



Audiomica and AcouPlex – the AudioWorks approach

Steve Dickinson

If you're going to take the question of system ancillaries seriously—and you should—you need a rationale for your approach. As ever with hi-fi, throwing money at the current 'best in show' products doesn't guarantee results. You need a methodology with an objective and an understanding of how the chosen products work toward that objective. Some people scoff at the idea of a 'one-make cable loom,' but it's pointless to have a system where the weaknesses of another undermine one cable's strengths.

There is a genuine need to find cabling solutions that function harmoniously together, so using the same range throughout is logical. Similarly, supports adopt different strategies for their tasks, so you must consider holistically how your system will perform musically. The AudioWorks, my local dealer in south Manchester, has developed solutions after extensive listening and careful consideration, and the results have exceeded expectations—not least my own. Below is what occurs when it is applied to my own system. But the story here is the essentials, not the system itself. This is a review of a system, without the system!

Maximise

As I mentioned elsewhere, their approach is to maximise the musical energy in the room as coherently as possible, then mitigate any interference by addressing how that energy can feed back into the system. Getting the energy out there requires paying attention to mains and cabling. They offer their own mains solutions in their MusicWorks mains leads and distribution blocks, but to reduce the number of variables and keep the most foundational aspects of my system familiar, I've retained the Nordost Tyr2 mains leads and the QB6v3 mains block I usually use.

From there, I've adopted their preferred cabling, so interconnects and loudspeaker cables are from Audiomica. These Polish cables, while not budget-priced, offer performance that I find surpasses what many can provide at their respective price points. I've been sent two ranges: the 'Red' Reference series, where I think things really start to get interesting, and the Ultra Reference series, which is two levels further up Audiomica's hierarchy while still being two levels below the top 'Silver Signature' series. »

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» **AcouPlex**

The issue with releasing a lot of musical energy into the room is that the potential for feedback and interference with the signal is increased. Sometimes, this is perceived as smearing and vagueness; at other times, it can enhance any boominess in the bass. MusicWorks –AudioWorks' trade arm – has also been active in designing stands to minimise this acoustic feedback mechanism, beginning with its collaboration with Quadraspire on the Acrylic Reference table many years ago. MusicWorks also learned how detrimental the presence of metal, especially ferrous metal, can be.

The quest to replace metallic componentry led the company to PEEK, an engineering plastic with strength comparable to aluminium, along with remarkable vibration-managing characteristics. This makes it excellent for structural components, but it is fiendishly difficult to work with

in sheet form. Consequently, a compromise was pursued, embedding PEEK into an acrylic substrate cast into slabs for shelves. This approach has been so successful, achieving results well beyond expectations, that the MusicWorks team has spent the last few years developing and refining this material into what is now AcouPlex.

I've long used MusicWorks' previous generation tables, utilising acrylic shelves and PEEK structural elements. This review replaces that table with the newest all-AcouPlex version, where the shelves, uprights, and feet are all made from the material and secured with threaded PEEK inserts. You can specify the stand as screwed together: the uprights in each tier screw through the shelves to the pillar above, with a set of feet and top caps to finish off the ends. Alternatively, you can create individual tables that stack, with the feet of one sitting snugly into recesses in the top caps of another. »



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The Audiomica Rhod Reference interconnect and Dolomit Reference loudspeaker cable utilise 6N OFC copper and FEP dielectric, terminated with high-quality connectors.

» The free-standing option offers useful sonic benefits; the lossy interface between levels appears to further reduce the transfer of energy through the structure. However, the modular nature means you can start with a built-up stand and later separate it into individual layers as funds and requirements permit. It's not a cheap solution; AcouPlex is slow and challenging to manufacture (read: costly), but it's important to assess not just the cost but the value. My yardstick is how much I'd have to spend on upgraded components to achieve an equivalent musical uplift (even assuming a hardware upgrade can deliver the same benefits, which is by no means guaranteed).

