

The INSPIRATION speaker cables and The ORCHID interconnects

Reviewer - Ramsey Raad "Audio Tweak"

System:

- Wadia 3200 transport
- Benchmark DAC1 converter
- NuForce P8 preamp
- NuForce Ref9 SE monoblocks (*Bluemoon award 2006*)
- Bohlender Graebener 520i ribbon planar speakers
- Bohlender Graebener 210i subwoofer

As you can see, I love clarity and I have no tolerance for colorations.

Current comparison speaker cables are my personal Cardas Crosslink. Other interconnect cables include my own personal pair of reference Wireworld Silver Eclipse MK3, one last before the flagship (worth 10,000.00 Rand). From Pre to Power, I'm using Eichmann 6 XLR interconnects.

Music used for evaluation:

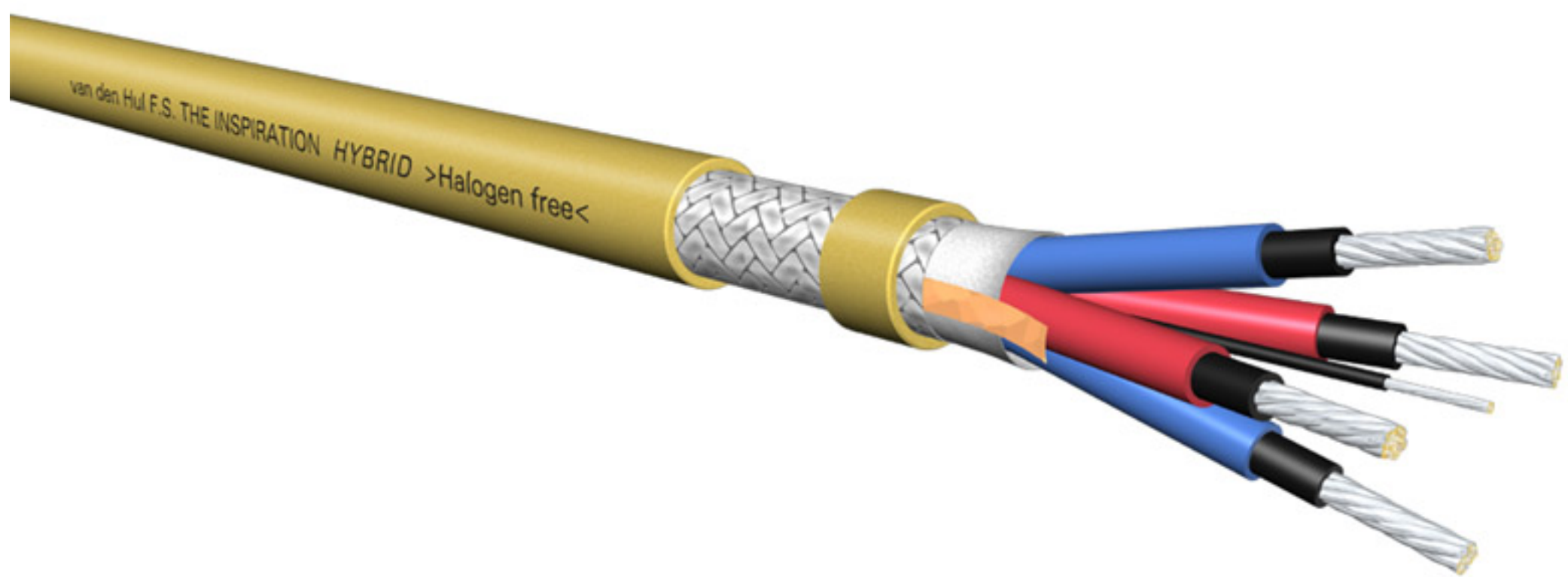
- Eva Cassidy - *Songbird and Imagine*
- Patricia Barber - *Café Blue*
- Killing Joke - *Nighttime*
- Led Zeppelin - *The BBC Sessions*
- David Bowie - *Ziggy Stardust*
- Bozzio, Levin, Stevens - *Black Light Syndrome*
- Ozric Tentacles - *Spirals In Hyperspace*

Van den Hul has been an original and genuine innovator since the dawn of Audiophilia Embrius. Mr. VDH was the first nut to bring us a wire free interconnect in the form of The First a little while back, later on came The Third carbon speaker cable with (again) no wires at all as conductors. Do I suspect a hate for solid state and digital, I don't know? I know that some wires can sound nasty and steely; some are punchy as hell but have as much finesse of a big Corvette ;-)" "Know what I mean?!" Other cables all together roll off the top-end entirely to sound as smooth as a British cup of tea. My passed experience with VDH speaker cables haven't necessarily been one of jubilation in sonic terms; In my opinion, I've always found them to be too inoffensive for my liking, this was not just me, but some of my very close audio guru buddies too. Personally, I've never been too fond of The First interconnects or the Revelation speaker cables, while I did find them relatively transparent, I still couldn't get them to gel with my setups.

