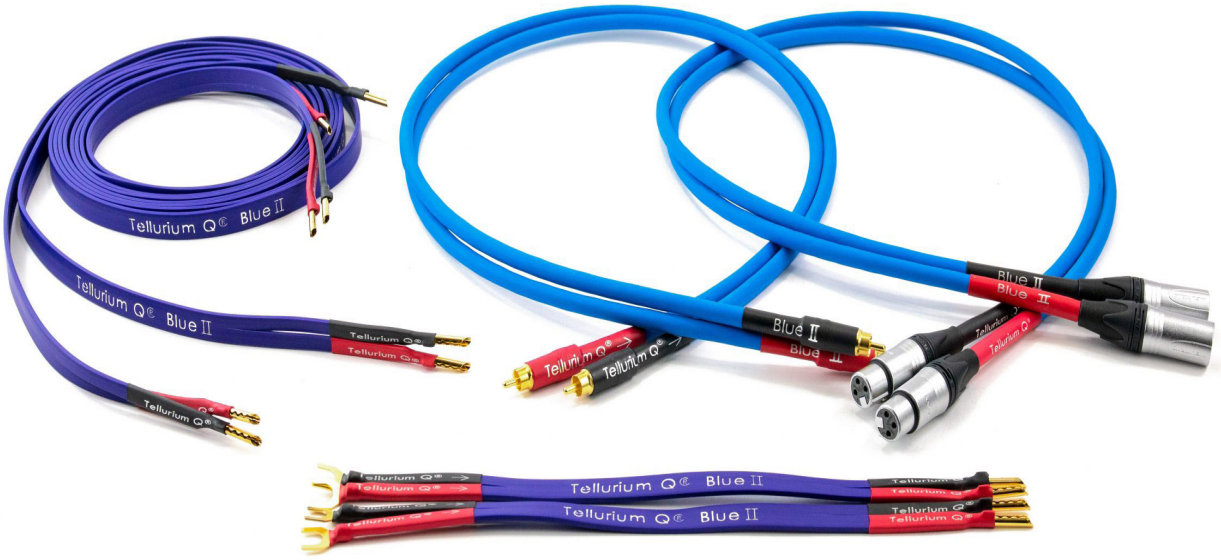
REVIEW

TELLURIUM Q BLUE II



TELLURIUM Q HAVE UPDATED THEIR ENTRY LEVEL LOUDSPEAKER AND INTERCONNECT CABLES, JANINE ELLIOT COMPARES THE OLD WITH THE NEW

BY JANINE ELLIOT

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Geoff Merrigan is different from most manufacturers. He doesn't like to give away too many details about his cables, even to friendly reviewers, as he feels you should just listen to them and come to your conclusion as to just how good (or not) they are. After all, you could be sold a lot of information on the cable's design, but unless it actually sounds good it's not much use. Luckily Tellurium Q has been producing some amazing products over the past 10 years, winning numerous awards including the Queen's Award for Enterprise 2018. When Geoff sends me cables to review that are new versions of existing cables, he always sends me the old cables as well so that I can do a direct comparison between old and new. The Blue II was no exception. This allowed me a great opportunity to experiment with both cables from this ex industrial chemistry student who trained in material science. Geoff turned to cable manufacturing just over 10 years ago. Tellurium Q produces three ranges of cables; the Blue family of products is their entry line aimed at giving warmer and richer sounds, the Black range is midway and more revealing, and at the top sits the Silver top-of-the-range series, with more detailed and revealing sounds. On opening the TQ website it shows a moving image of a single sine wavelength multiplying into several, illustrating a fault of many cables where the pure sound input can morph into something quite different by the time it gets to the other end of the cable. Their mantra is "Phase relationships in a signal is our focus".

"We are primarily focused on removing the smearing of frequencies through a timing shift and by doing this you get better clarity and transparency".

According to Geoff, no one can totally rectify this issue, rather just make the effects less audible.

"Every material a signal passes through will shift differing frequencies by differing amounts relative to one another. That will vary by each and every material and fields acting upon those materials. That is just the laws of physics in action. Even an ultra-pure amazing conductor will exhibit this problem, there is no getting away from it. It is only really an issue though in the transients – leading and trailing edges, but that is enough. So, you have to carefully match/develop materials, dielectrics, etc to get a better result to listen to".

