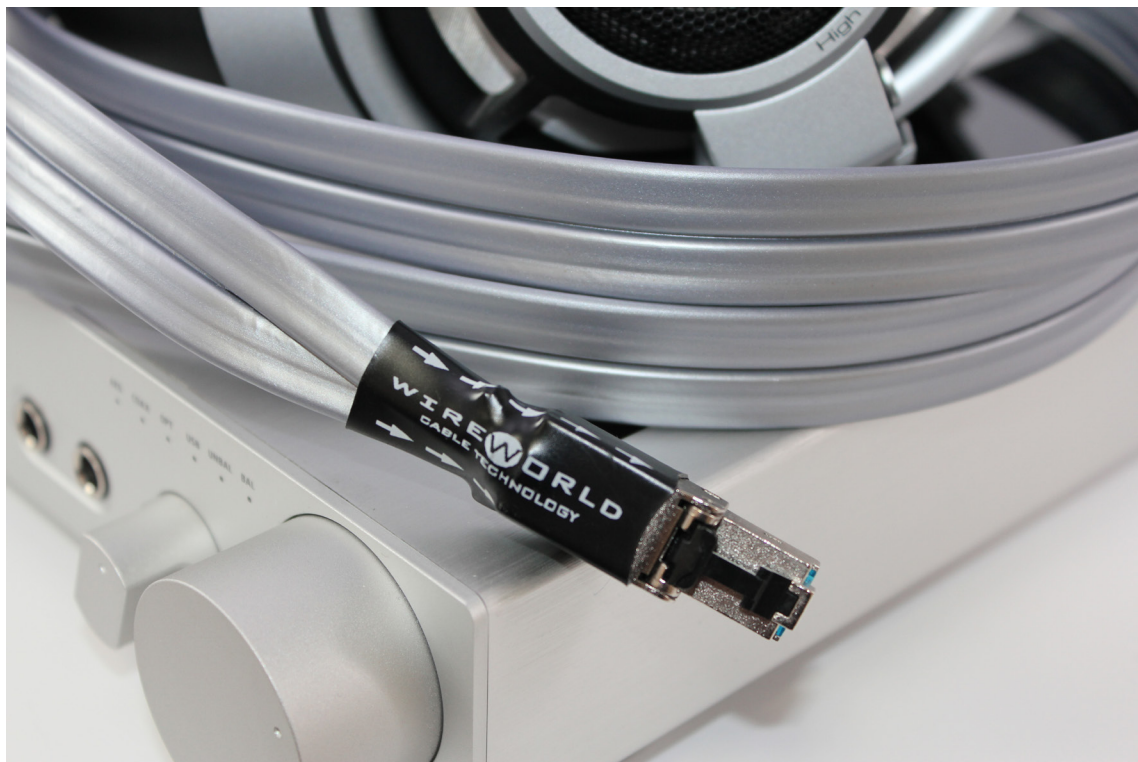


Wireworld Ethernet

by K.E. Heartsong



As I mentioned in a previous review, when your system is at, well, reference level—“exceptionally transparent and resolving, detailed, and eminently musical”—how can you efficiently and cost-effectively improve it? Improve it, that is, while keeping all current components “signed to long-term contracts.” In other words, while maintaining the continuity of your reference system. Tweaks was my answer to the previous review and that holds true for this review as well. Tweaks?

“What are tweaks? First, tweaks are things that can ostensibly improve the fidelity—the overall sound—of your audio system for relatively little money. Tweaks can be wires or cables or risers that keep cables above the floor. Tweaks can be isolation platforms or stands or isolation

feet or pucks or cones. Tweaks can also be spiked feet (surfacemounted or screwed-in) or certain inert materials—particular kinds of wood or carbon fibre or stones or a composite material. Tweaks can also be devices purposed with diminishing Electromagnetic Interference (EMI) or Radio Frequency Interference (RFI), etc. Or perhaps tweaks can be the combination of an inert, composite material embedded with, say, electronic innards—internal trap circuits—that defeat EMI and/or RFI.”

Some say that tweaks are, well, a version of “snake oil,” not dissimilar from that sold to Dorothy (see *Wizard of Oz*). Certainly, there are tweaks that are, well, ineffective. But to classify all tweaks in a similar fashion, certainly with respect to cables and wires, is like saying that all metals—

gold, silver, platinum, brass, copper, iron, lead, nickel, etc.—are “the exact same and we might as well call them all...brass.” Seem like a winning argument to you? Yeah.

