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GROUP TEST: Get plugged in with our choice of six affordable interconnects



Hi-Fi Choice

PASSION FOR SOUND

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QED Performance Audio 40i £55

Introducing the upgraded version of QED's original Performance Audio 40 RCA interconnect

DETAILS

PRODUCT
QED Performance Audio 40i

ORIGIN
UK

TYPE
RCA analogue interconnect

FEATURES

- Conductors: one OFC and one silver-plated OFC
- Dielectric: foamed polyethylene
- Screening: braided foil shield
- Connectors: Anamate low eddy current RCA plugs

DISTRIBUTOR
FutureShop

Supporting a number of major improvements over its predecessor, the Performance Audio 40i employs the company's Solid Core Complementary Conductors, designed to reduce capacitance by a quarter in comparison with the original, which in turn is intended to enlarge the stereo soundstage. The new cable has an OFC and a silver-plated OFC conductor to carry the audio signal. According to QED, this offers alternative routes for the high and low frequencies to improve rhythm, clarity and bass control, and reduce any smearing that might otherwise occur in a single, one-material configuration.

The conductors are insulated with a foamed polyethylene dielectric, which provides the necessary insulation and holds them in place to minimise any microphonic effects. Over the top of these is the company's ferrite insulation technology designed to increase the amount of high-frequency signal noise rejected by the cable and reduce the amount of relevant signal information loss. Furthermore, there is a braided foil shield to reduce noise pollution of the audio signal. The cable is sheathed in a Black Pearl PVC outer jacket.

Finally, the cables are terminated with QED's Anamate low-eddy current RCA plugs. These employ

high-purity copper conductors and are gold plated to offer a lower contact resistance with the socket and far greater longevity than un-plated copper alone. The use of high-purity copper conductors for the pin section, coupled with a small contact area for the return ring, means that the overall resistance in the signal path is lowered. This arrangement also prevents eddy currents from forming in the plug body with the aim of improving signal transmission.

Sound quality

Kicking off with Trevor Pinnock playing JS Bach's *Partita No.2*, the harpsichord displays superb detail as well as a real presence in my listening room. There is no hint of muddiness in the harmonics of each individual note during the louder crescendos, especially when the opening Sinfonia progresses into an energetic section. I have heard this section sounding like a cacophony of noise, rather than the tuneful assembly of notes that the Performance Audio 40i manages to convey so well.

Switching to Clare Teal singing Cole Porter's *I've Got You Under My Skin* accompanied by the Syd Lawrence Orchestra, the timing and pace of this swinging piece are superb and, once again, the rendering of the realism of the performance is excellent with Teal's vocals, along with each

instrument of the orchestra, holding a clearly defined position within the soundstage. The trumpets come through loud and clear, but never seem out of balance with the rest of the orchestra, nor with Teal's vocals for that matter.

Mabuchi's performance of *So What* also really sparkles with energy. While Mabuchi's interpretation still retains her own unique style and charm, the music remains true to the Miles Davis original. In particular, the stereo imaging is excellent with each of the musicians occupying a clearly defined space within the soundstage. Mabuchi uses the double bass to highlight the main theme, and I am made very aware of the detailed fingering of the instrument, which

There is no hint of muddiness in the harmonics of each individual note

really adds to the presence of the four players in my listening room.

Finally, with Prokofiev's *Romeo And Juliet* performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, I am struck by the excellent full sound presentation with clear and crisp drums that show no apparent signs of colouration. The music is very bright, ranging from the loud sections heralding the ceremonial entrance of each new visitor to the gentle detail of the more delicate passages, which tell the story of the visitors mingling with the other guests. The fullness of the recording is splendidly reproduced, and I find myself feeling really drawn into the performance by the impression of close proximity to the orchestra.

