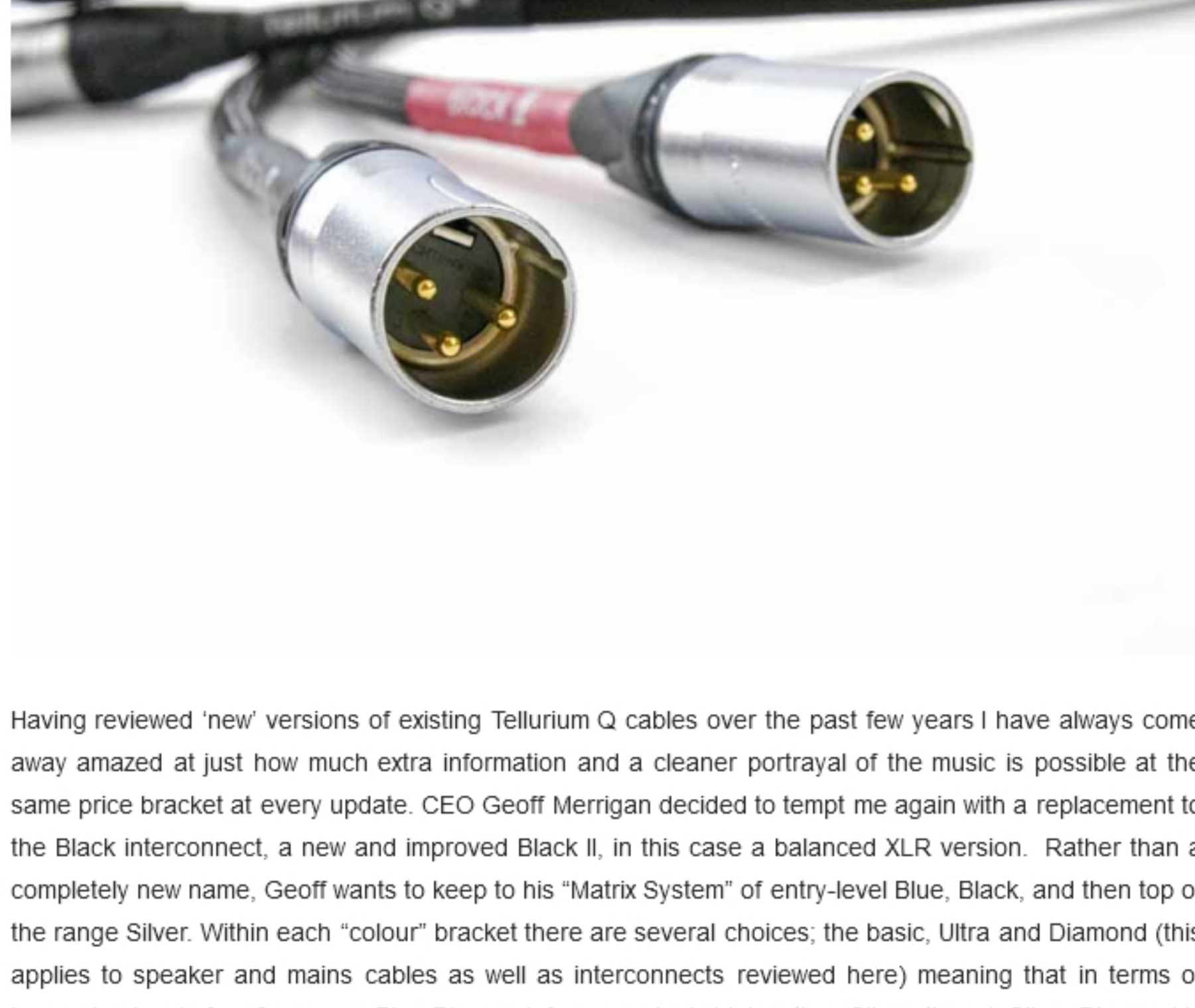


Tellurium Q Black II Interconnect Cables

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TELLURIUM Q BLACK II INTERCONNECTS REVIEW

Launched in May of this year Tellurium Q's Black II aims to be an improvement of the original Black range of cables. Does it achieve this? Janine Elliot finds out.



