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TARA Labs RSC® Master Generation 2 Cable

My old speaker cables were outdated, and I had become aware of the sonic signature they imparted on my system. TARA Labs RSC (Rectangular Solid Core®) Master speaker cables had been given an enthusiastic review by Russ Novak in *The Audiophile Voice*, so it seemed that this would be a good place to start my search for new speaker cables.

On re-reading Russ's review, I realized that he heard in these cables exactly what I was looking for: neutrality. But had Russ been a victim of his own hyperbole when he wrote, "Dynamics and bass and treble extension are the best and go hand-in-hand with this feeling of natural control. This cable breathes life into the music without coloration ..."? More than a year had gone by since Russ had written these words, so I gave him a call to see if anything had happened to change his mind. Nothing had. The TARA RSC remained his cable of choice, and soon the beginning became the end of my search for new speaker cable.

In April Of 1994, I acquired an 8 foot set of my own and within weeks I had become converted. They sounded every bit as good as I had hoped! Bass was clean, deep, open, and very dynamic. Mids were pure, sweet, very transparent, completely free of colorations. Highs were airy and extended without a trace of artificial brightness. This had to be the perfect speaker cable!

And then in September of 1994, Matthew Bond, founder of TARA Labs, announced a newly developed successor: RSC Master Generation 2. The cable uses a new conductor described as "Consonant Alloy," a proprietary blend of elements which, according to Mr. Bond, surpasses the performance of 99.9999% pure copper.

Like the earlier cable, the rectangular solid core conductors are individually insulated and wrapped helically around a center air tube. Unlike the original RSC cable, however, the Generation 2 uses fourteen small strands of extruded Consonant Alloy copper. The small size of the conductors optimizes the frequency response, and the "multi solid core" configuration results in much improved flexibility.

TARA Labs kindly supplied me with a set of their new cables so that I might make my own comparisons. Handling the newly arrived Generation 2, I was immediately aware of their improved flexibility. The older RSC was quite stiff, but these could easily be bent in a two inch radius. Like the earlier cable, a stereo set consists of four individual cables about three eighths of an inch in diameter. Positive leads have red collars with arrows pointing away from the amplifier. Negative cables are also marked with directional arrows but without the red collars. There are no left/right designations.

THE SOUND

Right out of the box, the new cables sounded just great. [*I've had that experience myself. Is cable "break in" merely a fiction? -- Mark*] Perhaps TARA Labs had improved on perfection. (Or is Perfection that mythical receding goal post always just a tantalizing yard or two beyond reach?) Putting philosophical thoughts aside, I let the Generation 2's play for several weeks to assure myself that they were well broken in and then I began my critical listening. I used hybrid and solid-state amps from Audio Research, and tube amps from Quicksilver and Sonic Frontiers. Speakers included Rogers LS3/5a's, Totem Ones, and Quad 63 Pros.

After several more weeks, it became clear that the Generation 2 is able to do everything at least as well as the earlier RSC cable, and is better in most key areas. Upper octaves are smoother, just as extended but with a slight increase in liquidity and a reduction in "white" hardness. The close-up miking of Anne Sophie Mutter's violin in *Carmen Fantasie* (Deutsche Grammophon 437 544-2) produces a string tone that can be slightly strident. With the Generation 2, the upper frequencies are just as extended but smoother and there's just a bit more air. All the detail remains but less sharply etched. String tone loses a little hardness and seems more relaxed. Rebecca Pidgeon's *The Raven* (Chesky JD 115) also demonstrates the Generation 2's superior upper range. Pidgeon's voice sounds marvelously open and natural with the earlier RSC, but switching to the Generation 2 removes a thin patina of coarseness that I hadn't known was there.

Midrange with both cables is very much the same: open, transparent, natural. James Levine and the Met Opera Orchestra have a marvelous 1993/94 recording of Beethoven's *Eroica* and Schubert's *Unfinished* squeezed onto a 75 minute disc (Deutsche Grammophon 439 862-2). Both the old and the current RSC cable present the midrange beautifully. Timber and tonal balance are accurate

and undistorted. Where other cables add bloom to the lower mids, brightness to the upper mids, or a warm haze throughout, the Generation 2 remains neutral, natural and unaffected.

Bass extension is solid and deep when listening with either the original or the Generation 2. But hearing the Ray Brown Trio in *Summer Wind* (Concord Jazz CCD 4426) with the Generation 2, the sense of rhythmic drive is stronger. Not by much, but the Generation 2 has a "foot tap" quotient that's slightly higher.

39 seconds into the second track on the Ray Brown CD a telephone softly rings, interrupting the performance and titillating the audience. I had heard this cut a dozen times, but with the Generation 2 there was something different and startling. I realized it was the very specific location of the ringing. I seemed to know exactly where the phone was located. Perhaps this is the most noticeable improvement of RSC Generation 2. The cable is able to transmit more spatial cues with greater accuracy than its predecessor.

On a subtler level than ringing phones, the Met/Levine recording mentioned earlier takes on added dimension with the Generation 2. The sound stage at Manhattan Center broadens, the sense of hall ambience is heightened, instrumental locations are more precise. In short, there is an increased "you are there" sensation of sharing the space with the orchestra.

Without doubt, TARA's RSC Master Generation 2 has to be a contender for the title of best speaker cable available. Although TARA Labs has not raised their price on the cable, it remains expensive, and I would certainly recommend a home trial before purchase. Regardless of amplifier/speaker combination, the Generation 2 made my system sound better. When listening to the LS3/5a's and the ARC D-240 MK II, the sound was truly transformed. These little speakers from twenty years ago sounded far better than they have any right to sound. The Quad 63s with the Quicksilver Silver 90's sounded better, but not spectacularly so. The improvement is there but at a modest level. Only by experimenting with the cables in one's own system, can a prospective purchaser decide if the upgrade warrants the expense.

For me, the bottom line is simply this: RSC Generation 2 is a superb cable. Music sounds more natural, with less coloration and a greater sense of space than with any other cable I know. I'm sure I could live happily with this cable in my system for many years to come.

Associated Equipment: Linn Karik/Numerik CD System, Audio Research transport and DAC 2; Audio Research LS2 B MK II preamp; Sonic Frontiers SFS-80, Quicksilver Silver 9, Audio Research V-70, and D 240 MK II amplifiers; Totem One, Rogers LS3/5a, and Quad 63 Pro speakers; MIT 75 Shotgun, Straight Wire Maestro, Cardas Quadlink 5C, & TARA Labs' original RSC speaker cable.