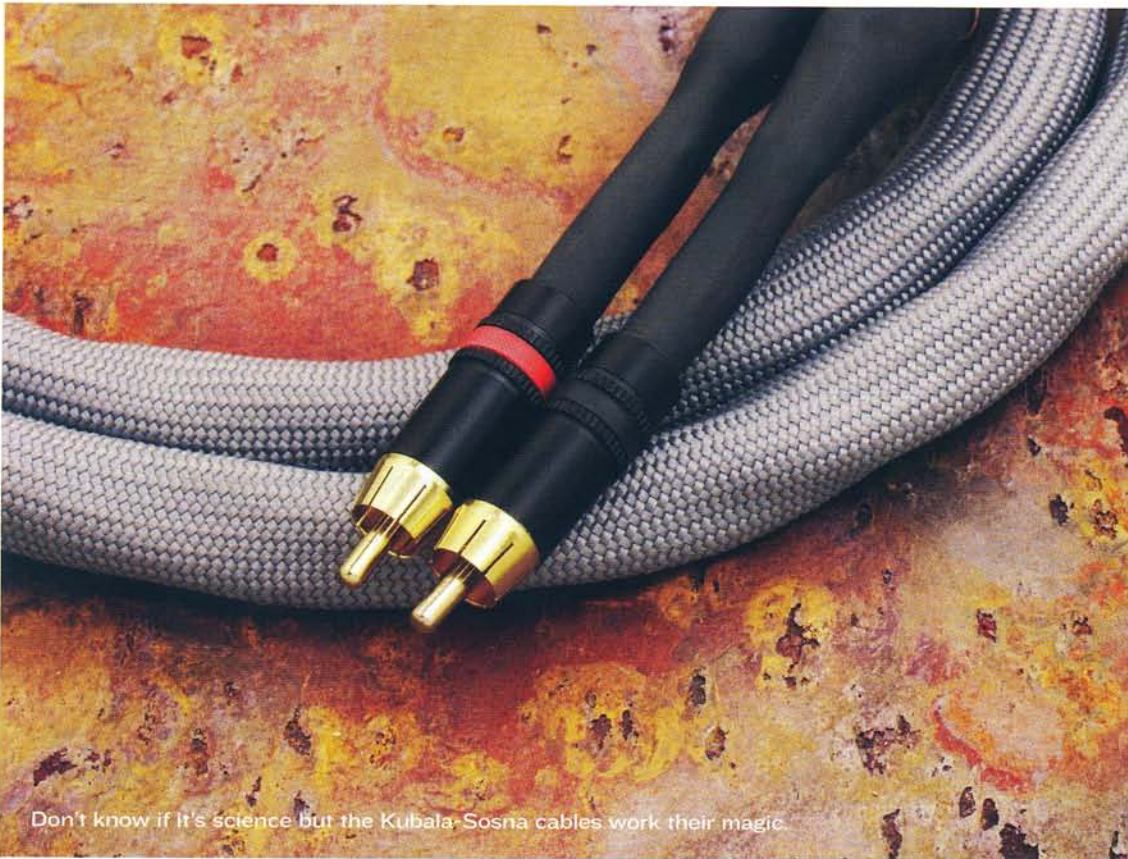


FASCINATIN' RHYTHM

KUBALA-SOSNA FASCINATION CABLING SYSTEM
AIN'T SO ENTRY LEVEL COMPARED TO OTHER
COMPETITORS IN THE FIELD

BY DANNY KAEY



Don't know if it's science but the Kubala-Sosna cables work their magic.

OVER THE LAST five years or so, I have become a true proponent of good cables: The whole lot, power cords, speaker cables and interconnects. Prior to that time I'd never really paid all that much attention to wire. However, matters took an unexpected turn when I was asked to review a pair of cables for a publication to which I was contributing. I soon realized that one truly needed to pay attention to all parts of an ultra-high quality audio playback chain. After all, if components with their various parts and designs can make a difference to sound quality, then surely the

cables used to connect them must also make a difference. Unfortunately, cables are also a great cause for all the nay-sayers; those who consider high-end audio thrill seekers a bunch of fools who have been conned by the latest snake oil gadget.

