



the Stereo Times

The Silversmith Audio Palladium Cables

Greg Petan

Associated Equipment:

Digital Front End

Linn Sonceck CD 12

Amplification

Jeff Rowland
Coherence Preamp
And 302 Amplifier.
Gryphon Audio
Prelude preamp and
Encore Amplifier.

Loudspeakers

Talon Firebirds Talon
Khorus X MkII Sonus
Faber Amati Homage.

Cabling

Wire: MIT Oracle V2.1
interconnects and
speaker wire.
Silversmith Audio
Palladium and Silver
interconnects and
speaker wire.
Shunyata Aries
interconnects and
Phoenix speaker wire.

Power Conditioning

Shunyata Model 8
power conditioner

Accessories

Solid Tech Rack of
Silence, Feet of
Silence and Disc of
Silence

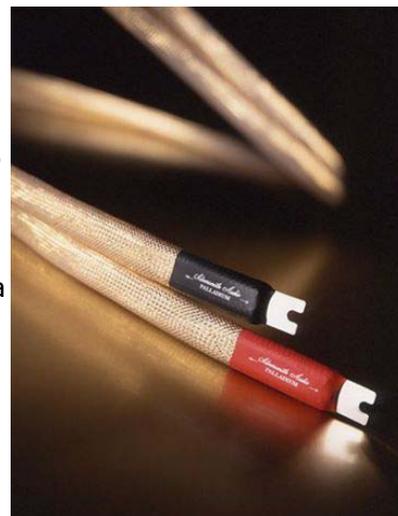
This, I must admit, has been a very difficult review to get off the ground. As I write this, I'm sitting in Starbuck's with my laptop searching my collective experience for a frame of reference in which to wrap around the time I've spent with the Silversmith Audio Palladium cables.

Hopelessly distracted by the lovely young fashionista sitting across from me, my conundrum eventually gives way to clarity. The struggle to get this review rolling goes directly to the fact that the Palladium cables nearly defy the typical review process of comparison to like products and the breakdown of a wires characteristics and inherent colorations.

The Palladium wires are constructed by hand and built to order. There is no spool of Silversmith designer, Jeffrey Smith's wire sitting in some warehouse waiting to be terminated. The barrels for the connectors are specially made for Silversmith but the RCA cables use the excellent Eichmann "Bullet Plug" connectors and the balanced cables use Neutrik XLRs. A lot of Jeff's own R&D went into the design of the cables as well. *"I knew the measured characteristics of the conductor that I needed to have and searched through literally thousands of alloys (even radioactive and toxic ones) looking for the best of the best,"* said Smith. *"Its skin effect related properties are several times better than even pure palladium, gold, silver, copper, or aluminum."* This choice was made purely upon the characteristics of the metal, not on listening tests. Jeff conducts listening tests later in the process only to ensure that the cosmetic design of the cable didn't cause any sonic degradation.

These factors, not to mention the cost of the palladium alloy ribbon Jeff uses all contribute to the rather dear price. As for construction, the Palladium's alloy ribbon is separated from the outer sheath by thin tubed Teflon, creating a near ideal air dielectric. Why a ribbon conductor? Simple. Thin metals significantly reduce skin effect, a leading cause of distortion in wire. The speaker wire is designed with the positive and negative runs separated.

My initial interest in Silversmith arose as a result of the "Editor's Choice" award Clement Perry gave to the Silversmith Silver interconnects and speaker wire in this past year's Most Wanted Components feature. Unfortunately, Jeff was called to active duty in the Mideast, forcing him to shut down the operations of Silversmith for the past year, so any review prospect would have to wait.



Thankfully, Jeff made it home in good bodily condition, and graciously offered a full compliment of the new Palladium's consisting of a six foot pair of speaker wire and two pairs of balanced interconnects. After an exhaustive yet fulfilling review of the Shunyata Constellation series of interconnects and speaker wire this past year, I wasn't in any real hurry to yet again set out to decipher the typically nuanced differences between competing brands of speaker wires and interconnects. But being hopelessly audiophilic, I just couldn't help myself.

The first thing that struck me about the Palladiums is the glittery gold Mylar mesh jacket which adorns both, interconnects and speaker wire. Their appearance led my wife to deem the Palladiums the "Disco cables" (Perhaps a more subtle color for the mesh?). After the appearance settles in, the next thing you will notice is how light and flexible they are. Where as the full set of the MIT Oracle (review to come) required a hand truck to move from room to room, the Palladium's barely add any weight to the silver flight case they arrive in.

The wire I received was a demo set so I cannot attest to the nature of the break in process, but Jeff asserts that unlike thick, hose-like cables, his ribbon designs require a modest break in of 15-20 hours.

Due to the width of the notched end of the palladium on the speaker wire, extreme care should be taken when attaching the wire to the speaker and amplifier terminals. As I regrettably found out, it is all too easy to mangle and even tear the bare palladium when trying to attach them to less than accommodating terminals such as those found on the Gryphon Encore amplifier.