I've played with some big toys over the years as a Golden Ear; I've also modded lots of gear, and have always been at the pursuit of neutrality to this day. By neutrality, I mean, transparent, clean, airy, spacious, open, fast, liquid "not creamy", dynamic and as wide bandwidth sounding as can be.

OK; so now you know that I am the most unbiased guy to review this product, and I'm sure by now Mr. Harold Day (our local South African VDH agent) must be sh#@*ng himself! Harold and I, have developed quite a friendship over the last few months; the reason why I chose this man as a friend was not because I liked his products, but because this man is a genuine thinker, and a gentleman, he's also an engineer in every sense of the word; the man is currently busy putting together the ultimate turntable for the European market (I don't blame him!).

I decided to give his cables a go and hence... I am now in possession of what I believe to be the first cables that ever rocked my world in no uncertain term!



I'm not too good with the technical aspects, so if you'll excuse me, I'll skip that stuff and get straight to the nitty-gritty; if you want the technical stuff, please visit [Van den Hul's website](#).

One thing that matters to me the most however is that technically the most important aspect of these wires and one that I don't believe VDH ever implemented before and yet makes loads of sense, is that The Inspiration speaker cables are shielded; I need say no more!

But I will... A few years ago Mr. Jenving of Jenving and Supra cables came up with this same shielding idea; Tara Lab on the other hand came up with another innovative idea, a dedicated earth station, avoiding polluted mains filtering through to the cables shield all together.

Synergistic Research also applied the concept but by instead plugging the cables shield to the wall's mains (one step behind Tara Lab!).

VDH offers these two options:

1. Floating The Inspiration's shield on the amp(s) side, yet shield and ground lead are joined together on The Inspiration's speaker-end (*).
2. Floating The Inspiration's shields on the speaker-end whilst combining The Inspiration's shield to its ground lead on the amp-end (*).

Who is right you might ask? In my opinion, it's the signature of the wires and the material and implementation of the technology that will win the day. Thus, enter The Inspiration.

(*) Remark: The above indicates two ways in which The INSPIRATION HYBRID's ground leads can be connected. We recommend configuration 2 mentioned above, as stated more clearly on our product information page about The INSPIRATION HYBRID:

When ordered with connectors mounted, The INSPIRATION HYBRID comes ready made with a ground lead at each side of the cable:

At the cable end located in the direction of the "van" side of the "van den Hul" cable printing (i.e. at the amplifier side), both the cable shield and the cable's central ground lead are connected together and exit as a ground lead, which is to be connected to the power amplifier's dedicated ground terminal (or chassis). If it is impossible to connect this ground lead to any ground terminal (or chassis screw) at the amplifier, it can be connected to the amplifier's "-" (i.e. black) output terminal of the channel in question.

At the cable end located in the direction of the "Hul" side of the "van den Hul" cable printing (i.e. at the loudspeaker side), the cable shield is left disconnected. Here only the cable's central ground wire exits as a ground lead.

If your loudspeakers are equipped with ground terminals, this ground lead should be connected to the speaker's ground terminal of the channel in question.

If your loudspeakers are not equipped with ground terminals, this ground lead should be left disconnected. —**A.J. van den Hul B.V.**

Listening...

First impression was of a rather dark and congested sound with big balls in the bass, after a few hours warm up, having allowed the system to settle in while avoiding the temptation to temper and swap wires around, the entire balance shifted towards an extremely balanced presentation, the highs sparkled and opened up way way more than I anticipated, without ever sounding too forward; the bass went incredibly deeeeeep, and get ready for this... no bloat! Yes you heard me right; I'm talking clean, articulate, lightning fast bass that emerged from an inky pitch black noise floor, in fact these cables convey a bottomless "abyss-like" floor, to the point that that terminology is just no longer applicable here!!!. Instruments popped out like gunshots in a panoramic soundstage. If you were to slow down the performance a few notch and tell the musicians to play in slow motion, you could literally go and pick up the notes in mid air and shake hands with the artists!!!

