

Ensemble INCANTO and DALVIVO cables

by Alan Sircom

The Swiss audio brand Ensemble has set itself a huge task. It believes good music (played through good audio) promotes wellness in the individual. But good music through bad audio does not. The INCANTO interconnects and DALVIVO speaker cables and power cords are therefore a gateway to a nicer world.

INCANTO and DALVIVO reject the current trend for one expensive material wrapped in an even more expensive material as conductor, preferring instead healthy amounts of high-purity stranded copper conductors, individually screened and sheathed in a halogen-free copolymer outer layer. This layer is made up of a mechanical damping layer and three different shields, optimised in terms of transfer impedance, and virtually impervious to extraneous interference. Both are also extremely low capacitance cables (60pF/m/1kHz for the INCANTO, 105pF/m/1kHz for the DALVIVO), allowing for long interconnect runs, and the speaker cable is a 0.0005mH low inductance design for easy amp-matching. The INCANTO interconnects are terminated in a custom ALLINO plug, a locking plug of extremely solid construction made of large amounts of gold-plated copper that makes ground contact before signal to ensure no accidental thumps when hot-swapping devices. The DALVIVO power cord is terminated in solid Furutech plugs and sockets, and the matching speaker cables are finished in solid spade lugs. The copper wrapped foil braiding is sheathed in copolymer throughout, giving the cables a look not dissimilar to a wrapped chocolate, and they come supplied in very nice gold boxes reminiscent of boxes of chocolates. Well, the company is Swiss, after all! ▶



▶ Ensemble is not strong on the whole ‘loom’ or ‘family’ cable ethos, believing that a cable should make a case for itself on its own. But ultimately, the wellness promotion concept does make for an inevitable migration toward an all-Ensemble cable system. I used a single power cord, one pair of RCA-based interconnects, and loudspeaker cables, and felt that the loudspeaker cable produced the biggest direction shift, followed by the interconnect, with the power cord less likely to create a sea-change in your audio listening environment.

These cables do create an effortless and extremely natural presentation of music. This comes across perfectly in a wide variety of musical genres, but particularly in recordings of acoustic instruments, where the sense of living, breathing musicians sitting in a three-dimensional space is presented accurately and honestly. That doesn’t mean the INCANTO and DALVIVO don’t ‘rock’, just that these cables really show their worth when facing more challenging material. The INCANTO and DALVIVO (apart or especially together) make a sound that is extremely organic in approach. I don’t think I’ve used this term in audio before, but these cables have an incredibly ‘gentle’ touch on the music played. The Ensemble cables might not introduce wham-bam dynamics or slam (unless it’s called for on the recording), but it’s all about refinement.

The Ensemble sound is not about detail or expansive soundstage, although it’s actually extremely good at presenting a wide and deep soundstage, made up of extremely detailed, solid-sounding instruments. Instead it’s more about the gestalt, the music as a complete, legato, flowing entity, where many of its rivals tend to go more for the fleeting musical moment.

So many cables ‘shout’ at the listener in some aspect or another, often with big, flowery, boomy bass, or peaky, accented treble. Others counter this by being rolled off in the top or bottom. While some of these ‘hyper-real’ cables (where the sound of a piano is more ‘piano-like’ than a real piano, for example) can sound very good indeed, Ensemble’s more intrinsically honest approach is rare, and well-received by those wise enough to hear it for what it is. The INCANTO and DALVIVO do that ‘honesty’ thing well.

Even though I really liked the EXPRESSIVO and LUMINOSO cables I tested previously, I prefer the INCANTO and DALVIVO. The reason for such a preference is the INCANTO and DALVIVO are a little more universal in approach; retaining that effortless, open, and dynamic sound common to Ensemble, but with an extra sense of energy and verve that makes them good partners with a wider range of electronics. Both cable groupings represent a taste of what Ensemble can do, but the INCANTO and DALVIVO ‘Ensemble’ a wider range of electronics. I think the cables invite the sophisticated listener to explore Ensemble’s catalogue, but the INCANTO and DALVIVO make that more of a long-term goal than a necessity. In other words, the INCANTO and DALVIVO act as civilising forces on a system, rather than assuming an already-civilised sound from the system.

In truth, it’s hard to review ‘wellness quotient’ in audio. But, in listening to these cables I did find myself relaxing more into the music, especially if that music didn’t come from an amplified source. Better yet, that relaxation process lets you settle into the sound of systems that are ‘economically oriented’ (relatively speaking), too. I think that counts as ‘wellness’ in this context.



DETAILS

INCANTO interconnect cable:

(1m pair, RCA/XLR)

DALVIVO power cord: (1.5m)

DALVIVO loudspeaker cable:

(2.5m pair, 4mm/6mm banana,
8mm spade)

Manufactured by: Ensemble AG

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The Ensemble INCANTO and DALVIVO cables are probably not for those seeking instant gratification and the sharp, forward sound that seems popular at the present. They are for the more cerebral music lover, seeking a longer, more refined path to sonic happiness. If you are musically mature enough not to simply want fireworks every time you listen to music, and your music tastes extend beyond simply loud shouting noises, this cable system is a perfect stepping stone into a more refined world! Highly recommended. +