Having reviewed 'new' versions of existing Tellurium Q cables over the past few years I have always come away amazed at just how much extra information and a cleaner portrayal of the music is possible at the same price bracket at every update. CEO Geoff Merrigan decided to tempt me again with a replacement to the Black interconnect, a new and improved Black II, in this case a balanced XLR version. Rather than a completely new name, Geoff wants to keep to his "Matrix System" of entry-level Blue, Black, and then top of the range Silver. Within each "colour" bracket there are several choices; the basic, Ultra and Diamond (this applies to speaker and mains cables as well as interconnects reviewed here) meaning that in terms of increasing level of performance, Blue Diamond, for example, is higher than Silver, though Silver Diamond is tops, just above Black Diamond. Slightly confusing, perhaps, unless you actually see the chart on the website, but as someone listening to Tellurium Q over the years I totally understand and agree with this protocol. I won't confuse issues further by mentioning the very, very top Statement series of cables.

As for the colours, they represent different types of sound strategies for the budding audiophile; Blue family has a slight warmth that just takes the harsh top edge out of a system; Black family: a natural/transparent range that allows greater life-like reproduction to simply unlock what the HiFi system can do; Silver family is the top of the range cables which sound much clearer, detailed and revealing, and as Geoff says "can best be described as silver but without the fatigue and harshness that can go along with that material". Of course, while this "system" is great for the purchaser, it is a bit of a nightmare for Tellurium Q to maintain development of their cables; Black II maintains the same position as the original Black, so other models in the matrix must also maintain their same position meaning they might also need to be bettered in due course. The new Black II maintains the same price as the original, coming in at £285/m for the RCA and £370 for the balanced XLR.

BUILD AND FEATURES

As many will know, Geoff isn't very open in telling reviewers exactly what is inside his cables, rather allowing the reviewer, me, to simply listen to the original Mk1 cable and then the new one to make my own decisions on the differences – and hopefully improvements – attained in the newer model. Whilst not knowing what is inside (without taking them apart, which of course I wouldn't do), all Geoff is happy to divulge is the important knowledge that in order to make a good cable one needs to look at the sum of all the parts rather than point to just one element. For example, silver has better conductivity than copper but might not necessarily sound better, and indeed many find silver-plated cables sound better than solid silver. In tests in the past Geoff has tried solid silver up against plated silver in various base metal mixes and various thicknesses of plating, which all sounded different. So, in Tellurium Q it is the sum of the parts that will create the best cable, including material and geometry of conductor and dielectric, plus the material and finish of the connectors and even choice of solder. The finish of the MkII is much better than the original, looking much more up-market whilst using the same Neutrik XLRs. The cable is a little thinner and much more pliable than the original, suggesting changes to the dielectric. Of course, the geometry, shielding and conductors were also revised.



PHASE RELATIONSHIPS

What is vital in all of Geoff's cables is ultimately removing phase distortion; something that will become clearer (sic) later in the review. Indeed, from the very first cable when Tellurium Q was set up the focus has been primarily on the idea of phase distortion and minimising this problem that is inherent in all cabling, something tackled in different ways by different manufacturers. As Geoff explained, all materials (and not just cables) in the path of a signal will act as an electronic filter, whether you want it to or not. According to research made in 1930 by Bell Labs on the impact on speech from distortion it was noted that the distorted speech was accompanied by certain audible effects "which appear to be extraneous to the speech and transient in character". Rather than accepting that the HiFi system will be acting as a multiple electronic filter altering the sound Geoff decided to do something about it and create as clear a path for the signal as possible, concentrating on phase reduction. By focussing on the "relative phase transient distortion" Geoff could deal with the all-important transients; the leading and trailing edges of the sounds. The Tellurium Q motto is "Phase Relationships in a system is our focus"; indeed, as I found the reduction of phase distortion is to create better focus of the music.

Geoff's great knowledge of materials comes back to his background as an ex-industrial chemistry student who trained in material science, turning to starting Tellurium Q in 2009. His cables have won numerous awards around the world over the years, including the Queen's Award for Enterprise in 2018 and [again this year](#). His ability to understand the material science gives him an advantage over many at visualising cable configurations when creating a new product, though of course the ultimate test is listening, and a new cable will only make its way into the Matrix if it does actually sound good.