I'm not kidding, this is frightening stuff, and the best part is Eva Cassidy who always tended to sound peaky (even on some of my friends more exotic systems), on Songbird and Imagine, Eva's voice now reaches those high notes with grace and surgical precision, yet without a screech, a glitch or a blip, sibilance are clean and no longer splashy! I found myself playing my music louder than ever before! This cable should come with a health warning... (Keep at sane levels to avoid permanent earring damage*), or this one for instance... (VDH will not accept liability for any earring damage caused during loud playback with The Inspiration*) - * use my line only with permission! ;-)

On Rock and Alternative music; drums and rhythms take on a new dimension with the resonance of percussions and the beats coming at me with alacrity and total control.

Timing is everything to me, and The Inspiration nails it.

Depth is another factor that I'd like to point out; you can often almost picture the length of the recording venue. Musicians and instruments are clearly layered across the soundstage, focused yet tangible, you don't just hear the mouth, you hear the chest and the belly; you now have a body to go with the voice.

The all feel is organic, these cables communicate texture and liquidity, yet never at the expense of over sugar-coating things.

Musical these cables certainly are, but make no mistake, they'll truly reveal the caliber of your system, and perhaps even compel you make changes in speakers positioning, decrease your subwoofer output or even perform new upgrades of some sort in order to bring your system up to their level.

Verdict:

The Inspiration cables (excl. termination and connectors) will only set you back at 990.00 Rand per meter. It's a steal; and for the first time I actually feel guilty paying such a small amount on a cable that I perceive to be absolute REFERENCE and STATE OF THE ART.

My sincere congratulation to Mr. AJ van den Hul for bringing a High-End cable to the masses at a real world price!

I bought my pair tonight, and this one is going to be my reference for a long long time...

The Orchid



Moving over to The Orchid interconnect; here's a cable that's thin as a necklace, and actually looks like nothing in VDH's range. The look immediately strikes a stunning resemblance with the Kimber Illuminati digital cable. But rest assured, this aren't no Kimber and bares no unfamiliar traits with typical American "loud" sounding "in your face" cables.

I always say, "You get British and you get Brut-ish!"

The best way I can describe The Orchid is that it's ultra focused, tight fisted, yet round and refined all at the same time. Is it transparent?..... hmmm, I don't know, that depends on your definition of that word... Against The First, or The Jubilee, a resounding YES; however, compared to my Wireworld Silver Eclipse MK3, I would've preferred The Orchid to deliver even more sparkle and air on the top end, although I must admit that I did not give the cables a fair chance to run-in. Here's what I think; when mated with the killer Inspiration speaker cables, everything seems to be in such perfect harmony that I begin to question my own perception on neutrality and even my reference Wireworld Silver Eclipse's virtues. Tipping the balance towards the top-end does not always translate into detail, but rather into fireworks; Initially it's...Woow; but in the long run - probably more visits to the Ear, Nose, and Throat specialist ;-).

For the first time, all I can say is that, Mr. van den Hul is onto something quite special. To put it mildly, I'll even say, magical and spell binding! I suggest that shielding be implemented on all his upper echelon cables.

We now have a wider choice of cables from the Dutch Professor. The range now stretches from the ever so slightly rose

tinted First interconnects and Third speaker cables, to “now” the more gripping and exhilarating Inspiration and Orchid of the flagship family. For entry level interconnects, there’s always the simply awesomely neutral and one of my old favorite, the D102 MK3 interconnect.

Verdict:

In my opinion The Orchid cables are the answer to many audiophiles wishes and all those who’ve always liked the more effervescent sound of Kimber, Audioquest, and that sort of sound, minus “their gripes”. Excellent value for money under 4,000.00 Rand P/mtr.

Never offensive, yet articulate, clean, focused and open with a solid deep bass.

Has no competition at this price. Other cables sound bright and fatiguing by comparison.

Obviously skin effect has been dealt with to great effect, and the distortion and rigging that we often perceive as detail is now null and void. One hears the details in the music as we were meant to hear them. Neutral.

Overall conclusion:

The VDH’s seduce with a killer midband, and yet has an equally iron-fist presentation, exerting unparalleled control throughout the range right from the low-end all the way to the critical mids and highs.

Give the VDH a try, and leave all your preconceived ideas behind, and see what I’m talking about. Neutrality without bloat, no shouty upper-mids, tight and firm low-end, focused soundstage, and airy yet uncolored and totally grainless and clearly defined top-end with a large soundstage!

You will be rediscovering your entire music collection and notice details that you never knew even existed!

Go and buy them now, in fact don’t walk - RUN!!!... Before VDH realizes that his price is too low and decides to jack it up!

Thank me later... ;-)



Ramsey Raad - “Audio Tweak”, June 2006

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