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Product Review

GutWire Audio
Chime Interconnects and
Speaker Cables
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I just love playing in a room full of snakes, don't you? OK, maybe not *real* snakes, but these days, with all the cabling I have in use and lying around, my listening room is starting to resemble a snake pit. Cabling for an audio system can be viewed from a couple of different angles. One person sees it as merely wire to make a system work, while another believes that good cables are almost as important as the components they connect. I tend to fall into the latter category, and I can only imagine that you, if you have gotten this far, are with me. With some careful matching and just a little dumb luck, we may end up with a synergistic whole that brings everything together, complementing the fine electronics the cables are partnered with and maximizing the abilities of each link in the chain.

Thankfully, all of the stepping around the snakes has been for good reason—the GutWire Audio Chime interconnects (\$769 USD per one-meter pair) and the biwire version of the Chime speaker cables (\$2920 per eight-foot pair) I received for review.

Technical Guts

GutWire cables are all the product of one philosophy: "to bring back music the way it should be." While this may sound simplistic in the grand scheme of things, GutWire has taken some unusual steps toward achieving this goal. They have applied some sophisticated shielding to reject both electromagnetic and radio-frequency interference. The company claims a 98% reduction rate in the levels of both types of interference, thus allowing nearly unpolluted signal transfer.

One visible cue that the Chime interconnects aren't like all others is the ground wire with a small alligator clip attached; this is found only on the RCA-terminated, single-ended interconnects, not the balanced. The idea is to allow the user the option of either floating or grounding the final outside shield layer, which may yield a better sound one way or the other. The easiest way to ground the interconnects is to attach the clips to the preamp's ground terminal. I personally grounded the cables, and I suspect that since I run a long length of balanced interconnect between my preamp and the power amps, I was minimizing the perceived differences between the single-ended GutWire interconnects and my reference balanced interconnects.

A less visible but equally noteworthy feature of the Chime interconnects and speaker cables is that GutWire has chosen to employ a cold-welding method of termination. This is essentially done by crimping under very high pressure, which GutWire believes results in a superior connection and better sound.

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The Chime speaker cables also have an aluminum box along their length. At first glance, this could be confused for one of the network boxes that Transparent or MIT uses, but it is not. Its purpose is actually to help keep the speaker cables elevated from the floor, thus reducing the influence of stray static or vibration. To this end, it is moveable along the length of the cable to facilitate experimentation if so desired.

All GutWire cables are made with high-purity oxygen-free copper wire, with unique weave patterns employed. The outer jacket is of a woven black fabric, soft to the touch, and of moderate flexibility. The Chime interconnect will require about an extra inch of clearance behind the components due to its strain relief, which could give some users grief in cabinets or racks with closed backs. Interconnects and speaker cables are both fitted with WBT terminating hardware. In the case of the Chime interconnect, the locking-collar 0108 WBT RCAs are used. The speaker cables, in particular, were extremely solidly put together, as is befitting a product at their price level. GutWire backs up its products with a lifetime warranty to the original owner.

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REVIEW SUMMARY

Sound

"The Chime interconnects are capable of exposing an enormous range of detail buried within the music, doing so in a natural, relaxed manner," but "listening to the Chime speaker cables... proved to be just the ticket to sonic nirvana"—with their "liquid midrange and highs," "quiet background," and "powerfully articulated bass that revealed lots of detail and weight."

Features

Interconnects and power cords have shielding that can be grounded or floated; interconnects and speaker cables use a "cold-welding method of termination"; lifetime warranty to the original owner.

Use

Interconnects and power cords will require a little extra clearance due to their bulky strain-relief mechanisms.

Value

Costly, but the speaker cables are "something special" and the interconnects are "competitive with some of the best interconnects available."

Associated Guts

The GutWire cables saw lots of use over the last few months, with my usual reference gear: Mark Levinson No.31 transport and No.360 DAC, Levinson No.380 preamp, Krell KSA-200S stereo or Blue Circle BC8 mono amps, and B&W Nautilus 804 speakers. I also used the cables with my Sonic Frontiers SFT-1 transport, Aragon Aurum preamp and Aragon D2A Mk II DAC. The GutWire cabling was also used during the course of reviewing the Matisse Fantasy Mk II line-stage preamp and Blue Circle BC26 amplifier. Comparison cables were Transparent Ultra interconnects and Reference digital cable. The main link between the preamps and amplifiers was a long length of balanced Transparent Music Link Plus. Speaker cables were biwire Transparent Music Wave SuperXL. Power filtration of all source gear was done by an AudioPrism Foundation II.

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Sonic Guts

In some respects, listening to the GutWire cables over the review period has been an ear-opening experience. The Chime interconnects are capable of exposing an enormous range of detail buried within the music, doing so in a natural, relaxed manner, as opposed to the explicit, in-your-face way that some overly detailed cables seem to do. The upper midrange seems to be these cables' forte, digging up copious amounts of detail and presenting it with an uncanny sense of space and image specificity. Playing "Salamander Pie" from the DMP sampler CD *A Taste of DMP* [DMP CD-466] opened up a fine, focused space and showed taut yet agile bass. There seemed to be a reduction in the overhang of the stand-up bass too, allowing each note to be more articulated from one another. The highs were clear and delineated without becoming too clinical or abrasive. There was plenty of "air up there" for those who value such commodities and the contribution it can make to conveying the space of the recording venue.