SOUND

Firstly, I listened to the original cable noting characteristics and then swapping over each track of music with the new cable, all after some running them in properly. Initially the source was the XLR output from the excellent Krell KPS20i CD player, and then replacing the cables between MFA Baby Reference preamp and Synthesis Roma 98DC powers, using vinyl, FLAC and reel sources. I chose initially to use the Wilson Benesch Arc/Torus speaker duo as they are very fast and with the emphasis on fast transients due to the lack of phase distortion, I wanted to be able to hear them clearly.

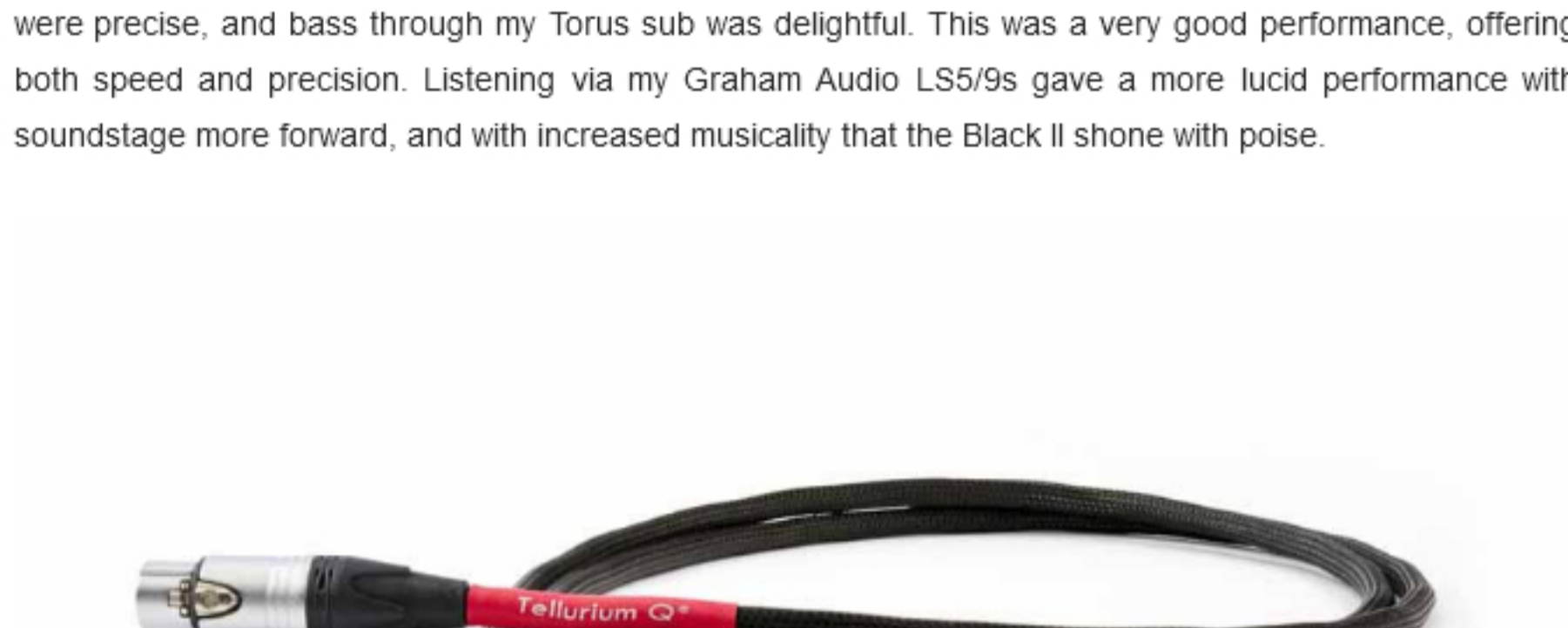
The first track was Kate Bush's 2005 double-album 'Aerial' carefully missing out Rolf Harris's vocals. This album is very well engineered with a variety of instrumentation and recorded effects of pigeons sounding actually very musical, unlike the ones sitting on my own house roof. The original Black had clear bird melodies and rhythms, but the new cable had better timing on notes and the child's vocals in the "Prelude" of 'A Sky of Honey were much more musical and concise. The next track "Prologue" resulted in the elder Black having a slightly more veiled sound than on the Black II. At 4'40" the low frequency "bangs" on the tom-toms were much better controlled and faster in the newer cable. My conclusion was that the overall sound was clearer and tighter, the effects of phase relationships focussing the music.

