

kubala-sosna

Elation cables

as reviewed by Robert H. Levi

The Elation series of interconnects, speaker cables, and power cords are the newest entry from Kubala-Sosna Cables. They are very expensive by any standard, but certainly do look and feel expensive. They have top-notch fit and finish with superb connectors. They are large, but flexible. They are 100% copper and well shielded. The Elations are Kubala-Sosna's mighty attempt to grab the brass ring and out perform all cable competition. Their older Emotion cable series very nearly did this and is still my top choice for best metal cable under \$4000 per meter. As you shall see, the Elation surpasses its older brother and propels audiophiles into a new sonic paradigm of musical perfection and realism. The Elations are a true triumph in high-end connectivity!

The Reference System

2009 has been phenomenal audiophile-wise at the Levi home. My recent review of the Paravicini Disc Master Magnetic Drive Turntable, now complete with two Helius Omega Tonearms and a Koetsu Rosewood Signature and ZYX Airy 3 carts, has lifted my analogue sources to new heights and is now a permanent reference. The review of the ground breaking Marten Bird Loudspeakers forever opened a window to the musical performance that was previously unknown to me. I bought the review pair and finally replaced my trusty Avalon Eidolons.

The cabling has remained the Kubala-Sosna Emotion throughout reference system number one. The digital source is the Paravicini E.A.R. Acute Tube CD Player. The preamp is the E.A.R. 912 Professional Control Centre and the phono stage is the E.A.R. 324. Both the phono and CD are balanced sources. Also used was the ModWright Sony 9100 CD/SACD/DVD with newly improved tube power supply modified by the brilliant Dan Wright. Amplifiers are two stereo E.A.R. 890 Tube Amps switched to mono operation producing 150 watts each in pure class A power. The speakers are bi-wired in this configuration. Complimenting the system is a Rel Studio III sub-woofer with crossover set to 22Hz, 180-degree phase, and with Rel signal sensing hookup from the amplifiers.

The Elation wires arrived and were quickly installed. Balanced interconnects were placed in all positions except from tonearms where RCA connectors were used. Six Elation AC cables replaced the six Emotion AC cables. Two Elation speaker cables were utilized per side to connect the Birds. I retained all current tube compliments and types within each component. Elation, like all its siblings, comes from the factory 90% run-in. 48 hours of use finishes the job. No cooking or other heroic break-in activities are necessary. To quote Joe Kubala, CEO of Kubala-Sosna, "Just hook them up right out of the box and listen for 15 minutes. If you don't like what you hear, just send them back!"

Definition

Though not the whole story by any means, the overall definition achieved by the Elation matches that of either the Nordost Odin, Tara Zero, or Jorma Prime which all cost significantly more per meter. The Elation has substantially more definition than offered by the Emotion and I placed the Emotion as still superior overall to the Nordost Vahalla. I have been travelling around Los Angeles dropping a meter or two of Elation into Odin, Zero, and [partially] Prime

wired systems. The character of the sound changes [and mostly improves], but there is NO loss in detail. In my system fully wired in Elation, I have never before heard such definition.

Plus, I believe, as do my audiophile friends in unanimity, that not one of us has heard a system more defined anywhere even at stratospheric prices than my system wired in Elation. At \$6000 per meter for the Elation, its price is less than half Odin or Zero. Not a reason to rejoice, but interesting for those who want the very best and will pay the cost.

Compared to the Emotion, I'd place the improved Elation at 30-35% more overall definition assuming you have components and speakers revealing enough to allow for this phenomenal level of reproduction. Same jump in performance with the almost identical sounding speaker cables. [I'll say more about the speaker cables in a follow-up.] Ah, but there's more to the story than just definition!

Timbre and More

I can speak with 45 years of audiophile cable auditioning experience, that to my ears, the Elation is the King of Timbre. Compared to systems wired in 100% flagship cable brands that I have personally spent time with, the Elation bests them all for reproducing harmonious organic musicality with top sources while remaining utterly neutral overall. Most other high-end cables that preach neutrality do it with a subtle reduction of musical colors... like turning down the contrast and color saturation in video to get less noise. But less is not *always* more in audio reproduction!