Audiomica

The Audiomica Rhod Reference interconnect and Dolomit Reference loudspeaker cable utilise 6N OFC copper and FEP dielectric, terminated with high-quality connectors. The interconnect features optional in-line filtering and antistatic couplers, all sheathed in attractive scarlet sleeving. This, along with digital, tonearm, power, and other cables, comprises the Red series.

The Europa Ultra Reference interconnect and Genimedes Ultra Reference loudspeaker cables originate from another equally extensive range, featuring dove-grey sheathing. The 6N OFC copper used in the Europa interconnect has a heavier gauge, there are two screening layers. The Genimedes loudspeaker cable now incorporates four silver-plated 6N OFC copper wires, a dense braided screen, and double-layer rhodium plating on the plugs, which also come with antistatic couplers as standard.

Using the Rhod/Dolomit combination, the most striking aspect is how much musical energy these cables provide. There's vitality, freedom and freshness to the presentation that makes some alternatives in this price range feel rather flat, compressed and toneless. A vivaciousness manifests in vivid colours, clean transients and weight to notes, but importantly, it's all kept in check so it doesn't become overly enthusiastic or stray off course.

It's all very well getting the energy out there, but power without control is useless, and the Red series delivers a level of coherence that keeps all that energy honest. Hiromi's *Spark* [Telarc] has explosive energy, but you can follow her piano lines and phrasing amidst the busyness of the tight, fast, energetic percussion and bass, and the drums have skin as well as impact. Isolation, the opening piece to her 'Silver Lining Suite' (Telarc), gives us different textures of string instruments set against the weight of the piano.

When the groove gets going, the surefooted steadiness of the string quartet begins to swing a little while still securely grounding Hiromi's freewheeling piano. Now to Purcell, the Queen's Funeral March [Decca] presents a mighty drum and a cavernous acoustic space, alongside the airy, almost ethereal timbres of period brass instruments. The procession builds in power and volume, leading us to a brass-only Canzona, followed by a Cantata featuring layered voices, before the recession, which diminishes in power as it recedes. It's a very cohesive and convincingly visceral performance.

Moving up to the Europa/Genimedes cable pairing, the Purcell offers even more spaciousness in the acoustic environment, while the flat trumpets and sackbuts of the period brass are tonally distinct and distinct. The chorale now resolves down to the level of individual voices, and the recession has a much clearer sense that not only is it quieter, but the drum is actually moving away. Revisiting the 'Silver Lining Suite' and now there's more of the individual instruments working in their own space. There's greater resolving power here, more organisation of the parts, and better coherence.

There's a fluidity to the various musical lines, but also a neatness and incisiveness in the strings, being just as lyrical or choppy as each phrase of the music demands. Hiromi's piano has more mass without dominating – you're aware of her dexterity and lightness of touch one moment, and her power and control the next; the overall effect is to enhance the groove and swing. Crucially, the strings function as a string quartet, not just a backing group – this is clearly a meeting of equals between the quartet and piano. Laura Jurd now, the title track from *Landing Ground* [Chaos Collective], showcases another melding of jazz and string quartet. The strings are urgent and driven, with a spine of steel, to better highlight Jurd's liquid trumpet playing.

Energy, organised

We're now receiving more energy, but also better organised into musically meaningful information. However, this is where things often tend to fall apart. Retaining the Europa/Genimedes cables and switching to a three-level stack of MusicWorks AcouPlex tables, along with the same Laura Jurd track at the same volume, now reveals much more complexity. I'm more aware of not only the individual parts but also of what they contribute to the whole, whether that's fragments of countermelodies in the bass, call and response between trumpet and strings, or quotes in the rhythmic riffs from the percussion. There's a much clearer sense of collective effort here, with musicians listening to and responding to each other. »

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» In 'The Lady of Bruntal' from the same album, experience the tunefulness of the inner string parts, which at times are more melodic while also providing a clearer contribution to the harmonic structures. The Purcell is now <checks notes> 'wildly different'. Not only is there that cavernous acoustic space, but a much better sense of how the instruments are positioned within that space. It's now easy to hear the drum approach in the opening processional – the timbre changes as the leading edge of each beat becomes clearer, the closer the drum gets; there's a sense of actual movement, not just increased power and energy but also more physicality to the playing. The following Canzona doesn't just differentiate the parts; it reveals that this is constructed like a round, with the musical fragments passed among the performers.

