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## **Analysis Plus Oval One Interconnects and Clear Oval Speaker Cables**

Cables continue to be a contentious issue in audio. Some people hear differences seemingly so vast that you'd swear the cables have more to do with the sound of a system than the components they're connecting. Others hear no difference at all and swear that any differences that the first group is hearing stem from overblown imaginations. As with most things, though, the truth likely lies somewhere between the extremes.

When properly matched to an appropriate system, cables can provide an incremental improvement to a system's sound -- the last touch, so to speak. And this improvement does not have to cost all that much. The Analysis Plus Oval One interconnects and Clear Oval speaker cables break the sub-\$100 price barrier -- \$83 for a six-foot run of speaker cable and \$89 for a one-meter interconnect can buy you a terrific improvement over the "gimme" cables that most manufacturers include in the box.

### **Background**

Just as there is disagreement about whether cables make any difference at all, for those who do believe they do make a difference, there is also disagreement as to exactly how. Cable gauge, geometry, shielding, and materials have all been cited as possible reasons. Then there are the more obvious things such as the quality of the connector that terminates each end. As a result, different companies employ different methods to build their products -- and to differentiate their own products from the competition.

The folks in charge of Analysis Plus are electrical engineers who specialize in providing measurable, quantifiable data about why their cables do what they do. Analysis Plus didn't start in audio; it started out as a consulting firm providing in-depth engineering expertise to a wide variety of industries. When it was hired by a well-known audio company to provide data that would substantiate the performance of its products, one thing led to another and Analysis Plus ended up with a cable design with performance characteristics that were easily measurable and which should correlate with good sound. The company spun-off an audio division that now produces cables based on this experience. That's why Analysis Plus can be seen at trade show after trade show with its oscilloscope demonstrating just how its cables -- and the competition's -- perform under various tests

Among other things, Analysis Plus believes that the geometry of a cable is critical to the cable's ability to transmit a signal without degradation. That caused the company to develop its patented, nifty-looking Hollow Oval design. According to the company's president, Mark Markel, "every wire is statistically as close to the return current as every other wire." This is said to distribute the current density more evenly, which makes the resistance of the cable constant over a wider range of frequencies compared to conventional round cables. And, of course, Analysis Plus claims, all this is measurable.

## Description

The Oval One interconnects are far more substantial than most inexpensive interconnects. The cable portion is finished in a thick purple jacket with a cleanly fitted shrink jacket that goes over the RCA termination. It's a fully shielded design in order to keep the noise floor low. The high-quality 75-ohm RCA connectors provide a tight fit -- important for optimum signal transfer -- but not so tight that they are difficult to use or will rip the RCA jacks off components when they're removed. Overall, they're nice looking and well finished.

The 14-gauge Clear Oval speaker cables have, as the name suggests, a clear PVC outer jacket. The individual high-purity, oxygen-free copper conductors are covered with either black (negative) or purple (positive) insulation and are stacked on top of one another. The Clear Oval cables that I received were terminated with gold-plated spade lugs that should fit most binding posts. They are also available with banana plugs or pins for those who prefer these methods of connection.

Both the Oval One interconnect and Clear Oval speaker cables feature crimped-on, solderless terminations said to protect the dielectric from heat damage. Both the speaker cables and interconnects are quite flexible and easy to use, but are solid enough to give the sense of *confidence* that comes from using high-quality cables.

## Sound

I've found many of the "gimme" cables have a thin, almost zippy sound that can be irritating to the ears. The same goes for the lamp-cord speaker cable that some audio dealers will supply at no extra charge. First, I used the Analysis Plus Clear Oval speaker cables with an Arcam AVR100 receiver, Panasonic DVD-A110 DVD player (used as a CD player), and Athena Audition AS-B1 loudspeakers. I heard an incremental increase in low-level detail from recordings. Everything sounded just a little bit clearer and more refined. The top-to-bottom balance of the sound was also better. The system imaged better. For instance, vocalists were placed more precisely in the soundstage from left to right and there was also a good sense of depth to the presentation.

Adding the Analysis Plus Oval One interconnects incrementally improved the sound, but in a way that surprised me.

I normally use my DVD player as a transport and rely on the digital-to-analog conversion capability of the Arcam receiver. It sounded better that way than when I used the player's internal DACs and sent an analog signal to the receiver. That was before the Analysis Plus Oval One interconnects came along.

With the Analysis Plus interconnects on the analog outputs of the DVD player (using the DVD player's internal DACs) the sound was warmer, richer, and more enjoyable overall. Less-than-perfect pop recordings such as "Lady Marmalade" from the soundtrack to the movie *Moulin Rouge* [Interscope 0694930352] became weightier and less harsh when played back at high volumes. The bass on Billy Idol's *Greatest Hits* [Chrysalis 72435-28812-2] was stronger and firmer. Cuts such as "White Wedding" and "Rebel Yell" sounded less etched than before, but still had plenty of low-level detail.

Well-recorded classical CDs also benefited from the use of the Analysis Plus interconnects. Robert Silverman's powerful piano playing on *Beethoven: 32 Piano Sonatas* [Orpheum Masters KSP830] came alive and there was more body and weight when the piano hit its lower registers. The Analysis Plus interconnects provided a more "fleshed-out" sound that was powerful and visceral, yet easy to listen to.

With both speaker cables and interconnects in place, the system had a more substantial, fuller sound that was smoother to the ears. Strings on Eva Cassidy's *Live at Blues Alley* [Blix Street G2-10046] did not sound as hard and her voice was placed further back in the soundstage with more depth and air around her. Although the effect was not huge, the soundstage was unmistakably larger with greater delineation of its individual elements. On Madonna's "Sky Fits Heaven" from *Ray of Light* [Maverick CDW 46847], the spooky synthesizer scales imaged well outside of the speakers and the vocals were more precisely placed and *holographic* sounding.

The added weight that the interconnects added to the presentation and the clean transparent sound of the speaker cables complemented each other nicely on the varied tracks on the soundtrack to the movie *City of Angels* [Warner CDW 46867]. The opening piano bars of Sarah McLachlan's "Angel" had excellent pitch definition and authority and McLachlan's vocals were breathy and mournful.

The guitar riffs of the Goo Goo Dolls' "Iris" can sound etched at times, but they remained smooth and powerful with the Analysis Plus cables in the system. Peter Gabriel's "I Grieve" exhibited deep, throbbing bass, but the subtleties of the complex and atmospheric sound were still discernible. The Analysis Plus cables provided a sound that was powerful, yet always remained coherent and refined.

## **Conclusion**

Specialized audio cables such as these Analysis Plus offerings should not be used to compensate for poor-sounding components. Instead, they should be the icing on the cake -- to allow you to hear everything the system is capable of. In a system that already sounds good, the Analysis Plus Clear Oval speaker cables and Oval One interconnects provide a discernable sonic improvement over basic cables. I enjoyed the increased weight and power of the music, along with the system's improved transparency. The cables are also well-built, attractively designed, and, perhaps most importantly, priced reasonably enough that the cost of this upgrade is easy to justify.

## **Price of equipment reviewed**

[Analysis Plus Oval One Interconnects and Clear Oval Speaker Cables](#) - \$89 USD (per one-meter pair) and \$83 USD (per six-foot pair) respectively