While I was expecting a positive first reaction to the Palladiums, I was in no way prepared for the startling affect the Palladiums would impart on my system. Typically, the inclusion of a new set of competitive wires will create some shift in the sonic picture from what came before, perhaps revealing or emphasizing different aspects of the performance - greater dynamics, deeper bass, lightening or darkening of the tonal balance, etc.

The Palladium's taken together as a full cabling system, however, wiped the canvas almost completely clean and rendered a new composition. Nearly every aspect of the sonic picture, top to bottom, front to back and left to right, had been exposed as being in one way or another touched by the distortions of previous cables.

While I had a very positive experience as a result of the Palladium's beguiling neutrality, I would imagine that some could not. If you have been using wire as some sort of system equalizer, and let's face it, we all have, the Palladiums may cause a case of severe upgrade whiplash. If your components exhibit any, and I mean *any* sonic failings, the Palladiums will leave them utterly exposed in a way that is impossible to deny. The Palladiums are truly the anti-tone controls of the wire world.

In my system, for example, the Palladium's neutrality further exposed each components weakness without adding any of its own signature to compound the problems. From the Jeff Rowland Coherence's slightly softened low-end definition and dynamics to the Rowland 302's rising upper-midband and lower treble, each component was rendered as more of itself than ever. On the positive side, the good in each component was further revealed and allowed to shine through, creating on balance, a huge slice of sonic Heaven.

The synergy of the system brought about by the Palladiums is undeniable. Music was as liquid and as grainless as can be. Lightning quick transients are presented without any unnatural exaggeration whatsoever. Dynamic ease, jarring explosiveness, tonally rich yet supremely transparent and revealing, the Palladium's bring about a cohesiveness that we all speak too, yet rarely fully achieve. Like a live musical event, the Palladium's bring together all of these typically mutually exclusive traits harmoniously, and in equal part. Needless to say, the exact opposite is true when the recording is poor. Flat has never sounded flatter, compressed has never sounded more restricted and so on. I realize most these claims are made over and over in reviews. The Palladium's redefine these proclamations and sets the bar impossibly high.

Typically, I would site sections of any given disc to illustrate these particular points. Yet this is one of those rare occasions when that exercise is rendered insignificant. On disc after disc, imaging, frequency extension, dynamics, truth in timbre, and vast amounts of space are all injected with such a heightened

realism and obviousness. After a very short time, all I could do was just sit there, shaking my head in amazement. The only area where comparisons to other cables come to light is in the bass where the Palladiums don't have quite the reach or slam of the MIT Oracle V2.1. speaker wire. Which is more accurate in this regard? I think, like all things at this level of incredible performance, it simply comes down to system synergy and personal preference.

Neither warm nor cool, fast Sounding or subtly subdued, light nor dark in balance, the Palladium's exhibit no signature, that I can detect, of their own. Recordings and components alike were left to fend completely for themselves in the effort to impress. The Palladium's put me in the enviable position as a reviewer, to grasp the nature of whatever finds its way into my system. Tweaks such as the Disc of Silence from Solid Tech worked their magic on the Gryphon Prelude preamplifier, leaving me even more impressed with both the capabilities of the Gryphon and the Feet of Silence, not to mention what the Palladiums brought about when connected to the already staggering Talon Firebird loudspeaker.

At this stage of what has amounted to a religious conversion, I must shout out, "Can I get a witness?" Yes, I can. These results are not solitary observations brewed up in some scotch and soda induced delusion. Sober minded editors Perry and Knack, having heard the system just a week before the inclusion of the Palladiums and then shortly after the cables implementation, will hopefully testify to the Palladium's magic via a quick follow-up.

So are there any natural predators in the kingdom of the Palladiums? Nordost Valhalla? Not based on my admittedly limited exposure to them or from what I have read about them, and wow, has that wire gotten some great press. I can only imagine the top of the line wires like MIT Oracle V1.1, Transparent Opus, XLO, Siltech, Kimber's Black Pearl, or perhaps the Analysis Plus Gold may want to go a round or two with the Palladiums. I will do my best to set up just such a battle. Just call me the Don King of the reviewer world - "It's gonna be a spectacular spectacle of gargantuan proportionality ... Only in America!"

Just as I was humpin' to get this review finished for a CES publishing deadline, Jeff suggested I give the Silver line a listen. After such a profound experience with the Palladium, I was bracing for a letdown.

Well, if there was a letdown, it was of the gentle meandering of an oak leaf falling gracefully from its branch. The Silver's offer, and I hate to use percentages, 80-85% of what the Palladium's offer, though make no mistake, there is serious magic in that last 15-20%.

