

## EQUIPMENT REVIEW

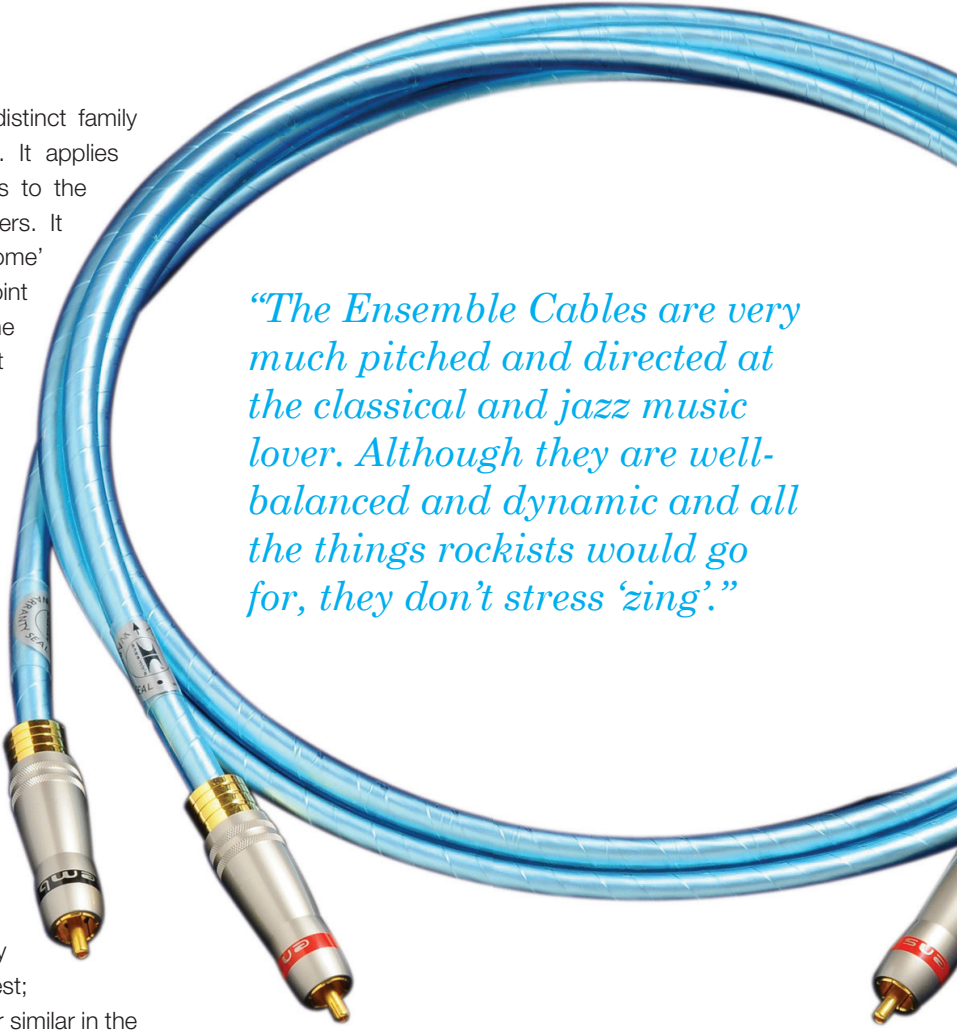
# Ensemble Luminoso and Espresso cables

By Alan Sircom

**E**nsemble's products have a very distinct family sound, which applies everywhere. It applies as much to the cables as it does to the amplifiers, speakers and CD players. It also has an 'all roads lead to Rome' signature; once you try one, you tend to point yourself in a very Ensemble-related direction. The trouble is, the entry point has always been a bit 'spendy'. Until now.

Luminoso and Espresso form Ensemble's new cable line. Luminoso is used to build loudspeaker and power cords, while Espresso forms the interconnect ranges. It's – in Ensemble terms at least – 'entry level' (this is hand-made in Switzerland, remember...). Luminoso is made up of three 2.08mm<sup>2</sup> high-purity copper conductors in a helical array. These are individually screened with two shields overall. Espresso is formed from five 0.34mm<sup>2</sup> conductors (also high purity copper), again in a helical array, individually shielded, with two overall shields. Ensemble has made a big thing of low dielectric dissipation and good mechanical damping throughout. It is also one of the very few brands to announce the results of a spark test; it is rated to 1,500V, and rather than use PVC or similar in the cable, the turquoise cable is actually very green. This is going to sound alpha-geek, but it feels nice in the hands too. It's a solid wire that you aren't going to put too much of a bend into. **Naturally, the terminators are first-class, too.**