Note: Though I have heard individual links of Jorma Prime, I have never heard a system fully wired in Prime as I have the other top brands. [The Birds are wired with Jorma cable which may give some advantage to the Jormas.] I hope to hear a system 100% wired in Prime at some point and will revisit this at that time. For now, ranking of Jorma Prime is conditional. The Elation uniquely retains the full-bodied, full color beauty of analogue richness and provides ultimate definition. As much as I like Odin and Zero, neither matches this feat in any top system I've heard to date. Yes, it could be the gear and not the wire... but, unless ARC, VTL, Meridian, Boulder, Magico, Wilson and the like are less detailed and realistic, it's probably not the equipment at fault.

I listen to vocal and acoustic instrumental music for most of my evaluations and the realism of reproduction with the Elations is simply more palpable. The "alive-ness" in the room is astounding. Textural nuance is unsurpassed. Reproduction through the one inch diamond tweeters of my Marten Birds is majestic and supremely smooth and delicate. The mids are sophisticated and imaging spot on perfect. The bass is tight and deep and oh so detailed. This is the best bass qualitatively and quantitatively I've previously achieved in my listening room. Micro dynamics were very nearly as thrilling as macro dynamics!

The Elations offer linearity from top to bottom unmatched in my experience. No bumps or lumps... more evenness overall than even previous efforts by Kubala-Sosna. Plus, I detect no subtle reduction of dynamics as heard with the Odin in the lower mids and upper bass where they also imparted a bit of added dryness. I did not hear the subtle upper mid bump of the Zero along with its slight glare. The Elations showed me near flawless smoothness and sophistication without sonic signature. What an achievement!

My investigation into today's very top cables reveals to me that electrically most are functionally perfect and current lab measurements fail to predict their musical qualities. Their sonic character is due more and more to the musical tastes of their designers. I am not surprised that much of the equipment we so respect for their musical faithfulness comes from Europe where unamplified acoustic instrumental performances are so readily available. In this case, Kubala-Sosna designers live in New Jersey and build the cables in the USA, but love to record live, unamplified jazz performers. This gestalt of live music is most apparent with the Elation cables.

Ambience and Imaging

By removing another layer of subtle sonic grain, the Elation enhances imaging and ambience retrieval. I noticed a longer decay time of drums, trumpets, and voices in most top recordings. I did not notice any coloration that should not have been there. Image specificity and size were just right. The speakers disappear and the performances come to life. As much as I admire the Emotions, the Elations were even better. Airiness, which gives you clues as to recording space and hall character, was more easily heard. The drama of the musical event was bigger and bolder and more in the room than with any other cable I've tried.

CD vs. Phono

With Elation on board, I heard the amazing clarity of the E.A.R. Acute CD player with almost analogue-like sound from its superior upsampling DACS and its Paravicini transformer/tube amplification. With Reference Recordings, Yarlung, Telarc, and others, the performances were more stunning than digital should be and is most of the time. The Acute appears more even natured and sophisticated with the Elation... and it could have gone either way. I clearly heard the affect of the Bedini Clarifier and the L'Art du Son CD Enhancer. With the Elation, everything matters!

The ModWright Sony 9100 again proved its mettle by sounding glorious. Maybe a bit behind the much more expensive Acute for CD playback, the ModWright has never performed better with SACDs. There's something sinful about using a \$6000 cable with a \$4300 player. In SACD mode, the ModWright continues to astound all listeners. In its latest version, the unit is strikingly alive sounding and is a marriage made in heaven with the Kubala-Sosna. The Elation helps prove to me that spending more on SACD playback than that of the ModWright may just not be necessary.