In a Bell Labs report from 1930 they found that transient phase distortion affected the 'naturalness' of voices, and this has inspired Geoff to create cables that gave a pure representation of the source. For example, the more expensive interconnect, Ultra Black, is one of the best cables I have ever heard, so I looked forward with great excitement at trying the new entry-level Blue II. Complete with the 1m XLR interconnect, weighing in at £235 (the RCA version is £180 for a 1m length), I was also supplied with a 3m Blue II loudspeaker cable, working out at £16.50/m plus £12 for termination.

CONSTRUCTION

This section will be very short since Geoff is very secretive about what goes on inside, and I didn't particularly want to cut a cable in half! What is very important in terms of construction is that a lot of different areas build up to create the 'best' cable, not just the choice of conductor or dielectric. Geoff told me that manufacturers can be too dependent on getting as much purity of the copper, rather than looking at the overall design;

"People assume that to get the best performance the "fastest" conductor – pure silver or something even better has to be used. Which is also one of the reasons for the pointless chasing of nines as I call it i.e. copper to 99.9999999% purity as if that is the single most important factor for a cable!"

Even the choice of solder is vitally important to Geoff and is the result of many tests. As a result, solder is both silver and lead-free. Important, too, are the connectors. For this entry-level product, the excellent Neutrik connector is used, but in the higher range products, they have multi-layers of plating and not always the materials you would expect. Indeed, the plating process itself is chosen carefully, even to the thickness of the plating, and what has to be in the plating bath as well as what shouldn't. Whilst both old and new Blue cables look very similar (well, actually the new Blue interconnect is a nicer lighter shade of blue), that is where the similarity ends. Improvements have been made in the conductors

and dielectrics, plus work on the asymmetric shielding. The speaker cables follow the TQ pattern of a flat cable design, and the finish of all the cables sent to me for review was exemplary.

THE MUSIC

For the review I used two hi-fi set-ups: one high-end and the other more in keeping with the price range of the cables. To start the review, I decided to listen to the old Blue to totally understand how they sounded before moving on to the new products. When reviewing the interconnects I kept my existing loudspeaker cables in situ as I know them so well, only listening to the TQ loudspeaker cables when the first part of the review was completed.

Initially, the XLR cables were used between my excellent Krell KPS20i CD player and MFA pre-amplifier, and then between the passive pre-amplifier and valve Synthesis power monoblocks. On listening to the original Blue and then the new product it was easy to establish the differences. Indeed, the cables were like chalk and cheese. The new cable was astounding in comparison – though the original was still a very good product. Listening to Tangalco's 'La Zucca Barucca' on the older cables the sound was forward and engaging but lacked extreme bass. I also found in comparison with the newer cable that the sound wasn't so forceful and certainly not as engaging. This album is a very exciting performance, and the instrumentalists sit in their own defined areas which wasn't so clearly heard with the older cable. With the Blue II positioning was improved and there were better initial transients that even made my cat jump up in surprise at the beginning with the piano and drum rhythms. The music actually sounded louder than with the elder cable and it had a far better top end. This cable is really aimed at getting close to the Ultra Blue though I could hear some similarities with the Ultra Black which I had previously reviewed. Each instrument was placed in its own defined space with the musicians visible in the room, rather than behind a curtain, as in the older Blue's. As well as improvements in the treble, the





bass was further extended and tight with the double bass and percussion.

Mozart's String Quartet in Bb KV174 was next (Philips Complete Mozart Edition). The Blue sounded a little blue in comparison with the Blue II, with detail not as good as with the new cable. The Blue II had a "cleaner" and more extended top end. Lower mids sounded particularly good, especially the viola. Interestingly, everything sounded a tad faster. The interconnect gave a warm and musical rendition of the work with excellent space around the five instrumentalists. Continuing with classical music I listened to a mono 1955 recording of Ravel's 5-movement Miroirs. This work is very dry; no digital reverb to spoil the music, though in the recording its dryness was perhaps a little too much. This was like listening to a piano in the smallest bedroom, but it enabled me to accurately assess the cables. The Blue II did this much more successfully and admirably. Nothing was added nor taken away. Shostakovich Concerto for Piano, Trumpet and Orchestra in C minor is a particularly innocent work with plenty of oomph and space, and much more reverb. The cables gave a faithful and honest rendition, with the Steinway grand piano easily identifiable against any other make with its handling of the top frequencies and the bashes of the lowest "B" and "C". Whilst this isn't my favourite Shostakovich piano concerto it is a particularly enjoyable one, basing ideas on neo-baroque combinations of instruments, hence the small orchestra. The piano seems to get most of the playing with the louder trumpet taking second fiddle. But when he does play, the cables are able to bring quick and tidy transients and separate the soloists in space with the orchestra. The trumpet does have the final laugh, though, playing the final melodic line.