Of course, considering that cables worth thousands upon thousands of dollars are available to the audiophile consumer, someone unfamiliar with the science behind cabling could easily think that we are indeed fools who have fallen prey to fly-by-night marketing operations. The truth, however, is quite the

FACTS

MODEL

Fascination
Speaker cables,
power cords,
interconnects

MANUFACTURER

Kubala-Sosna
Research Rating

RATING



PRICE

\$800 US
interconnect
& single wire
speaker cables
for 1 metre,
\$250 US each
additional metre

CONTACT

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Unlike many other cable systems I have tried, with the Kubala-Sosna Fascination series, more does equal better

contrary: A cable system — any cable system — can make or break the sound of an audio playback chain.

Case in point, a few weeks ago a colleague received a new pair of recently released loudspeakers built by a very well-known manufacturer. He inserted them into his home system, anticipating the rumoured and highly regarded sound to emerge at the flick of a switch. To spare you the details, the sound was nothing close to what I could recall about the potential these speakers had exhibited in my past encounters. One could not fault the other components, as they were all top notch. Only after we had changed the entire set of cables did the sound resemble what I had known these loudspeakers could do. It quickly became clear that the interaction of the substituted cables with the rest of the gear in the system allowed the sound to truly come alive. A lesson relearned.

The World Suddenly Changed

ABOUT TWO YEARS ago, a good friend of mine, recording engineer and owner of Bluport Jazz Jim Merrod, invited me to one of his recording sessions. Jim is a master of his craft and someone whose ears I genuinely trust, so I could hardly wait. Shortly after my arrival I noticed hordes of rather nicely crafted cables: Kubala-Sosna touted the logo, and each cable was beautifully encased in velvet-like dark blue cotton cloth. Jim's entire recording chain featured these new cables!

"Danny, you have got to hear these Kubala-Sosna Emotion cables: They are truly amazing!" Jim exclaimed. "I guess they must be 'amazing,' since you've wired your entire recording system with them," I replied. Far from being a marketing chaser, Jim is perhaps one of the most serious engineers I know of: Only if something truly improves the sound of his work will he actually embrace it.

Fast forward to the present. I can safely tell you that since I rewired my entire system with Kubala-Sosna's top-of-the-line Emotion cables, my system has rendered a new-found level of playback quality. They seemed to produce what I would call utterly neutral sound, that is to say, no sound at all. Unlike my experience with many other cables that have come and gone, each time an Emotion cable was added to the system the closer the system moved toward neutrality. Typically, in the past, while each

addition from a cable family's line clearly improved certain areas of sound quality, it nevertheless seemed to impart some sort of "sound" to the system. When the system had been fully wired with whatever brand of cable was under scrutiny, the overall perception usually was that too much of a good thing sometimes is, in fact, just that. Not so with the Kubala-Sosna cables. Whatever piece of review gear I inserted into the system, I knew that component's signature sound would not be altered by these cables.

I don't know enough about the science involved to say what causes the KS cable to perform this sort of magic, but the results speak volumes about the performance of the Emotions. They are the top products of a series KS calls Revolution™ followed next by the Expression and then by the Fascination series. Each line uses what Kubala-Sosna calls Optim™ architecture, about which presently they choose to remain mum. All Joe Kubala will say is that the cables are copper based and use KS's patent-pending architecture to keep capacitance, resistance and inductance in check. While it would be great to understand the science behind it all, I really only care about the results: simply fantastic and unexpected!

An Entry Portal

A FEW MONTHS ago, Joe Kubala asked me about the prospect of reviewing KS's entry level Revolution cable, the Fascination. At US\$800 for the first metre (\$250 for each additional metre and applicable to any XLR or RCA single wire combination; power cords start at US\$350 for the first metre, \$100 each additional metre) the Fascination line is certainly more expensive than the "throw it in the package" cables provided with some components. However, the question, of course, was how they compare and contrast with other cables or even the top-of-the-line Emotion series. As I pondered this comparison, Joe had an interesting suggestion: "Why don't you compare them directly to the Emotion series?"