The tweak currently under review is a series of ethernet cables from WireWorld, a company established in 1980 by David Salz, who applied the adage “necessity is the mother of invention” to produce cables and wires that would improve the music and video of his clients (or reviewers).

REFRAIN: Unlike most reviews, this review will be non-sequential, as it will start with how the equipment actually sounds and not the process of physically “undressing” it and/or laying out its various accoutrement, specifications, etc. Think of this review then, as a non-linear movie—Memento, Kill Bill, Pulp Fiction, Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, The Queen’s Gambit, In the Shadow of the Moon, etc.—that likewise starts at the end and winds its way to the beginning.

THE SETUP

For this review, I again used my most transparent and resolving electrostatic headphone system to more easily determine the differences, if any, between the various WireWorld supplied ethernet cables.

I began with that Basic Black ethernet cable that we all receive with our various streamers, DAC/streamers, etc. Its analysis would serve as the baseline for evaluating the suite of WireWorld cables—WireWorld Platinum Starlight 8 Twinax (Silver), Starlight® 8 Twinax Ethernet Cable (Red), and the Chroma™ 8 Twinax Ethernet Cable (Yellow)—currently under review.

The system used for the cable review comprised the Mola Mola Tambaqui as both DAC/Streamer, the Silent Angel Bonn N8 Pro Network Switch, the Blue Hawaii Special Edition (BHSE) Electrostatic Headphone Amplifier, and the Dan Clark CORINA Electrostatic Headphones (review coming). Analog cables and power cords were Audience Front Row and AntiCable. Power conditioning was provided by the TORUS POWER RM20.

I kept things simple in terms of the streams that would be used for evaluation. I utilized Dave Brubeck’s “Time Out” (Take Five, Columbia), Ólafur Arnalds “Árbakkinn,” and Joan Shelly’s “We’d Be Home” (Joan Shelly, No Quarter). My familiarity with the various pieces would make the evaluation all the easier.

I had spent quite some time with the various cables, and as it came time for the head to head to head reviews, I began the proceedings again with the Basic Black ethernet cable.

THE SOUND

Basic Black Ethernet Cable

“Time Out,” “Árbakkinn,” “We’d Be Home”

The one word that best describes the Basic Black ethernet cable’s relative voice is opaque. Relative to the WireWorld trio, its opacity would tamp down transparency and resolution while making detail retrieval all the more difficult from a higher noise floor, at the same time greatly diminishing both air and ambiance. Joe Morello’s cymbals did not attain their airy, well resolved ambiance, nor was there the same level of dimensionality. The sound stage volume, as a result, was compressed. And given the Basic Black’s limited or truncated frequency response, bass was also diminished, the treble abbreviated, and overall engagement with the music was not as immersive or natural.

I would characterize the Basic Black ethernet cable as perhaps a high-school musician playing unpaid gigs here and there and “good enough,” but not yet skilled or experienced and maybe, just maybe, in the end, only quasi-talented.

Chroma™ 8 Twinax Ethernet Cable

“Time Out,” “Árbakkinn,” “We’d Be Home”

The WireWorld Chroma 8 Twinax ethernet cable is less opaque, more open, with improved dynamics, and an expanded frequency range relative to the Basic Black. The Chroma 8 Twinax’s bass goes deeper and is tighter, though it still does not have the impact of its siblings. Further, tone/timbre are more natural and more musical, which draws you into the music, unlike the Basic Black, which holds you at a distance. Resolution is improved as well and Joe Morello’s cymbals and bass drum are, respectively better



resolved and more extended. And in terms of the voice, there is less sibilance and the voice is now richer, more robust, and not characterized by the relative thinness of the Basic Black. Overall, the Chroma 8 Twinax, relative to the Basic Black, has more transparency, is more coherent, more dimensional, and more immersive. It also extends the frequency range.

I would characterize the Chroma™ 8 Twinax ethernet cable as a discovered musical talent with all the goods and the natural ability, but it has yet to acquire the skill of the journeyman or master musician. Small off-the-beaten-path concerts and the coffee house are the boot camps of sorts where they excel, though refinement and nuance and air between notes is only grasped at by the Chroma™ 8 Twinax.

