becomes clear is just how much we shape our systems by the nature of our cables. Given the Hamlet theme vaguely running through this review, even those of us who actively try not to use cables as tone controls will find that, “it is a custom more honoured in the breach than the observance.” OePhi Reference doesn’t make that tailoring unconscionable, but it does point to another way, and you may find your system follows suit. »



You might look for a deliberate tonal balance elsewhere, maybe opting for a valve-like sound... tube-y or not tube-y, that is the question.

» I promised a minimum of Zen-noodling earlier, but it becomes almost impossible to resist here. OePhi Reference is the answer to audio's Zen kōan, "what is the sound of no cable?". Of course, such an 'un-cable' demands it partners outstanding audio equipment (more accurately, outstanding audio equipment demands cable partners that do as little as possible to their sonic capabilities... but we are shining this light on cables, after all). However, with OePhi Reference, you find the sonic capabilities of each component in the signal chain are more sharply in focus.

This ultimately means you make better buying decisions in your audio system, without the cable lending its voice to the system. So, for example, you might look for a deliberate tonal balance elsewhere, maybe opting for a valve-like sound... tube-y or not tube-y, that is the question. Sorry.

The rest is silence

The OePhi Reference also redefines those silences between the notes we all crave; which calls into question the current thinking around cables; the importance of eliminating radio frequency and electromagnetic interference. The design of OePhi cables (and Reference in particular) is more about preserving the signal's electrical integrity while preventing mechanical vibration and resonance from one device in the system interfering with another and the signal itself, rather than dealing with 'Electromagnetic Invaders from Beyond'.

The music simply doesn't have a background noise with OePhi, save for tape hiss or pops and crackles introduced by a record. This seems especially true of 'tube rush'; unless

you are using a particularly noisy valve on its last legs, that distinctive 'whoosh' behind the music is reduced to the barest minimum when using OePhi Reference.

I'm picking out aspects of performance (or more accurately, aspects of *absence* of performance), but where you really notice the OePhi Reference's sonic 'un-there-ness' is in the gestalt, the whole musical picture, not simply parts of that whole.

You find yourself drawn ever deeper into the music regardless of what that music is. The absence of signature imposed on the system and the cable's ability to keep each component from singing along with the others makes for an intensely immersive, musically honest sound. Moving quickly through all those recordings I use to test audio, I found each was simply reset to being musically enjoyable as well as sonically informative. On CD, all these tracks are so known to me, I find myself saying 'track six' automatically at the first sign of their label, and yet the OePhi Reference opened the whole album to me once more. An album like *Stripped* by The Rolling Stones [Virgin] has been in my review arsenal for years, but I only play track 12 ('Love in Vain'). This time, I found myself playing the whole album end-to-end. The same happened with 'test' albums from Trentemøller, Joyce DiDonato, Cannonball Adderley, and the works of John Pickard, Rachmaninov, and Mahler. This rarely happens and, while I doubt it would happen with *Porn at the Jazzshop*, who knows?

In truth, though, I am at a bit of a loss to describe the performance of OePhi Reference because more than most cables, it doesn't have a performance to speak of. I found myself writing a lengthy description of

the performance, only to realise the listening notes were fundamentally identical to those of the Wilson Duette Series 2 and the Hegel Mohican CD player I used in the system. Finding the sound of a cable that strives so hard not to have an influence on sound is not easy!

Express and admirable!

Similarly, it's hard to separate the performance of the individual OePhi Reference cables as they all do so well at removing their imprint from the musical mix. I'd argue that the interconnect cables nudges ahead of the others, but there is almost nothing in it; they all do a fine job in showing up the signatures of other cables.

I think it's fitting that I bludgeoned Shakespeare's finest play into the mix because OePhi Reference is both express and admirable in terms of untrammelled signal delivery. It is also 'to the manner born' in its ability to work with the best in audio, bringing out the best in a system like 'a fellow of infinite jest'. Let's hope it all ends a little better for this Prince of Denmark. Listen to many, speak to a few, and buy OePhi Reference! +

Prices and Contact Details

OePhi Reference Interconnect cables From £4,000/1m DIN

OePhi Reference Loudspeaker cables From £3,595/1.5m (spade or banana plugs)

OePhi Reference power cords From £2,975/1m

Manufacturer OePhi

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