Comparing the Chime interconnects with my reference Transparent Ultras proved to be an interesting venture. Designed from two rather differing schools of thought, they both attempt to re-create a presentation analogous to the real thing—no surprise. Both succeed, albeit in different ways. The Chime interconnects excel in their open, almost ethereal presentation of the upper midrange and highs, while the bass is taut and may be perceived by some as a touch light. The Transparent Ultras, on the other hand, propel the music along with timing and a rhythmic quality that can become rather addictive. The Ultras' midrange and highs tended to be perhaps a little more matter-of-fact by comparison to the Chimes' delicate and graceful quality.

The Chime biwire speaker cables, however, played the trump card. Listening to the Chime speaker cables in conjunction with the Blue Circle BC8 mono amps proved to be just the ticket to sonic nirvana—no fooling! The sonic virtues of the Chime interconnects are manifested in the speaker cables too—the liquid midrange and highs, the quiet background, the air time too; however, added to the mix is a powerfully articulated bass that revealed lots of detail and weight.

Listening to "Fanfare for the Common Man" from the Wilson Audio Specialties sampler CD [Wilson Audio WA8008] was a jaw-dropping good time. The drum whacks were fully realized, with lots of definition to the skins accompanied by an enormously wide and deep soundstage. The horns, in particular, sounded well developed in the acoustic space. Similarly Sade's *Lovers Rock* [Epic EK85185], while being perhaps a bit overly ripe in the bass at times, is nonetheless a great CD loaded with lots of layering and detail to be unraveled. With the Chime speaker cables in place, my favorite track, "Somebody Already Broke My Heart," developed a wide, deep soundstage with Sade's voice hanging deftly in the middle and surrounded by the various rhythm instruments—all propelled along by a potent bass line. Whoa!

Compared to my Transparent Music Wave Super XL biwire speaker cables, the Chime speaker cables seemed to remove a layer of haze, allowing the background to be quieter than the already superb black background of the Transparent cables. Voices were also rounder and smoother with the Chime speaker cables in use. The Transparent cables sounded perhaps a touch more forward by comparison and didn't render quite as deep a soundstage. Instrumental timbre was great with both products; however, in the area of macrodynamics, the Transparent cables had the slight edge, sounding just a bit more unrestrained on large peaks. To their credit, however, the Chime speaker cables always remained composed regardless of what was thrown at them, and in the domain of sorting out microdynamics, the GutWire cables were the absolute master of the game.

Interestingly enough, while using the Chime speaker cables, I came to realize that I was perceiving an increase in coherence from my B&W Nautilus 804 speakers, something I have praised them for in the past. It seemed as though the Chime speaker cables were allowing me to hear *even more* of this trait, giving the Nautili a heightened sense of unity. I suspect that the

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Chime speaker cables are highly effective in the time domain (if this is possible for a speaker cable), which would account for the focus and lack of smear that I was hearing.

That's a wrap

My time spent with the highly effective Canadian-made GutWire Chime cables was indeed a joy. The price of admission on the speaker cables could be somewhat daunting to many; however, they are certainly worth a listen—and their cost. They were, at least to my ears, truly something special, offering a highly seductive mix of beautiful imaging, along with fine tonal balance and retrieval of detail. The Chime interconnects also shone in their ability to communicate the space of the musical venue at a price that is competitive with some of the best interconnects available. Give 'em a listen. Like me, you may just end up with a room full of snakes.

More is more...is more?

Along with the Chime interconnects and speaker cables, GutWire sent their Chime AES/EBU digital cable (\$469 per one-meter length) and a selection of their power cords: the G Clef (\$299 per 65" length), C Clef (\$549 per 65" length) and Power Clef (\$799 per 65" length). Shared by all these power cords is the use of the Hubbell hospital-grade plugs and the Furutech IEC connectors. They are all of modest flexibility, but they will require an additional three inches of clearance behind associated components due to the bulk of the strain-relief mechanism. Like the Chime interconnects, these power cords are equipped with the ability to either float or ground the final layer of shielding, giving the user an extra degree of flexibility and universality.

Each of the power cords seemed to build on the strengths of the model below it. However, it was the middle child, the black-sheathed C Clef, that really piqued my interest. It seemed to offer the best blend of all the characteristics that the other two models did at a more competitive price point. I've discovered that probably the fastest way to find out what a power cord can do for your system is to connect it to a digital component. In this case, both the G Clef and C Clef turned in superb performances on my Sonic Frontiers transport, letting it get more out of the disc in a smoother fashion than with the Transparent Power Link Super power cord I had been using. Similarly the big Power Clef cord gave both the Krell KSA-200S and Blue Circle BC26 amps a greater sense of power and ease—sort of like someone had opened up the tap and really let the water flow. There was also a smoothing effect to the upper midrange, where a noticeable reduction in grain took place, particularly with the Krell amp.

The Chime AES/EBU digital cable turned in a brilliant performance. It displayed remarkable tonal shadings in the upper midrange, with a remarkable amount of unforced detail available throughout the midrange. Listening to the Naim sampler CD2 [Naim CD042], I noted that the voices on "Nice to Meet You" by Patrick Noland were rendered very naturally and with fine spatial perspective. In comparing the Chime to the Transparent Reference digital cable, I found the Chime cable to be more ethereal-sounding, the Transparent cable having a slight edge on harmonic texturing, body and punch. To its credit, the Chime digital cable did display fine timing and pace, and I would say it's one of the finest digital cables I've used—and it doesn't break the bank.

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COMPANY INFO

GutWire Audio Chime Interconnects and Speaker Cables

Prices: Interconnects, \$769 USD per one-meter pair;
Speaker Cables, \$2920 per eight-foot biwire pair.

Warranty: Lifetime for original owner.

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