

## Jimmy Hughes Vol 66.

MAD is a pretty good name for a company that specialises in cables for audiophiles. It neatly sums up what most non-audiophiles think of those of us who profess to hear differences between cables. Over 30 years have passed since Jean Hiraga's infamous 'cable sound' article was published in the UK – the first to talk about such things in detail. Yet, despite this, cable sound remains a bit lunatic fringe. Ironically, Hiraga's article was printed in the highly conservative title Hi-Fi News, then edited by the doyen of anti-subjectivists John Crabbe.

I believe Crabbe only published Hiraga's article for fun – he didn't believe a word of it. But, in retrospect, it opened a Pandora's box. It was the journalistic equivalent of throwing a pebble into a vast expanse of still water – like in *The Lord of the Rings*, when the Fellowship are outside the entrance to Mines of Moria and Merry (or was it Pippin?) tosses a stone into the lake and a terrible monster is aroused.

MAD stands for My Audio Design, and the UK-based company produces a range of cables that include some very reasonably-priced offerings, as well as more expensive types. These include analogue interconnects, speaker cables, digital interconnects, and mains cables. High purity



copper conductors are employed, with silver being reserved for the more expensive cables.

Unlike many such cables, MAD chose one of the best names in the business to supply these copper conductors – Cardas. Each one of these Cardas strands (usually seen as chassis wire in the very best quality amplifiers) is individually insulated with special enamel that eliminates oxidation – always a danger with very

pure copper – and potentially corrosion, too. The cable is terminated in Neutrik Gold-plated RCA connectors using Cardas Silver Eutectic solder.

MAD place great emphasis on the physical relationship between the individual strands, using a distinctive

woven Litz layout. Unlike traditional woven designs (such as Kimber Kable) the MAD weave is a lot looser, meaning the individual cables cross at closer to 45°, rather than the 90° weave used elsewhere in audio cables. This retains much of the RF and EMI self-shielding properties of traditional weaves, but gives the cable greater flexibility and, potentially, a more free and open sound.

Now this is all very interesting, but subjectively what does one look for in a cable? Are you trying to find something that sorts out a problem with your system – eliminating bright scratchy treble, say, or lightening thick heavy bass? – or is it all about neutrality? And, if it's the latter, how do you judge? How do you know when a cable's neither adding nor subtracting? Choosing a set of cables is all about getting something that's right for your system in your room. So reviews will only help up to a point. So - having lightly rinsed my hands of responsibility - here's what I found...

Faced with listening to a range of cables at different price and performance points, it's usually best to start with the cheapest and most basic. So I began with the cable called My BABY, a shielded interconnect using woven two 0.55mm thick cables of super-fine 99.99997% pure copper per side.

I tried the My BABY cable between CD player and amp, replacing a Kimber interconnect I've had for a decade or more. First impressions were of a smooth, open, well-balanced sound that seemed natural and unexaggerated, yet clear and detailed. The top-end sounded sweet and incisive, while the bottom end was rich and full.

I listened a while, then moved on to the My JOCELYN cable. Essentially a similar design, My JOCELYN also uses a twisted pair of copper cables for each side, but this time opts for 0.95mm thick conductors. This offers a similar sort of tonal balance to My BABY – albeit, a bit more refined and focused. I later tried the My MELODY Mk II and My PARIS interconnects, which move from two conductors to four ('Quadcross', as MAD call it), and the big change between the two cables is the use of Neutrik connectors in the cheaper cable and Cardas' own Rhodium over silver-plate connectors. And once more heard further improvements along the same lines.

The integration and homogeneity initially noted with My BABY were maintained, while the sound seemed to gain added refinement and clarity. I chanced to play George Michael's song 'Cowboys and Angels', and noticed how the 'fat' bass on this track cleaned-up nicely without losing richness and weight.

The bass line (string bass?) on this track is very full and deep, and sometimes my system doesn't cope as well as it might. But with the MAD cables (even My BABY) it sounded good – rich and fruity, with plenty of depth, but at the same time nimble and articulate. It almost seemed as though the speakers were coping better – going deeper and handling the extra bass energy with greater ease.



The important thing to understand here is that the improvement in bass clarity did not come about because the sound got leaner and tighter – if anything the opposite occurred. The bass sounded richer and deeper, yet at the same time the pitch of individual notes was clearer. The bass line on this track should sound weighty and fat, and (via the MAD cables) it did.

All in all, there was nothing 'spectacular' about the way the various MAD cables sounded.

Never once did I sit there thinking - Wow! But I don't mean this as a criticism – quite the opposite. The sound being made had an innate rightness and 'realness'. It was natural and believable. And while important differences were noticeable when A/B comparing, I also felt my system sounded better when I listened the next day. This, for me, is always the acid test. You can fool yourself (or be fooled) at the time, but if things sound better next day, chances are the improvements were real.

A 2m run of My PARIS speaker cable was also provided. My PARIS in speaker cable form is identical in construction to the interconnect, but it's the only one of the SPL (Super Pure Litz) range that can be made into speaker cable. This was long not enough to replace the 7m runs of Townshend Isolda I normally use, but sufficient for a short run of speaker cable that goes between my Musical Fidelity kW-750 power amp and an output transformer that connects the it to my loudspeakers.

This also made a worthwhile improvement. Admittedly, I was only using simple solid-core – nothing exotic – but substituting My PARIS immediately improved the smoothness and refinement of the sound, while increasing dimensionality and creating a more holographic soundstage.



By now, I was enjoying a bigger cleaner sound that had greater projection and dynamics. Voices and instruments had more space around them, yet the cohesiveness and integration I value most was fully maintained. Sometimes, a component gives you improved soundstaging and detail, but at the expense of coherence – the music sounds more detailed and dynamic, but doesn't hang together as well.

But that wasn't the case here. If anything, coherence was enhanced, and my system sounded more integrated. Even the MAD mains cable My ENGLAND produced an audible difference. This was the final cable I tried, and it proved excellent. I was a bit surprised, since I used the cable to power the PS Audio Premier power conditioner that my system runs off – and you'd think this might eliminate mains cable effects because of what it does. But it didn't. Again, the sound seemed to be sweeter and nicer to listen to; just as sharp and clear, but somehow relaxed and more effortless-sounding.

MAD cables are well-made and look good. The stereo interconnects are kept together by a wooden holder. I wondered if this had any effect on the sound – you never know when the Voodoo stops – but apparently not; it's purely there for aesthetic and practical reasons.

The cables I listened to were all copper based. But, for those wishing to spend more, MAD also offer a range of more expensive silver cables. Hopefully I'll get to grips with these during the next few weeks and report back in a future issue. For those wishing to dip a toe into the world of MAD cables, the company offer a 30-day trial period on all their products, available direct by mail-order only. So, if after a month of listening, you're not convinced, you can get your money back. Anyway, do give these cables a try – you'd be MAD not to.