Starlight® 8 Twinax Ethernet Cable

“Time Out,” “Arbakkinn,” “We’d Be Home”



The Starlight 8 Twinax brings better refinement and nuance, more air and ambiance with more natural tone/timbre, which together are immediately more immersive. Cymbals are now light, airier, and beautifully resolved. Suffice to say that the Starlight 8 Twinax is much less opaque than the Chroma and certainly the Basic Black. Further, what the added air and ambiance bring to the performances are greater dimension and an expanded soundstage. Dynamics are more impactful (see Joe Morello’s bass drum), transient responses more energetic, and bass notes are weightier, more transparent, and more easily resolved. The “inner volume” of the bass drum now begins to come into play. Sibilance is also much reduced.

Overall, the Starlight 8 Twinax is far less opaque, of greater texture, with improved, realistic, and more natural tone/timbre, and it is more palpable. Its frequency response is still more improved.

I would characterize the Starlight® 8 Twinax ethernet cable as the very talented journeyman musician who plays at mid-tier to high venues across the country, has gained a name and a following, and clearly understands refinement and nuance. This musician has also begun to understand that air and space and nuance are part and parcel of a next-level performance, where quiet gives relevance to the notes. The confidence is there but in the end, the jazz master’s inherent superb talent escapes.

Platinum Starlight 8 Twinax Ethernet Cable

“Time Out,” “Arbakkinn,” “We’d Be Home”

The Platinum Starlight 8 Twinax, which has become the ethernet cable of choice at Casa Heartsong, steps things up quite a bit across all relevant categories. The refinement and nuance, air and ambiance rise far above all the preceding ethernet cables and together with improved tone/timbre, facilitate the most open, natural, and immersive performance. The Platinum Starlight 8 Twinax is more transparent and resolving and able to “unearth” detail to a far greater extent than its siblings; no doubt the solid silver (OCC®-7N) plays an instrumental role here. There is greater weight across the entirety of the frequency spectrum, which introduces greater palpability and a you-are-there corporeal reality for both performers and instruments. None of its siblings possessed this trait, certainly not to this degree. The weight referenced above also instigates greater dynamic impact as well as greater



treble energy. Overall, the Platinum Starlight 8 Twinax recreates the most transparent, resolving, detailed, natural, and immersive performance of all ethernet cables here at Casa Heartsong, to date. It handles the full frequency spectrum beautifully.

I would characterize the Platinum Starlight 8 ethernet cable as the most exceptionally skilled and experienced musician—the master musician—who as a result plays with skill, refinement, and nuance, and who possess the ability to pull you into the performance via unmatched talent, exceptional pacing, and the ability to place air and space between notes. Platinum Starlight 8 provides a performance with overriding confidence and certainty and ability.

NOTE: For those who may be less able to parse differences in a given cable's abilities on-the-fly, I'd suggest the Long Term Trade Out (LTTO). That is, live with the cable for a while—several days, a week, month, etc.—then remove it and replace it with your prior ethernet cable. You should have a pretty good idea after this what's what in terms of sound.

CONCLUSION

Yes, that last six feet or two metres of ethernet cable can decidedly make a difference, despite the miles and miles of wire/cable that precede it. After all, the folks who bring us the various cables for our systems, or at least many of them, have put in crazy hours on research and development working out ways to make it so. That is, making sure that the last measure of cable will improve or even dramatically improve the fidelity of your audio/stereo/video systems via the reduction of the various nasties—jitter, EMI, RFI, etc.

WireWorld has done its work with regard to its triumvirate of ethernet cables—WireWorld Platinum Starlight 8 Twinax, Starlight® 8 Twinax Ethernet Cable, and Chroma™ 8 Twinax Ethernet Cable—that will absolutely improve the signal intended for your stereo system (or even your TV). So if you're using the Basic Black or Grey or White cable, well, fuhgeddaboutit. There's better to be had out there with a good two-metre, well engineered ethernet cable from WireWorld starting at \$87.

That being said, we highly recommend the WireWorld's ethernet cables. And as you go up the line of ethernet cables, our recommendations get higher still, until you reach the WireWorld Platinum Starlight 8 Twinax, a decided BLUE MOON AWARD winner.

PROS:

Inexpensive tweak that brings improvement to your music streams and, no doubt, your video streams as well.

CONS:

None.

COMPANY

Wireworld Cable Technology

Platinum Starlight 8 Twinax (2m): \$1,500

Starlight® 8 Twinax Ethernet Cable (2m): \$350:

Chroma™ 8 Twinax Ethernet Cable (2m): \$125

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