

the ear

HI-FI MUSIC GEAR

hardware review



Tellurium Q Black II RCA

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Chris Kelly

I recently posted on an audio themed social media group that I was about to embark on a review to compare a second generation cable to its predecessor. Another member, who is not somebody known to me, jumped in and told me in no uncertain terms that without a double blind listening this would be meaningless and that, in effect, all reviews are the work of charlatans and liars. Well ok, I may have inferred the last part from the general tone of his diatribe, but it did start me wondering. First, what is a double blind listening test? Would it involve putting up two curtains between me and the system to make sure I couldn't see what was happening?

Would a simple blind listening test not meet his criteria? Secondly, under the COVID rules which were applied at that time, how would I enlist a third party, with the appropriate skills, to come into my home to operate the equipment? Then I wondered if when going to audition equipment at his local dealer, does my interlocuter insist on double blind listening? In my years in the retail arm of the audio industry not once did a customer arrive with such a demand. So for the person who challenged me, and for anyone who is new to The Ear, let me reiterate that my reviews are honest but subjective, and simply reflect what I hear. I do not have the skills or the equipment to conduct measurement tests and to create all those graphs that we all read but probably only partially understand. I am a regular guy with my audio set up in the living room of my 2015-built mass-produced house, in a Devon coastal town. The room is roughly 16' long by 12' wide and the ceiling is about 8' high.

With that off my chest, I shall now press on with the review. The cables I am reviewing today are the Tellurium Q Black II analogue interconnects. They can be purchased with either XLR or RCA plugs, and in this instance I requested RCAs, as not all the equipment that passes through my system is XLR equipped. The company were good enough to send me an original pair of Black interconnects and a pair of the newer Mk II version so that I can compare them back to back.

Regular readers of The Ear will know that I have over that last few years been able to review a number of cables from the Tellurium Q catalogue, and that I have never failed to enjoy them. I have met Geoff Merrigan, the chief designer for Tellurium Q several times and have been lucky enough to have been able to visit his development and listening facility in Langport, Somerset. I have access to several different manufacturers' cables but I always find myself going back to Tellurium Q, simply because I enjoy listening to my system with them in place. In order to make sure that the playing field was as level as I could make it I ran both pairs of the interconnects in my system for several days, to make sure that they were at least a bit 'run in'.

My preferred source is a Gold Note PH10 phono stage, attached to my Linn Sondek LP12, on whose Ittok arm is fixed a Dynavector XX2 cartridge. It seemed sensible therefore to

use that for the listening tests. Tellurium Q always Mk their cables for directionality, and I was careful to make sure that the signal flowed in the marked direction. (I think my social media friend would at this point be approaching an apoplectic meltdown, but so be it). The rest of the system used was my Lyngdorf TDAI3400 amplifier connected to Harbeth C7ES3XD speakers with Tellurium Q Ultra Black II speaker cable.

Sound quality

The most immediately obvious difference between the Mk II version of the Black interconnect is in the outer sheathing. On the original it is a black rubber compound, whilst on the newer one it



is a black woven material, which to me at least makes it feel a little more upmarket, for want of a better word. On both versions the plugs themselves are high quality with an outer sleeve which can be loosened to insert the plugs and then tightened in place to ensure a secure fit. This is a slightly fiddly procedure but worthwhile doing nonetheless – these cables are not going to fall out accidentally, which has happened to me before with other brands.

I lined up five albums to play through, first listening to the original Black and then to its successor. The playlist was my 1973 original *Dark Side of the Moon* by Pink Floyd, *Hardware* by Billy F Gibbons (a 2021 release), *Bass On Top* by Paul Chambers (Blue Note from 1957 re-released in 2020), *YoYo Ma Plays Ennio Morricone* (Music On Vinyl release of the original 2004 Sony recording) and *One Flight Up* by Dexter Gordon (a 1964 Blue Note recording rereleased on their Tone Poet reissue series in 2021). These formed the core of my listening although many other records have also been played since then, mostly using the Black II cables.



Truth be told, my first run through the play pile, using the original Blacks, had me fully engaged with the music. It sounded very musical, with plenty of tonal nuance, great dynamics and a very good balance across the whole frequency range. I then switched the cables and with the Mk IIs firmly plugged in sat down and played these albums again. I was open minded of course, but I thought it would be a surprise if I could hear much difference. I should have had more faith in Mr Merrigan. From the heartbeats at the start of *Breathe on Dark Side Of The Moon* to the heartbeats as *Eclipse* fades out at the end of side two, I was hearing a little more detail coming through, a slight but perceptible sense of the music driving ahead more powerfully and an overall greater sense of immediacy to the music. On other recordings, like the YoYo Ma discs, the sense that I was hearing a real cello was enhanced, the rasp of the bow on the strings, the subtle harmonics of the instrument and the individual players of the Roma Sinfonietta Players under the baton of the composer himself definitely lifted the musical enjoyment. In fact all five test records sounded better with the Mk II cables.

Switching back to the originals, the music seemed to lose something. It was still highly enjoyable but it sounded smaller, if that makes sense. Still tuneful, still engaging, but diminished. After that, the Mk IIs stayed in place, and are in fact still in the system as I write. For part of the review period, a guest amplifier was introduced to the system – a Copland CSA150,



which – spoiler alert – I really enjoyed. My Harbeths were supplanted by a guest pair of PMC Twenty5.23i floor standing loudspeakers. Those changes did nothing to alter my opinion that the Black II interconnects do an exceptional job.

Conclusion

If it ain't broke, don't fix it is clearly not a phrase in Geoff Merrigan's language library, and we should all be grateful for that. The original Black interconnect was by no means broken, but Geoff set himself the task of improving it and I would say that he has more than achieved his objective.

He never reveals details of the make-up of his cables, and nor should he have to, but I think with these Black IIs he has simply blended excellent engineering with good quality materials. The Black II interconnects are well made, they sound terrific and by the standards of the fierce competition for your hard earned money, I believe that they represent exceptional value for money.