

kubala-sosna research

Emotion Cables

as reviewed by Jim Merod



JIM MERODS' SYSTEM

LOUDSPEAKERS

TETRA 606s (also: Apogee Stages, SP TECH Time Piece 1.2s, Vandersteen 2Ce-modified, Acoustic Zen Adagios, van Sweikert VCL-15 monitor reference and sub, Tetra Manhattans),

ELECTRONICS

Z Systems UDP-1, Birdland Odeon-Ag 24-192/SACD Upsampling DAC, Manley Shrimp, Meridian 518 mod plus, Audio Research SP-8 Dahong Seeto version preamplifiers. McCormack 125 Platinum Full-Rev Edition, Nuforce P-9 mono blocks, KR VT600-MK tube mono blocks, McCormack 0.5 "Lady Day" Edition amplifiers.

SOURCES

OPPO DV 970HD, Denon 1650-AR, Pioneer Elite DV-45A, Samsung DVD R135, McCormack CD Drive-plus, Alesis ML 9600 MasterLink 24-96 digital recorder, Tascam RA1000 DSD recorder, Marantz "Professional" Recorder, Tascam RW750 Pro CD Recorder,

CABLES

Nordost Valhalla, Stealth Meta-carbon and Stealth ZERO limited edition, Kubala-Sosna Emotion and Emotion "cryo'd", van den Hull carbon, Acoustic Zen Matrix and Silver Reference "Exact", Magnan Silver Bronze, Silversmith Paladium, Analysis Plus ULTRA

PLUS, Wireworld Eclipse III, Audience Conductor, Bogdan Silver Spirit, Silverline "Alan Yun Special Edition" balanced digital, Acoustic Zen MC-Squared, Magnan digital RCA. Kubala-Sosna Emotion, Analysis Plus, Acoustic Zen Absolute. Gargantua, Krakatoa, and Tsunami power cords, VH Audio Flavor 4, Stealth, PS Audio, WireWorld power cords.

ACCESSORIES

Audience AdeptResponse 12 outlet power conditioner and Magnan ultra power strip.

Prologue

Shakespeare's Macbeth offers the most gripping of the Bard's psychodramas, not least because his regicide's articulate self-awareness delivers any witness to the foyer of psychic hell. Macbeth knows better, but cannot resist imagination's evil instincts. We follow his crime straight to the infernal clarity his language crafts, where "tears shall drown the wind".

Thus, my peculiar witness to Macbeth's disturbed fondness for the best or most of lust's elusive kingdom, no second or third allowed when "best" or "most" is scarcely good enough for evil imaginings. Such desire applies to audio dreams and nightmares.

I was fine before Joe Kubala visited my calm domicile one day two years ago or so. Joe is a gentle, enthusiastic man given to serious discourse, the sort of give and take one gets from someone who cares for the Bard's complexities. My world was not disturbed before Herr Kubala arrived at the scene of our crime. I was not displaced against my will. Much simpler, it was the mayhem his wordless demonstration of "a new of brand cables" offered my too eager interest.

First Act

Joe Kubala visited innocently enough, at my request, because potentially good cables (or great cables) somehow attract my attention. The deviser of the ensuing crime will be kept nameless since the havoc his recommendation concocted is still underway. Cutting toward my chase, let me accept responsibility for perpetually seeking the burdensome joys of perverse (well-rewarded) audio curiosity.

On his initial visit, Maestro Kubala explained what his cables were up to, something of the long history of creation that stood behind their birth—and his own willingness to put the Kubala-Sosna brand of wire against any and all competition, bar none. That challenge was not given stridently. It almost slipped out, a surplus of confidence, the way Clint Eastwood's lovable character, Dirty Harry, can't resist telling the truth. When he reminds someone to "make" his day, you smile in anticipation of conclusions about to change the day's meaning.

Joe Kubala has none of Eastwood's swagger, but a good deal of his charm. I'll admit, and refuse to be revised in this statement, that I was somewhat disarmed by the low-keyed humor and effortless calm of Joe Kubala's cheerful presentation. We're talking about wire here, not Mozart's unfinished operas, and yet wire means a great deal to a recording engineer always looking for a sonic advantage on both sides of the game (recording on site and mastering to mop up extraneous details).

Thus my wary initial engagement with K-S cables. Why did I need to investigate more wire? I had this area of audio covered, I thought. Why push for more when "more" was already near at hand?

Second Act

Maybe not. Joe asked me which interconnect junction was most crucial to my current listening endeavors. He then made the substitution: K-S Emotion in and a very expensive pair of cables out. VOILA! More *there* there.

"Can you repeat that trick?" I mumbled. He nodded in response. We swapped more chunky Emotion braids into place. Same result.

So, I immediately called a nearby audio guru and told him that as long as this Magical Snake Oil Cable Guy was in the neighborhood, it was in his best interest to offer a prompt invitation. Soon Joe Kubala headed off to my pal's, my head a touch agog with what I'd witnessed. Tears shall drown the wind.

Later that day, my buddy called to say he'd been greatly distracted. The magic I'd heard at Chez BluePort did not appear in his audio den. I commiserated and assured him I'd been set ajar, against my wishes, but hearing is believing (as the German reminds us, *gehoren follows horen*). A scant few weeks after, with closer inspection, his recognition of Emotion's undeniable rightness verified my own.

