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Wireworld Platinum Starlight Ethernet Cable

by *Bill Wells*



Many years ago I had the opportunity to review the wonderful Platinum series of cables from Wireworld. At that time – I found these cables to be among some of the best that I had heard, in my system, which was consistent with the overall commentary and feedback throughout much of the high-end audio community. In fact, Wireworld is no stranger to this industry and has a very solid reputation particularly regarding its continuing rigorous, research and development efforts leading to the design and development of newer, innovative cables for various high-end audio applications.

So when the prospect of having an opportunity to audition one of this company's newer cable products – absolutely no hesitation on my part. For this particular review, my focus is primarily on their top of the line Starlight Platinum Category-8 Ethernet cable. Additionally, I will be providing some brief, high-level commentary on these as well on other cables in this series

specifically the entry level Chroma and mid-level Starlight Cat-8 Ethernet cables.

With the world of streaming – the manner in which many of us access music these days is undergoing significant change. In particular – in earlier days, most of our audio systems were configured with different types of hardware devices for playing back recorded music including such things as turntables, CD players, DACs, tape decks, FM tuners, other. Today, many are now storing their favorite recordings onto some sort of storage device – either directly from ripping CDs or downloads from various internet-based sites. There is now access to a far broader range of recorded music than ever before that can be easily sourced through various streaming platforms from companies such as Apple, Tidal, Pandora, Spotify, Slacker Radio, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, iHeartRadio and so on.

Music playback in my current audio system is now configured solely for digital playback and

specifically for streaming music that's been stored on either the hard drive of my laptop or an external storage device. Also, prior to this review – my laptop was connected via USB cable to a separate USB converter and then connected to an external DAC via A.T. & T. Fiber Optic cable. This arrangement has served me well for many years and during that same period, I had an opportunity to check out a number of highly-rated and very excellent USB cables. However, as I continued my journey with this type of setup, I was also becoming more aware of various technical issues associated with the USB interface. In particular, issues around noise, distortion, timing errors and potential loss of data during the streaming/transfer process were identified as being attributable to USB. Fortunately, all is not lost and today there are a number of devices that are designed to address some of these issues and effectively minimize the negative effects of the USB interface.

As I continued to explore alternative methods for streaming music in my system - it was during

that time when I was introduced to Ethernet connectivity as a viable replacement to USB. Fortunately, my Bel Canto Black System DAC/controller provides an input for Ethernet connection direct to the unit and without needing some sort of interface device. Along with this change, I was also interested in physically removing my laptop from being in close proximity to my system's electronics and specifically for the purpose of reducing the potential impact of digital artifacts generated by this device from entering into my system. The wired Ethernet approach helped to address this situation and allowed me to move both my laptop, and external storage device, to my home office located on a completely different floor in my home.

Truth be told, whereas this was new territory for me, I was able to solicit the assistance of someone with far greater technical knowledge, familiarity and awareness regarding how to set up an Ethernet network in my home. The good news is that there was a relatively straight-forward, plug and play solution available that simply required the purchase a couple of powerline adapters that provided what's called Ethernet-Over-Power. As stated in the literature, these devices are able to....."turn your existing internal home powerline into a high-speed network with no need for new wire or drilling. No

configuration required, simply plug the adapters into your power AC wall sockets and you can establish a networking infrastructures in a flash." One adapter was located in my office with my router plugged into the adapter via Ethernet cable. The other adapter was plugged into an AC socket immediately behind my system with an Ethernet cable coming from this adapter directly to the input on my linestage. (According to the advice given - this is where the Wireworld Technology Starlight Platinum CAT-8 Ethernet cable was used. Apparently in this type of Ethernet

and overall, did not require a great deal of time. It did however require me to become familiar with how my electronics connect through this new arrangement such that the network identifies my laptop containing my music files. Fortunately, my mini-iPad already had JRiver Media Center loaded on it. This allowed me to continue using this device for accessing all music files that were loaded on either my laptop or external storage device. Without going into a detailed explanation of the overall impact of making this change – it quickly became



evident that the sound of my system had advanced and in a positive way. Although not what I would necessarily call a complete transformation, there was a generally a noticeable improved level

of quiet. configuration – the cable coming from the wall to your equipment is where the benefit is realized. Attempts to use a variety of premium Ethernet cables from my router to the wall AC in my office actually yielded no improvement over my former reference CAT-7 cable).

Sounds simple enough but I'm also glad to have had someone with me through this initial setup and de-bugging process. As with anything involving technology – if it can go wrong, it will. Fortunately, getting this new high-speed network established in my home was completed without a great deal of difficulty or confusion

of quiet. It was at this point that my focus shifted to learning more about Ethernet cables and the various choices available. Needless to say – the field of available products was wide open with all sorts of claims being made by many different cable companies. Fortunately, through various resources, I was able to secure a number of Ethernet cables, on temporary loan, including entry, mid and top levels, and also from well-known cable companies. This experience provided me with the ability to gain important insights around how these cables performed in

my system. Without question – each cable had its own signature and also performed anywhere from good to excellent overall. Fortunately, included in this mix was Wireworld’s newer Category-8 Ethernet series that are the subject of this review.