Turning to things a lot louder the punchy "Dancing in the Moonlight" from Toploader (Onka's Big Moka) gave the electrons something to dance about, the cable not having any problems giving a feisty performance, with all frequencies accurately catered for. "Just Hold On" is particularly good in respect of frequencies, particularly the highest, and the cable again gave as good as it could. Slowing things down 'Tres Lunas' from Mike Oldfield, an album more suited to reiki or reflexology sessions, gave me a chance to unwind. The dated digital instruments were easily discerned, but the

cable did so in a very musical manner, something some more expensive cables can find problems with. All frequencies were evenly distributed. Only the digital bass line in track two was a little too prominent, though my Wilson Benesch Torus sub handled it with relish.

Time to add the loudspeaker cables. Listening to the excellent 'Vivaldi in Venice' and Tartini Concerto in E minor, the original Blue cable had lots of detail but the instrumentation was very central and lacking in excitement. Tops were good and detail in the bass adequate, but it was not as good as I know this album can be. But soon as I switched to the Blue II my eyes just lit up. This was a far superior cable. Instruments weren't so confined, and the acoustics of the Venice San Vidal Church could be heard in all their glory. London Grammar's album 'Truth is a Beautiful Thing' allowed me to hear a surprisingly truthful performance from both of these cables, but the elder sounded more relaxed and subdued in comparison with the new cable, which was also much more natural. "Everyone Else" has significant phasing in the track which was more confused in the original Blue but opened up with greater clarity in the newer cable. The latter gave an excellent bass and clear treble in "Non Believer".

Some of the listening of the loudspeaker cable was done using Slee amplification and Chartwell LS3/5a's. Whilst the lowest octave might well be missing, I had no sensation of the loss of musical prowess. This cable made these speakers sing with precision and accuracy to a much higher level than I expected. When replacing with Wilson Benesch Arcs that accuracy was even greater with these clinical sounding speakers, especially the initial transients. Listening to John Barry "Raise the Titanic" (John Barry 'The Collection) the music was detailed and very precise at all frequencies, particularly from the brass and percussion. Jennifer Warnes "Bird on a Wire" had very quick and accurate striking of bass tom-toms with precise lead and backing vocals being given space on the soundstage, plus extended decays. For ultimate space I turned to Kitaro 'Live in America', an album I first heard in the States. Whilst the LS3/5a might miss the lowest frequencies,the Blue II added more depth and space than I expected for such a cheap cable. These really are the bargain of the year. Combining



both Blue II interconnect and speaker cables gave a very capable performance for the price, particularly its ability to transform the aged digital sounds in the live performance into a very musical and realistic affair.

CONCLUSION

Both cables excelled in giving a faithful reproduction from the very lowest to highest frequencies with a speed that far belied its price point. The interconnect particularly excelled with all music thrown at it, and combined with the loudspeaker cable formed a tight, musical and extended frequency package. Music was controlled, and with an open and natural transmission of the music with no colouration. I would highly recommend both these cables not only for the cheaper hifi set up but, as has been shown in this review, also for those with top end audio but on a budget. These really are a bargain!

AT A GLANCE

Build Quality: Excellent quality control. Good XLR connectors.

Sound Quality: Excellent clarity from lowest to highest frequencies, with excellent speed of initial transients for the price.

Value for Money: £235 for an interconnect and £99 for 3m loudspeaker cable is excellent value for the quality of sound being produced.

Pros:

Transparency.

Excellent speed.

Clean and extended response.

Cons:

Nothing other than I wish I knew what was inside.

Price: £235 1m Blue II XLR interconnect (£180 1m RCA interconnect)

£99 + £12 termination 2 x 3m Blue II loudspeaker cable

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