The Silversmith Audio Silver sounded nothing like any silver wire I have heard before. Like the Palladium, there is no sense of frequency related exaggeration, no edge, no brightness, no transient emphasis, just a clean, clear view into a living and breathing soundstage. If you never hear the Palladiums, and I suggest you do not unless you want to spend the next several months in withdrawal, huddled in a corner swatting at imaginary flying monkeys, the Silver could well be the finest wire you have ever heard. This is great news for all those who read this review, yet will never be able to either afford the Palladium's or swallow hard enough to cut the check.

Conclusion

Can any product be perfect? Jeff has gotten very close with the Palladium's. I always search for at least one shortcoming in the performance of everything I review. Compared to the MIT Oracle 2.1, for instance, the Palladium may lack the last vestige of low bass slam. Then there is issue of the asking price and relatively fragile nature of the speaker wire's construction. That's it. It is a little unnerving to consider how much distortion is going undetected in even the finest high-end systems of both consumers and reviewers alike. Until you put the Palladium's into your system you may regard this claim as hyperbole. I know if anyone would have gushed as I have, I would have given them the old polite frozen smile and obligatory 'Oh really? That's nice" and then moved on. For those who can afford the still rather pricey Silver line, you will be living with the spirit of the Palladium if not the body and soul.

I realize that the use of the word perfection to describe the Palladium's doesn't exactly fit, as perfection is forever elusive. That said, I cannot think of another word that more aptly describes Jeffrey Smith's Silversmith Audio Palladium cables.

Clement pays Greg a visit:

To cut to the chase: the sonic improvements wrought by the Silversmith glitter-sleeved Palladium cables on Greg Petan's system was nothing short of remarkable! Not simply because the cables are that good -- which they are -- but more because the sheer sonic value of Greg's rig was already state-of-the-art both sonically as well as monetarily (which, by the way, is a rarity in and of itself. For very seldom in my experiences have I heard super-expensive audio rigs sound better than decent).



First of all, Greg calls home a beautifully situated loft located in downtown Manhattan (only a stone's throw from Stereo Exchange). Audiophiles eat your heart out, for this room's expansive as one could ever want at (what I hunch) to be 40' by 150', yet its purpose isn't just for audiophile fun. No, no. It's a place to live as well and raise his family. Greg's a married man, well balanced, and lucky. As a result there's a special place allocated for his musical pleasures next to a bay of unusually large windows overlooking busy Manhattanites on one of New York's more glamorous streets (actually, once while paying Greg a visit, I literally ran into Denzel Washington, who I've learned lives nearby, and couldn't resist asking him how many times he's been told how much he resembles the publisher of Stereo Times).

As a result, whenever we listened I got the sensation that the room was, at times, too cavernous for intimate listening sessions as my small listening room would induce. At times I also felt as if the sound was sometimes too distant sounding. Greg's penchant to play loud -- let me reiterate -- LOUD, was his usual antidote. It was impressive as hell but I privately wanted more intimacy, not loudness, to the music. The thought that perhaps I was asking too much, or being too critical, when one considers the size of this space as too large to claim one of music's most intoxicating moods: intimacy. Or so I thought.

The introduction of the Silversmith Audio Palladium not only changed the sonic portrait of Greg's living space in terms of size, but made the sound as personally intimate as I'd ever heard in his place -- minus the outside interference coming from being so close to the bay of windows. Chalk this up to the ability of the Silversmith Palladium's capabilities to ring-out like one of those industrial mop buckets, all the musical treasures soaked up in wire. The ability for the music's *natural* to be set free and take hold on this listener -- instead of the *visceral* -- was the most obvious, and welcome improvement. Greg's system simply stopped sounding like a great audio rig and started sounding like music. Real music.

For the first time in my many visits here did I now suffer the pangs of envy. "Damn, it sounds like people are really playing up in here!" was all I remembered saying over and over aloud. My reasoning was simple and quite logical: in real situations where live musicians perform, the room would be closer to the size of Greg's and that reason alone, for the first time, lent so much authenticity to the "live" factor of this sound. All I could say mumble was "I'm glad for you."

The envy subsided within hours and I was glad to see this system take on a transformation of this magnitude from a mere swap of wire -- God awfully expensive wire. When the MSRP is as outrageous as this it should perform nothing less than feats as astounding as what I heard, yet I've not heard any cable minus the Analysis Plus Gold, do anything like transform a system to this degree (and the AP, for all their worth, didn't make a big a difference as I heard). And consider, the cables Greg owned previously weren't anything resembling powder-puff. I've read as well as heard tales of Silversmith's abilities. Finally, I had the chance to hear it for myself. I am thoroughly convinced, having his Silver in my possession that Jeff Smith knows how to make some of the best cables extant.

Specifications

Palladium - 6ft. Speaker cables \$9800, 3ft. Balanced (XLR) interconnects \$4900, 3ft. RCA interconnects \$4000
Silver - 6ft. Speaker cables \$2500, 3ft. Balanced (XLR) interconnects \$1450, 3ft. RCA \$1400

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