In a media release issued earlier from Wireworld, the following message definitely caught my attention”development of the newer Category 8 Ethernet cables was to address high speed media network applications. Specifically, the Category 8 cabling standard was created to make 40 Gigabit Ethernet possible. Additionally, the patent pending flat design (Tite-Shield -- tripled shielded 23 gauge conductors) of these cables supports faster transmission speeds to provide lifelike reproduction of streamed music and video signals. It further states that even though media networks run far below that speed, cables that support higher speeds have been found to improve the quality of audio and video streaming.”

“Those improvements are possible because streamed signals (UDP/IP) suffer from data losses that cannot be repaired by the error correction systems that preserve normal files transfers (TCP/IP). The losses in normal file transfers are fully corrected as the system automatically resends multiple times to replace missing data. Streamed music (and video) can only be sent once so missing data cannot be replaced. The cleaner waveforms delivered by the Wireworld Ethernet cables can make substantial gains in imaging and fidelity.”

OK, so much for a message from the manufacturer. Question is: how do their newer cables

really sound? During my earlier experience with the newer CAT-8 series Ethernet cables from this company, I can comfortably state that what I observed was consistent with the press release. Beyond that, over the extended period of this review – I have had the opportunity to very closely listen to, observe and scrutinize the performance of the newer Wireworld Category-8 Ethernet cable. At this point - I am very impressed and continually amazed at the level of sonic superiority of the Starlight Platinum Ethernet cable. Additionally, I have not been able to detect anything in its sonic character that might detract from the purity of music flowing through it. Specifically, with this particular cable in my system, it was immediately apparent that the sound had improved and in significant ways. There was now a greater sense of immediacy with the sound portrayed in an even more life-like manner. I’m not talking about brightness or aggressive sound but that illusive “you are there” type of sonic quality. Presence is a word that quickly comes to mind. It was also somewhat like the proverbial lifting of veils and when you experience this for yourself – it is unmistakable. Importantly, it doesn’t take a set of golden ears to appreciate this sonic quality.

Case in point – my wife’s immediate reaction was quite revealing. Without any knowledge of anything being changed in my system – she happened to enter the listening area, took a seat, sat for a moment and then looked up and quickly asked...”Wow, what have you done? Everything sounds different and even better than before. The music sounds

(and feels) so real, so alive - like it’s right here in the room with us.” Additionally, a number of persons who have visited our home and are familiar with the sound of my system, including audiophiles, as well as both casual music-lovers and a few truly serious music hounds, have all remarked about the noticeable change in the overall sound. Most often they found it hard to believe that the only thing different in my system was the replacement of one single cable. Clearly the Wireworld Starlight Platinum CAT-8 Ethernet cable easily captured their attention and in very positive ways.

Another blessing received from placing this cable in my system is the intersection of how it enhances both audiophile type improvements along with raising the overall level of musicality and listening enjoyment. What I now get from an already highly resolving, and very musical system, is playback of reproduced music that is now even more rewarding and enjoyable than before. Music simply comes forth in a wonderfully natural, rich and lifelike manner – something that helps listening become an emotionally engaging experience. In terms of comparison to my previous reference CAT-7 Ethernet cable, I can unhesitatingly say that this cable provided a noticeably cleaner, clearer, less noisy and much smoother sound. Across the board, the sound was improved in every sonic dimension – from top to bottom. In fact – the improvement was such that it was quite easy for me to just relax, sit back and soak in the good sounds. By the way – I was also fortunate

to have access to a number of other highly regarded Ethernet cables with all having superb performance in my system. Initially it was somewhat challenging to clearly distinguish the differences between these stellar cables but the more I listened to them, the more I was able to identify their individual sonic character. In the final analysis and after extensive listening, the Wireworld cable ultimately became my favorite.

Throughout my time with the Wireworld Platinum Cat-8 Ethernet cable, my awareness, sensitivity and appreciation around inner detail, resolution and the finer intricate nuances embedded within reproduced music has increased. Additionally, this cable easily reveals spatial cues more readily and helps to enhance the perceived realism of recorded music. Likewise, the intention of the performing artist, as well as the recording engineer, are more quickly observable and more fully appreciated. My musical tastes are focused more on the jazz genre, including mainstream, contemporary and fusion styles, and in both instrumental and vocal formats. Additionally, I very much appreciate old-school and contemporary R&B as well.

With the CAT-8 Platinum Ethernet cable in place, many of my favorite recordings of all genres have had new life breathed into them and offer up a wealth of subtle, hidden treasures that I had only been slightly aware of previously. In particular - hearing more of the juicy little musical nuggets that were embedded in whatever music I played simply has me hooked. The really intriguing aspect of this is beyond just being able to hear a bit more

detail. It now allows me to more easily discern the performer's artistic style and approach and appreciate how the music was presented.