The single-wire speaker cables, interconnects and power cords Joe sent had all been fully broken in by KS, so I was able to rewire my entire system with the Fascination series at the same time and grateful that my listening could proceed immediately without the dreaded lengthy burn-in process. Of course, I wasn't quite sure what to expect: Would they work

magic similar to the top-of-the-line iteration? To say that I was impressed within seconds would be an understatement. I would venture to guess that it didn't take more than a half dozen seconds to realize that what I was listening to was eerily close to the sound produced with the Emotion cables, although perhaps a few clicks short of top end resolution and providing an ever so slightly lower level of refinement in the rest of the audio spectrum. Ta-Da!

The disbelief began to settle as I played track after track of my favourite discs, which demonstrated that the Fascination was quite an amazing feat. A cable system giving me perhaps 85% to 90% of the sound delivered by the much more expensive Emotions for such a lot less money? Who could say no to such a (relative) bargain? What was perhaps even more profound was the fact that I could hear the family resemblance — neutrality (if one can actually call this a family resemblance). This was immediately apparent as were all the other performance characteristics I had learned to love with the Emotions: resolution, transparency, dynamics and timing.

Take for example one of my all-time favourite electronic bands, Yello. Their recordings are immaculately produced and engineered aural landscapes that can leave one breathless. On their latest disc, *The Eye I* [Universal/Motor 0602498658635] "Planet Dada (Flamboyant)" is a perfect example. Explosive dynamics, a super-tight rhythm and bass section and overall whizz-bang effects are important features of this number. With my other no-longer-in-use reference cables (no need to name them), this track could, at times, sound somewhat congested (there's a lot going on!) and slow, as in giving you some sort of time lapse playback rather than the continuous flow of the rhythm section. With both the Emotion and the Fascination cables in the system, timing snaps right back in place, presenting a more balletic and graceful flow and pace; I can easily hear that difference even when I sit in the adjacent living room.

The difference between the two lines at opposite ends of KS's hierarchy is really not that dramatic. In fact, so good are the Fascination cables that you'd be hard pressed to tell the difference unless you had immediate access to the much more expensive Emotion line. While pace and rhythm are almost

identical with both cable lines (to my mind, these are among the most important characteristics of good sound), you do get a bit more top end extension and perhaps more transparency (seeing deeper into the soundscape) with the most expensive cables.

On Sly & Robbie's *A Dub Experience* [Mango — 162 539 787-2], the track "Computer Malfunction," provides another great demonstration of the strengths of the Fascination line. An early digital transfer — yes, the vinyl sounds better — this disc has a tendency to sound overtly bright and in your face in some system set-ups (I usually take this track on all my audio show visits). With some familiar systems, especially those that use exotic and often extremely costly cables, the sound is simply too early-digital, that is, a certain glare and extra high frequency garble comes through. I'm not convinced, by the way, that this comes from the disc itself. In fact, when I play this song with the Fascination cables in the system, the glare is gone, replaced by a smooth, neutral top end while still being bright. In other words, with the KS Fascinations in place, the song becomes listenable, even for extended periods.

So — how to truly judge the Fascination line? Based on my auditions, these cables are so good that you really need to give them a try, preferably in a complete system approach. Unlike many other cable systems I have tried, with the Kubala-Sosna Fascination series more does equal better. Inserting all available cables into your system, right down to the power cord does, in fact, bring you incremental improvements, particularly in neutrality and timing. Of course, as with many things in high-end audio, the pricier top-of-the-line Emotion series gives you just that much more.

The Bottom Line

NOW IF KUBALA-Sosna would only offer some sort of generous upgrade policy... wait a minute: They do! Further differentiating themselves from the norm, this company offers a true upgrade path that will allow you to test the benefits of the Kubala-Sosna cables in your system. If you want to upgrade within 90-days of purchase from an authorized dealer, the full retail price of the original set will be applied to your next KS step-up purchase. However, you may love the Kubala-Sosna Fascination cables so much that you may not jump on the upgrade train any time soon.

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