We received two power cords, a phono interconnect and a short run of speaker cables, just enough to test it both as a complete system rewire and as individual cables. And once again, the Ensemble 'all roads...' thing happens again, albeit mainly from the interconnect and speaker cable. It seems as if once you 'get' the sound of one, you get the sound of the others. The power cord, in fairness, doesn't have the same re-acquainting you with your music immediacy of the interconnect and speaker cables; it's more of a supporting



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cast member than the star of the show. But when all your ducks are in a Ensemble-shaped row, it does pull the sound together beautifully.

The Ensemble cables are very much pitched and directed at the classical and jazz music lover. Although they are well-balanced and dynamic and all the things rockists would go for, they don't stress 'zing' and energy that is often needed to deal with the endless leading edges of music with a solid four-on-the-floor beat. It more expresses the beauty of the sound, rather than its energy, and there isn't much beauty to be found in a Ramones CD. ▶

▶ What it does well is capture the sense of scale of a musical event; the tonal shading, the timbre of the instruments, the sense of excitement as the soloist stands on the podium. The Ensemble cables are masters at presenting the shape and feel of an orchestra, the flow of the music and the resonance of the body of a violin or a singer. It all makes for a wonderful impression of the musical performance.

I even found myself listening to Wagner without trying to conquer Poland. Specifically, the second act of the Furtwängler version of *Tristan und Isolde* with Ludwig Suthaus and Kirsten Flagstad from 1952. This masterful mono recording often shows the mettle of a system, because the lack of stereo soundstage coupled with one of the most precise conductors and several of the best lungs ever recorded really highlights how good a tonally poised a system can sound, and how bad it can sound when slightly off kilter. Fitting the Ensemble cables into a tried and trusted (and now sadly, largely discontinued) system of Lyngdorf, Sugden and Avalon that all worked reasonably well together before the Ensemble incursion (it was using Cardas Clear before), the tone shifted from overall balance with some top end shimmer to musical beauty. There's nothing wrong with either, but one goes for neutrality and the other for fire. Ironic then that the one going for neutrality isn't the one from Switzerland!

Moving away from mono, I still found the classical and jazz ends of the spectrum, and often smaller concertos, sonatas and lieder, rather than the big sweeping spectacle. When I went for the *sturm und drang* bits of the classical canon, the Ensemble cables were more than capable, but it was the freedom to listen to soloists seemingly unencumbered by the sort of background hash of the recording process that brought me further and further into the music.

Finally, I settled on a Bill Evans and Jim Hall album – *Undercurrent*. This subtle slice of piano and guitar jazz is a bell-weather for good audio systems. Get it right and it's two masters of improvisation riffing off one another. Get it wrong and it's bland jazz noodling with an excellent album cover. It doesn't matter about bandwidth, or dynamics or anything else, if the system fails to gel (and it frequently does) this sounds flat and dull. On the Ensemble Luminoso and Espressivo, it was first-rate jazz improvisation, a sense of control and order over the system, giving the music the chance to rise to the occasion. End of story.

I suspect the reason for these cables is to be the first taste of an Ensemble-based future for many listeners, and if that is the case, these cables more than achieve their goal. They are expressive, musical and very, very easy to live with. OK, so if you are still in your death metal phase, put the Ensemble, er, ensemble on the back burner for a decade or

so. But if you want to extract that bit more musical beauty and insight out of your music (except perhaps death metal), then look no further. +



## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

### LUMINOSO power and speaker cable

3 x AWG 14 ( 2.08 mm<sup>2</sup> ) conductors in helical array, individually screened plus 2 x overall shields

Diameter: 11 mm

Bending radius: 8.5 cm

Resistivity: 0.0073 Ω / m

Capacitance: 155 pF / m ( 1 kHz )

### ESPRESSIVO interconnect ( RCA / XLR )

5 x 0.34 mm<sup>2</sup> ( ≈ AWG 22 ) conductors in helical array, individually screened plus 2 x overall shields

Diameter: 8.2 mm

Bending radius: 6 cm

Resistivity: (single conductor) 0.049 Ω / m

Capacitance: (single conductor) 90 pF / m ( 1 kHz )

System as tested (2x 1.5m power cord, 1x 1.5m phono-phono interconnect pair, 2x 3m spade

Manufactured by: Ensemble AG

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