I invited Joe Kubala to visit again, willing and able, on his next jaunt west. Joe is an east coast guy and a busy man. I suspected I'd likely not be lucky soon. Wrong. When the time came, Joe graciously came for extended listening, the two of us plotting an extensive rearrangement of my main sound system. That visit was one of those "never to be forgotten" occasions when your wife begrudgingly jibes that you completely invaded the house with wire and discs, but the comic energy with "that new audio bloke" was nonetheless welcome since even she (who cares little for such nonsense) heard the musical enhancement right before her reach.

No higher compliment obtains. No tears. No wind.

I'll confess that, more than most, I'm devoted to differences that cables provide both sound crafting (recording) and sound reproduction (listening and mastering work). Anyone who's read my reviews over the years recognizes that I'm a sucker for the subtle and not so subtle differences that wire makes—tone control alterations in meter lengths. However, something was afoot here with Kubala-Sosna's Emotion cables that presented an order of magnitude difficult to define.

Let me try. My initial hearing on that otherwise dull afternoon showed me that the Emotion cable is a lover of music. That statement is an approximation, without metaphor, intending to suggest that the essential musicality of Emotion cables was the first obvious, concretely evident quality of their sonic presentation. I really did not want Joe Kubala to abandon my house that day without leaving a pair of those rather bulky, blue cloth-covered cables with me. That did not occur.

Therefore, my second, longer, far more detailed and leisurely session with the cables was gratifying—because it confirmed my first observations and gave extended musical pleasure. On that occasion, the trick that Joe employed was the oldest, dirtiest, most tried-and-tested gambit in the book. He replaced all sets of cables in my system, one by one, top to bottom. This swapping out effort took hours. It included all interconnects, speaker wires, and digital cables replacing very good (expensive), enormously loved and respected cables in a serial substitution that wholly revamped the system's wire ...and sound.

One lonely Kubala-Sosna power cord was the final substitution. With each incremental replacement, Emotion in, other cables out, my system took on greater resolution, fuller staging, more delicate and refined tonality, more powerful dynamics and, degree by relentless degree, more engaging musicality—that hard to define, but impossible to ignore, involvement between one's ears and heart and all the sensuality and intrigue one's most cherished music gives them.

Third Act

How do I explain to my grandchildren, whose legacy someday will be cables atop cables, that the old man haunted by their use was not a tearful integer storming blank space?

I have more to say about the Emotion cables since they've come to be partners in my life as a listener and in my work as a recording guy—and with my work with Steve McCormack in mastering BluePort Jazz recordings. I'll digress to say that, recently, Steve and I plopped Emotion cables into our mastering rig. The results will be found in the review that follows this one. No need to be coy. They are affirmative and trump the newly discovered "law of Emotion cables" ...to wit, musicality

outflanks mere analytic precision anytime, but musicality with analytic detail is a recording and mastering engineer's Holy Grail.

I'll conclude by summarizing more than two years of listening to, working with, and making sense of Kubala-Sosna's Emotion cables. No cable easily can claim "the best" in every aspect of signal delivery and sound reproduction. Only a very few are within reach of that absolute. Emotion is one of those.

No cable will please all listeners. Each sound system has its own eccentricities and synergy match up challenges. But no cables I've ever used or listened to as frequently as Emotion cables has withstood so many demands from my personal inclinations and professional needs. When I report that these cables are detailed, I mean that, but I do not mean they are "bright", "etched", or tilted up within the sonic spectrum. Nor do I mean that they cheat against spectral fullness or any other signal constant for the sake of narrow audio victories.

When I say that Emotion cables as a set, as a full system of wire in a fairly complex sound rig, offer added degrees of clarity and engagement—an order of magnitude of audio enhancement—I mean that precisely. I doubt many audio-driven people have been fortunate to have a complete system of Emotion cables in their domestic or professional audio domain for an extended time. That's an expensive venture. While I cannot judge "audio value" on an absolute scale, I can attest to the fact (vividly evident) that a good sound system becomes great with Emotion re-cabling front to back. Great audio systems render words meaningless.

The longer I work with cables in my several occupations with them—as a music lover; as a recording guy; as a mastering laborer—the more I realize that I can easily "live" on an ongoing basis with several specific cable configurations that have earned my respect over the years. The sobering part of that realization is that none of them is inexpensive. Therefore, for me, the joy of it all demands practical sobriety of bardic proportions. In preparation for my follow up review, soon, devoted to Kubala-Sosna's extraordinary Emotion speaker cables, let me assert, simply and directly, that I have absolute faith in the audio integrity—the signal accuracy and musical beauty—delivered by Emotion interconnect cables, both balanced and unbalanced. I've used lengths from one meter to more than twelve meters (as microphone cables on delicate, difficult live recordings, plural). One comes back again and again to things that work.

For those who can afford to invest a significant portion of a large audio budget on wires, Kubala-Sosna's Emotion cables will open a universe of sonic discriminations where music's innate mystery, its expressive feeling, reveals tactile imponderables worth a lifetime's pursuit. **Jim Merod**

Emotion Interconnects

Retail: \$2700 a meter, \$800 each additional

Kubala-Sosna Research

web address: www.kubala-sosna.com