In the "Battle" from the Gladiator film soundtrack (The Lyndhurst Orchestra) the original Black had excellent bass-end and warm mids, but slightly confused phasing (from 1'05", for example) which the Black II ironed out making things much clearer and actually 'less phased'. Annie Lennox's "Wonderful" was much more controlled and less "busy" in the new cable making for much more understanding and hence enjoyment of the music. The sound was less confused; even the cymbals were clearer. "Fields of Gold" from Eva Cassidy has lots of atmosphere and great guitars, performed more ably in the newer cable with better top end. Indeed, the elder cable could often sound over-strong and less controlled particularly in the bass end – just as I had noticed in the Kate Bush – and with top end less clear than the new version. Even the original hiss in the recording was very slightly easier to hear in the new cable as the soundstage was much more organised and musical. Turning the excellent "Legends", Sacred Spirits, the bass end was actually good in the elder Black, but just seemed slightly more confused in the low/mid frequencies; In the Black II the bass end was clearer; more coherent.

Moving to classics and "Spring" from Vivaldi's 'The Four Seasons' (Classical Kids "The Best of Vivaldi") it was not quite so easy to see differences between the cables, though the Black II had better positioning of the instruments, again likely due to the phase magic going on; The intertwining of bird singing from the strings was more engaging. Indeed, all stringed instruments were better with the Black II.

What seemed so obvious to me in my listening was the improvement in clarity; not just of different instruments but also where they were positioned in the soundstage. Somehow the elder cable sounded "louder" as it was slightly more blurred in presentation. Listening to "Temptation" from Diana Krall the sound was clearer in the bass guitar solos and everything was more refined and faster in the Black II. The work to create faster and clearer transients through reducing phase distortion working well. The organ and drums were similarly more succinct and having their own space.

I admit I do use the [TQ Ultra Black II](#) between CD and pre and pre and power amp in my listening room, so changing this down to the Black II was going to be interesting, and consequently I could hear the differences in my system. I must add that the Ultra Black II is almost £200 and three places higher in the Matrix, so there were bound to be differences in ultimate performance. However, those differences weren't as great as I expected they would be. 'Seventh Tree' (Goldfrapp) is a very relaxed and mindful album, not the easiest to digest, and it was apparent the music was slower and less detailed than with the Ultra, though still excellent. In "Eat Yourself" it sounded like she was eating her words as they were not as clear as the Ultra Black II, but in comparison with the elder Black the difference was quite noticeable. ATF are my favourite band of all time; a '70's mix of punk, electronica (admittedly Hammond C3, Mini Moog and Crumar Multiman) and biblical tones. Their album 'Signs of Change' pushes cables through their paces with tight transients, a good soundstage and plenty of frequency extremes. Listening via my top-heavy and very-detailed Wilson Benesch Arcs with their Scan-Speak tweeter plus Townshend Supertweeter the cymbals were precise, and bass through my Torus sub was delightful. This was a very good performance, offering both speed and precision. Listening via my Graham Audio LS5/9s gave a more lucid performance with soundstage more forward, and with increased musicality that the Black II shone with poise.



CONCLUSION

I had hoped at last to be able to find faults in a TQ cable, but that was never going to be the case here. This was an excellent all-rounder with excellent speed and precision. Working at all frequencies and all types of music excellently it opened up the music in a way that many other companies can only dream of, that focus on phase relationships doing its thing. This worked so well with different systems and I would heartily recommend having a listen, however expensive your system is. This cable is that good. I have no idea how Geoff has done it, nor will I.

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality:

Excellent build and better looking for the same price, and using Neutrik connectors.

Sound Quality:

Improved detail and speed and fewer phasing issues making music easier to listen to and understand.

Value for Money:

For the sound quality heading north towards the higher Ultra Black, this is excellent value and well worth auditioning. This is a great all-round cable well worth the price.

We Loved:

Transparency and "opening up" of the music

Good detail and transient response of the music

Tight but full bass

Wider soundstage

Instrumental lucidity

Improved vocals and top frequencies

We didn't Love so much:

Not a lot at this price

Elevator Pitch Review: A clear upgrade from the interconnect cable it replaces, the Black II allows the music to open up more and offers the listener a more detailed and coherent listening experience across the frequency range and all at the same price.

Price: £370/m XLR; £285/m RCA