Focus

Hiroimi's piano now has not just mass, but solidity, and on *Spark*, the contrabass has gained real heft, the percussion has depth, and the drums have volume as well as a skin. The instruments now bleed into each other much less during the most energetic sections, making it possible to appreciate and understand what each musician contributes to the whole. Everything has more focus and structure, a consistent feature of the AcouPlex contribution whenever and wherever I've heard it used. It's like single malt whisky versus blended, or *ristretto* versus *espresso*; the experience has greater intensity, tighter focus, and consequently a more satisfying impact.

Acoustic feedback seems to have a blurring effect, subtly smearing and blending the component parts, which makes sense if you consider that the same signal is feeding back into the system, just slightly time delayed. Here, it's working on a CD player and solid-state electronics, not what is commonly thought of as 'obviously' microphonic componentry. Thus, AcouPlex's party trick is to reduce the amount of vibrational energy that re-enters the system, leading to musically significant benefits in overall coherence and cohesiveness. We better appreciate the artistry of performers because they have more time and space to work their magic; they are surrounded by more silence, allowing everything to develop more naturally and become more expressive and communicative, as we hear better into the original event, not a subtly defocused facsimile.

The interesting thing to me is that this blurring is an effect we're so used to experiencing that we rarely even notice it until we hear a system that doesn't suffer from it as much. We're spending a lot of money on better cables and hardware to capture more of the musical event in our listening spaces, and the more we achieve that, the more it seems to obstruct itself. This smudging and fudging around the edges are so integral to our audio experience that we simply assume this is normal and how things should be. AcouPlex has shown me it needn't be this way. +

Technical specifications

Audiomica

Rhod Reference

Type: Analogue interconnect

Construction: coaxial, copper braided screen

Insulation: FEP

Conductors: 2x0.51mm²

Material: 99.9999% solid core OFC

Termination: Gold-plated RCA or XLR

Price: 1.0m pair £650/€650, additional 0.5m £130/€130, in-line filters and antistatic connectors at extra cost

Dolomit Reference

Type: Loudspeaker cable

Construction: multi-conductor, woven, unshielded. Single-wire, bi-wire or bi-amp configuration

Insulation: FEP

Conductors: 8x2.62mm²

Material: 99.9999% solid-core OFC

Termination: Gold-plated Spade or Banana

Price: 2.5m pair £900/€900, additional 0.5m £85/€85; bi-wire/bi-amp extra

Europa Ultra Reference

Type: Analogue interconnect

Construction: multi-conductor, double screened with aluminium foil and copper braid

Insulation: FEP

Conductors: 8x1.65mm²

Material: 99.9999% solid core OFC

Termination: Rhodium-plated RCA or silver-plated XLR with antistatic couplers

Price: 1.0m pair £2,300/€2,300, additional 0.5m £400/€400, in-line filters at extra cost

Genimedes Ultra Reference

Type: Loudspeaker cable

Construction: multi-conductor, woven, copper braid shielding. Single-wire, bi-wire or bi-amp configuration

Insulation: FEP

Conductors: 4x2.62mm²

Material: silver plated 99.9999% solid-core OFC

Termination: double rhodium-plated Spade or 4mm Banana

Price: 2.5m pair £2,600/€2600, additional 0.5m £300/€300; bi-wire/bi-amp extra

Manufacturer Audiomica Laboratory

🌐 www.audiomica.com

UK distributor Auden Distribution

🌐 www.audendistribution.co.uk ☎ +44 (0)7917 685 759

AcouPlex

Equipment shelf

Type: 580 x 440 x 15mm (w x d x t); £950.00

Uprights

Size & Price (per set of 4):

250mm £1,250, 200mm £1,100, 150/120mm £800

Top cap & Foot (set of 4): £640

Manufacturer MusicWorks (UK) Ltd

🌐 www.musicworks-hifi.com ☎ +44 (0)161 491 2932