Tonal balance is spot on with no high-lighting or emphasis throughout the broad frequency band. Also, reproduced music through the Wireworld CAT-8 Platinum Starlight Ethernet cable has a wonderful midrange presence that simply captures your ear right from the start. Nothing subtle indeed. Along with this, the broad midrange is wide open, clear and with a see-thru like quality including superb detail retrieval. The midrange also comes for with greater harmonic texture and lifelike realism. This allows you to easily listen deeply into the music and also reveals an expanded soundstage when the recording has this quality. Mated to the wonderfully reproduced midrange is a very well extended lower bass with solid dynamics, control, pitch and articulation. This sonic characteristic extends into the mid bass as well with a seamless transition.

Overall the entire bass range, when using this cable, comes forth with enhanced power and dynamics and at both macro and micro

levels. Coupled to this is excellent articulation and control allowing the listener to clearly follow bass lines. It also helps to anchor the music for rhythmic consistency. Higher frequencies take on a refreshingly clear, unrestrained, open and with an airy quality. Additionally, the entire upper frequency range sounds smoother as well as being relaxed without any apparent added brightness or edge. Percussive instruments come forth with impressive snap,

SIDEBAR COMMENT

A quick note on both the entry-level Chroma and mid-level Starlight CAT-8 Ethernet cables – both cables do a very good to excellent job and perform admirably at their respective price ranges. Interestingly, the Chroma bested my previous CAT-7 reference cable and served as my initial appreciation for the newer series by Wireworld. With it in my system – the sound was generally more quiet, smoother, open and clear. Not bad for starters. Moving to the mid-level and slightly higher-priced Starlight cable, the differences were immediately noticeable. In fact, the level of improvement with this particular cable was anything but subtle. Simply put – the degree of improvement was such that I could have very easily stopped at that point and been happy. And, what a segway to the stellar top-of-the-line Platinum cable. Best way for me to describe my reaction to this level of excellence is easily captured by one of the Stereo Times publisher's (i.e., Clement Perry) favorite expressions – game over!

clarity with leading edge transients that are both quick and at the same time smooth with a natural

resonant decay.

In terms of helping to create the illusion, with the Starlight Platinum CAT-8 Ethernet cable in place, the entire sound stage expanded by opening up in all directions and also with greater specificity and focus of performers within the stage. It was more than simply from side-to-side but also the height and depth as well. Along with this - there was more dynamic impact and authority to the sound with the bass being noticeably more powerful with greater heft, definition and control.

A few really good examples of outstanding recorded music that capture the essence of what this cable provides includes selections for the renowned jazz pianist Keith Jarrett. His versions of either My Foolish Heart or What's New from his recording titled Live at Montreux both feature warmth, power, majesty and subtle rich

nuances throughout. Another highly talented jazz musician who provides a full palate of wonderful music is Cuban pianist Gonzalo Rubacalba. On his superb renditions of Silver Hollow, or Blue in Green, on his highly acclaimed recording titled The Blessing – sound for both artists with this cable in place comes through in a musically authentic and compelling manner. For both recordings – the piano is rendered with a wonderful combination of power, dynamic drive as well as finesse and nuance. Clearly beyond what I experienced with my earlier reference Ethernet cable.

Another stellar recording that exudes musical beauty is trumpeter Sean Jones' recording titled Roots. His version of Divine Inspiration contains a mix of sweet, sensuous sounding trumpet that the Wireworld Ethernet

cable allows to shine beautifully. Also, listening to a variety of jazz vocalists evokes a similar reaction with their voices coming through clearly, purely and accurately. A couple of excellent examples of this includes multi-Grammy Award winning Brazilian pianist, singer, composer and arranger Eliane Elias, Movin' Me On from her CD titled "Dreamer." In terms of male vocals – check out jazz vocalist, composer, lyricist Kurt Elling's CD titled "Nightmoves." On this recording, Elling's whose voice comes through with lots of musical color and rich textures. Fortunately the overall tonal balance of music coming through the Wireworld Ethernet cable sounds neutral and quite linear. Again, as said before – there don't appear to be any parts of the frequency spectrum that are either elevated or laid back.

CONCLUSION

Bottom-line – my experience with the Wireworld Technology Starlight Platinum Ethernet cable has truly been an eye (ear) opener and also a revelation. With it in my system – my listening pleasure has definitely increased. In fact - the fun associated with hearing a broad range of my recordings sounding better than ever has caused both me and my wife to spend much more time listening to really good music together. This cable is a definite winner, highly recommended, and in my opinion – offers an outstanding price-to-performance consideration. And yes, you guessed it - my new reference Ethernet cable.

SPECIFICATIONS:

Cost:

Chroma Ethernet
OFC conductors, \$75/meter (yellow jacket);

Starlight Ethernet

Silver-clad OFC conductors, \$210/meter (red jacket);

Platinum Starlight Ethernet

OCC-7N solid silver conductors, \$600/meter (platinum/light gray jacket).

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