

## Ensemble Espresso/Luminoso

# WIRED TO MUSIC

If you think audiophile cables are 'mumbo jumbo', you'd better turn the page. The following text is intended for people who only judge after listening.

By Steffen Zilles. Pictures: Ingo Schulz

This listening comparison was not about nuances. The lowest frequencies came through a little less energetically than with good copper cables, but otherwise the pure silver cables from Argento Audio played in a league of their own: extremely open and rich in detail, yet never brittle or treble-heavy like other silver wires I tried. However, the Argentos were also quite expensive. Fortunately, a little later I was able to buy them second-hand for a reasonable price. Since then I've experienced a lot of surprises in experimenting cables.

For example, with the quite expensive power cables from Nordost. Until then, I was not aware that mains cables can have a strong influence on the sound. Finally, a good five years ago, I ended up with the cables from Acoustic System. Hardly any other cable could keep up with the furious energy of the LiveLines. That's why they took over the power and signal transmission in my system until recently.

Is there a cable family that can hold a candle to the LiveLines without draining the bank account? One that is also perhaps a little more neutral and thus more universally usable than Franck Tchong's character heads? Yes, there is one, and it is even considerably cheaper, although it comes from Switzerland. What's more, it comes with a much higher-quality look and finish. These are the Espresso and Luminoso models from Ensemble.

Urs Wagner, the head of Ensemble, charges 610 euros for a stereo meter of the Espresso, equipped with RCA plugs. Assembled with XLRs, the NF cable costs 560 euros. 1.5 metres of Luminoso cable with Furutech FI-11 cost 500 euros when used as a power cable. But the Luminoso also functions as a loudspeaker cable - in this case it costs 1140 euros with spade lugs or 4 mm banana plugs in a length of 2 x 3 metres.

I have been using Urs Wagner's cable set for a good year now with a wide variety of components and am extremely impressed with its qualities. I was full of anticipation about these cables, because firstly, Ensemble's excellent power strips - previously the "Power Point", now its successor "Power Link Plus" - are an indispensable part of my system, and secondly, the Ensemble system has always been among the highlights at the High End show visits.

Urs Wagner optimizes his products with incredible attention to detail. To call Ensemble a full-range supplier is almost an understatement. In addition to cables, power amplifiers and a complete system from source to loudspeakers, the range also includes isolation transformers, equipment platforms, tube dampers as well as special liquids for cleaning contact surfaces and optical data carriers. On top of that, Urs Wagner does not use off-the-shelf components in many places, but even develops speaker terminals and tube sockets himself, for example. It is therefore no surprise that the demanding Swiss does not put up with ordinary cinch plugs and spade lugs and therefore manufactures his own? Of course, Espresso and Luminoso are assembled with these excellent connectors.

Both ensemble cables have stranded conductors made of high-purity copper. The Espresso uses five conductors of 0.34 mm<sup>2</sup> each; the Luminoso has three conductors of 2.08 mm<sup>2</sup> each. Both cable types are multi-level shielded. This made me sceptical at first, because I have never really been convinced by conductors with shielding. Apparently this was not due to the shield per se, because the ensembles sound





however with an adequate system and open ears, they are normally nevertheless easy to identify. If the same is not available, one can still be happy about the money saved.

After I got to know the ensembles I familiarised myself with the corresponding information leaflet. In it, among other things, the sound of the turquoise cables was described. I expected the usual vacuous marketing talk of

"undistorted signal transport", etc. Instead, I was amazed to discover a detailed list of sonic characteristics that matches my listening impression down to the last dot.

There is talk of a "noiseless background", for example. Indeed, even a single Espresso cable in the system brings a pleasant calm to the sound, from which the music emerges unusually clean and rich in contrast.

» wonderfully open, uninhibited and dynamic. According to the manufacturer, their construction should prevent unwanted resonance effects. In any case, they are relatively stiff and therefore require a little more space when installed. The iridescent turquoise of the Ensemble cables looks even more noble in reality than on photos and underlines their already exquisite appearance.

Like every loudspeaker or amplifier, every cable has its own sound character. Of course, the differences here are usually of a different order of magnitude,

The connecting elements are of the same high quality as the cables. Ensemble even makes its own RCA plugs and spade lugs. XLRs are Neutrik and mains plugs are Furutech.



"Perfectly balanced, natural sound" is also assured, and this promise is also kept. This makes the Swiss cables seem a little less explosive than the crisp LiveLines, but they are by no means lacking in tempo, bite or rhythmic drive. It's just that such things do not take on a special position of their own. When the connected components don't need a cable-induced caffeine boost, the exemplary balance of the ensemble cables leads to a more coherent result. The manufacturer formulates the fact that his cables transmit an enormous amount of subtleties without getting bogged down in them as follows: "Micro-information (is) naturally embedded in the overall sound". Furthermore, he quite rightly emphasizes the "airiness of the acoustic space" - the reproduction of the ensembles is indeed extraordinarily three-dimensional and detaches itself excellently from the speakers.

Contrary to what the company name might suggest, these noble cables from Switzerland are not only convincing as a team, but also individually. In addition, they can easily be integrated into an unbranded environment. However, the more you expand them into a complete ensemble, the more reliably they provide a tonal precision and musical harmony that is very rarely encountered together. Espresso and Luminoso are said to offer "a price-performance ratio that is hard to beat". On this point, too, I must agree wholeheartedly with Urs Wagner. It really is worth investing in these excellent cables. I have just done so, by the way.

translation by DeepL, revised. Prices updated 06/2023

### Ensemble Espresso/Luminoso

Mains and signal cable / Warranty

period: 2 years

Ensemble AG  
PO Box 245  
4147 Aesch  
Switzerland  
Phone +41 614619191  
www.ensembleaudio.com

FIDELITY NO. 16 - 06/ 2014