Heart of Glass

QED's new optical interconnect uses bundles of glass fibres for a better performance, says Jon Myles.

Optical cables can be something of a mixed bag – especially when used to transmit high-resolution audio. On the plus side they are less prone to electrical/RF interference and so are said to be better over long lengths. On the minus side varying standards of construction and materials used frequently mean they will simply refuse to pass a signal.

I've lost count of the number of Toslink leads which after being plugged into my system simply refuse to handle 24bit/192kHz files. Therefore my preferred mode of connection is invariably coaxial. However this isn't practical for all equipment – many high-resolution portable digital audio players, for example.

Which is where QED's new Reference Optical Quartz digital interconnect comes in. The cable uses the company's proprietary Glasscore technology which utilises 210 boro-silicate glass optical fibres which is said to increase bandwidth compared to lossy plastic cores, helping minimise jitter and timing errors. QED claims the Optical Quartz has a bandwidth of over 150MHz – one which is totally unaffected by bending the cable.

At £79.95 for a 0.6m length (a 3m length will cost you £149.95) it's a decently priced for a quality connector with a flexible yet tough body and sturdy Toslink plugs.

SOUND QUALITY

The QED Reference Optical Quartz was used between a variety of different components including Chord's 2Qute and Mojo DACs, a Naim NDX streamer, Oppo BDP-105D universal disc player and Audiolab's new M-DAC+ digital-to-analogue convertor/pre-amp.

Whatever the combination the QED never failed to pass a signal all the way up to 24bit/192kHz while the Toslink connections fitted securely and remained tight throughout (not something that can always be said with some cheaper interconnects).

Music also has a tight, full-bodied sound to it. Compared to stock optical cables there's a greater snap and sense of body to the likes of drums and bass lines. Midband and treble are also possessed of a pleasing transparency and sense of detail.

On Miles Davis's classic 'Kind Of Blue' (24/192) you can hear the air and atmosphere of the studio – with Paul Chambers' bass notes packing a real punch and Davis's trumpet floating vibrantly above this foundation.

Moving onto something a little more upbeat the QED shows that it really does time very well indeed with the right equipment. The Smiths' 'Queen Is Dead' romped along with foot-tapping energy – helped by the fact that there's good separation between the various instruments and overdubs, letting you hear deep into the mix. It's when you switch back to a stock optical cable that you get a true picture of what the Reference Optical is doing. Suddenly things sound more closed-in and indistinct – as though the flow of the musical signal is being subtly attenuated. Put the QED back in and everything opens up again for the better – always the sign a cable is doing something right.

CONCLUSION

If you thought all optical cables were built the same then the QED will make you think again. Its enhanced bandwidth means there's never any problem passing a high-resolution digital signal. It sounds clear, open and rhythmically authoritative. If you're looking for a good digital optical connection at a reasonable price then this glass cable is hard to beat.

QED REFERENCE OPTICAL QUARTZ
£79.95 (0.6M - OTHER LENGTHS AVAILABLE)

£

OUTSTANDING - amongst the best

VALUE - keenly priced

VERDICT
A quality optical cable that performs brilliantly with high-resolution files and doesn't cost the earth. Highly recommended.

FOR
- reliable
- well constructed
- open, vibrant sound

AGAINST
- nothing

QED
+44 (0)1279 501111
www.qed.co.uk