Overall, the Performance Audio 40i is an impressive interconnect capable of a great performance, making it great value for money ●

Hi-Fi Choice

OUR VERDICT

SOUND QUALITY



LIKE: Build quality and sonic performance

VALUE FOR MONEY



DISLIKE: Nothing at the price

BUILD QUALITY



WESAY: A superb value, quality interconnect

FEATURES



OVERALL



Group test verdict

Having plugged in all six contenders, **Neville Roberts** sums up his experience and, with great difficulty, comes up with a winner

EVEN WITH THE lower-cost cables, there are significant benefits to be had by replacing those supplied with audio equipment with one of the six here. They all offer a step up in performance, however, it's only when you listen to them in close succession that subtle differences emerge. As with most things hi-fi, personal taste is a deciding factor, but here is my run-down on these six delights.

TCI's Fierce takes the wooden spoon. Its reproduction is clear and open, and the bass is powerful, punchy and tight. In other company it might have fared better.

Next up, Ecosse's Conductor CA1 is a lovely screened cable, capable of inky black silences between musical phrases. At the risk of mixing metaphors, silences are golden and crescendos reproduced with both elegance and power.

In fourth, Black Rhodium's Intro is superb value for money and offers polished performances with excellent detail and a great top end, combined with an extended and smooth bass response. Quiet sections are really clear and there is a definite sense that you can hear a pin drop between movements in the music.

Third goes to Chord's Clearway, a fantastic performer across a wide range of music. All the detail of individual instruments is well defined, adding to the overall realism of the reproduction.

The runner-up is the great value-for-money Atlas Element Achromat. It's classed as an entry-level interconnect, but it certainly punches well above its weight. Detail and imaging are top-rate and it offers great realism to the music and reproduces the atmosphere of the recording venues extremely well.



WINNER

At this level, personal preferences play a major part. In the end, though, QED's Performance Audio 40i just sneaks the photo finish, thanks to its consistently great performance across a wide range of music, plus it's amazing value for money.



Make/model	Atlas Cables Element Achromat	Black Rhodium Intro	Chord Company Clearway	Ecosse The Conductor CA1	QED Performance Audio 40i	TCI Fierce
Price	£86	£45	£100	£75	£55	£120
Sound	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Value	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Build	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
Overall	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★	★★★★★
	A versatile and very flexible interconnect with a very full and open presentation	Sophisticated sound quality and a worthy introduction to Black Rhodium's range	A great-value cable that sounds fantastic with multiple types of different music	A super quiet and refined performer with great detail, but it's quite chunky	A superb quality interconnect with top build quality at a great price	Easy and effortless sound, but some slightly recessed instrument positions
Website	atlasables.com	introbyblackrhodium.co.uk	chord.co.uk	ecossecables.co.uk	qed.co.uk	tcicable.com

Key features

Conductors	OCC copper	0.58mm diameter copper	Oxygen-free copper ARAY	Multi-stranded UHP-OFC	OFC/silver-plated OFC	PC-OFC alloy
Dielectric	PEF	Polyethene with 30% glass fibre	FEP	Low-loss polyethylene/FPE	Foamed polyethylene	PE
Screening	Coax construction only	Double screened/mesh outer	Coax construction only	UHP-OFC	Braided foil shield	Coax construction only
Connectors	Achromatic RCA	Gold-plated REAN RCA	VEE 3 RCA	MACH1 gold-plated copper RCA	Anamate low eddy current RCA	24K gold-plated RCA

TRY WITH THESE

CONTACT CLEANER: Servisol Super 10 £4.69

An aerosol specifically designed for cleaning switches and contacts, Servisol removes grease (including any residue from the manufacture of new items), tarnish, oxidation and other contamination from contact surfaces and leaves a protective and conductive lubricating film.



CONTACT CLEANER: Blue Horizon Clean-IT £20

Clean-IT is an electrical contact enhancer that has been specially developed for use with audio and AV equipment. It features a fast-acting deoxidising solution that cleans, conditions, lubricates and preserves the surfaces of connectors, thus improving the conductivity of all contacts. It is recommended for use on all surfaces that are susceptible to oxidation or corrosion.



CONTACT CLEANER: Caig DeoxIT £6.89

As an alternative to an aerosol spray, DeoxIT contact cleaner is a fast-acting de-oxidising solution that cleans, protects, lubricates and improves conductivity on all metal connectors and contacts. Use as a general treatment for connectors, contacts and other metal surfaces, and on non-critical metal surfaces with severe oxidation and corrosion. It dissolves the contamination and protects the surface.