The Koetsu Rosewood Signature sounded more majestic and alive. The ZYX Airy III was even LESS likable and colder. There was plenty of definition for sure, but no heart and soul before, and less now. The Koetsu was phenomenal sounding and more detailed than ever before. What delicious realistic musical sound! The Elation is the best tonearm cable [assuming you have RCA connectors] I've ever heard. It won't fix a rowdy sounding moving coil cart, but it will allow it to yield up its magic if it exists! The Elation truly proved its neutrality without subtraction or coloration within the phono circuit.

AC Cords

Not cheap for sure, but these Elations work and sound pretty much like their sibling interconnects. I don't know why, but everywhere they were used, the sonics became cleaner, clearer, and more *right* sounding. These are powerful AC cables and are suitable for power hungry amps and low power phono stages as well. They purify definition, enhance ambience, and provide *oomph* to the musical drive of the performance. I could not find an application where they did not excel. They had comparable dynamics to the Kimber Palladium and Shunyata Python, but with smoother and more elegant highs/upper mids.

They are more even natured top to bottom than the Emotion AC, which sound somewhat warmer and richer. The Elations sounded more dynamic and somewhat lushier than the Odin Power cord. I prefer the Elation power cord overall to anything right now even in systems where Kubala-Sosna interconnects are not used.

In Conclusion

There is much more to say and do with the Elations so you may expect a major follow-up. Meanwhile, the Elations will become my new high-end interconnect, loudspeaker, and AC cable reference. Based on comparisons in my number one reference system and drop-in comparisons in many other reference systems with Odin, Zero, Prime, Select, and more as

references, I am now prepared to elevate the new and quite phenomenal Kubala-Sosna Elation Interconnects, Speaker Cables, and AC Cords to State of the Art.

When used throughout an entire system, they are unsurpassed in my experience. When used in conjunction with other top cables, they most often improve the performance of that system in significant ways. We can be happy that they are not only one of the best, but also the least expensive in their supreme category. That's some kind of progress. My congratulations to Kubala-Sosna and their design team for elevating my listening experience to new celestial heights of realism with the Elation. Recommended for those that seek the ultimate reproduction of their music where cost is no object. **Robert H. Levi**

Revised interconnect rankings to include the latest listening sessions with cables ranked by reviewer preference within price categories as follows:

Over \$4000 per meter

Kubala-Sosna Elation (balanced and single ended)
Jorma Prime (balanced and single-ended) Conditional ranking
Nordost Odin (balanced and single ended)
Tara Labs The Zero (single ended)
Acrolink 7N-DA6100 (single-ended)
Jorma Origo (single-ended and balanced)

\$2000 - 4000 per meter

Harmonic Technology Photon Interconnects [fiber optic] with Power Pack 5 (balanced and single-ended)
Kubala-Sosna Emotion (balanced and single-ended)
Jorma #1 (balanced and single-ended)
Nordost Valhalla (balanced and single-ended)
Acrolink 7N-A2500 Mexcel (single-ended)
Silversmith Palladium (balanced and single-ended)
Kimber Select WITH Bybee Golden Goddess "Super Effect" RCA IC Tails (single-ended)

\$1000 - 2000 per meter

CRL Silver Interconnects (balanced and single-ended)
Stereovox 600-SElii (balanced and single-ended)
Kubala-Sosna Expression (balanced and single-ended)
Kimber Select Silver (balanced and single-ended)
Acoustic Zen Silver Reference II (balanced and single-ended)

\$450 - 1000 per meter

Harmonic Technology Magic II (Balanced and single-ended)
Nordost Heimdall (Balanced and single-ended)
CRL Copper Series Interconnects (Single-ended tested)
Harmonic Technology Pro Sil-way III+ (balanced and single-ended)
Kimber Select Copper (balanced and single-ended)

\$250 - 450 per meter

Mythos by Argentum Acoustics (balanced and single-ended)
Dynamic Design New Generation Lotus SE
Soundstring Pro (balanced and single-ended)

Under \$250

Kimber Hero (balanced and single-ended)

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Interconnects, Speaker Cables: \$6000 first meter, \$1200 each additional meter (or \$600 each additional half-meter).

Power Cables: \$1800 first meter, \$500 each additional meter (or \$250 each additional half-meter)

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