

Stager Silver Solids Interconnects

By Jeff Brown

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Specifications:

Design: Unshielded symmetrical pair - Ultra low 11 pF/ft.
Wire: .999 pure silver 24 ga. (.020" diameter) solid core wire.
Insulator: Translucent Teflon.
Connectors: Canare F-10 RCA connectors. Machined solid brass center, Teflon insulator, 24K gold plated contacts, spring strain relief.
Construction: Lead free silver solder at all contacts.
Color coded Polyolefin heat shrink at ends.
Caig ProGold coating applied to silver for lasting anti-tarnish protection, and to connectors for perfect electrical contact.

Price: \$129.00 - 1 Meter Pair (\$80.00 per additional meter)

Website: marc.stager.com/silver

When a product is designed correctly and does everything right, you really don't need to mess with it much. It seems to me that should be the way things are supposed to work, and I love those types of products. The Stager Silver solids have been built the same way using the same products by the same guy for over a decade and they sound awesome. A question that will go unanswered not only in this review but also likely for the rest of my life I believe is "Why do companies constantly create new product lines?" I think the answer is that people want the latest greatest product, but is it truly better and at what cost in the long run?



In this article I spend a lot of time talking about an honest sound. I want to preface it with what that means to me. We all have different expectations and we all have different opinions about what an ideal sound is. I think that a stereo system's purpose is to recreate music. Music is something originally created by instruments where they are normally heard in harmony with other instruments. While a solo performance is still music, a performance of several instruments should not sound like a performance of several individual instruments. It should sound like the skilled artistic blending of those instruments. So, stating that, honesty is accuracy but not "I can hear the rosin on the bow of the 3rd violin." (If that were present in the original performance it would have been the 3rd violinist's last performance with that group.) I am also aware that perfect "life like" recreation in the living room, or listening room, is pretty much impossible (especially on my budget!) So honesty, in this sense, is an expression of making me feel closer to the real deal. There are lots of products that color the sound from a system. I have even argued that every single item in the signal path, from the motor spinning the CD to the solder used to connect the speakers to their crossovers and every single piece in between, adds some color to the sound. So complete color-free sound, I know, is unattainable, but honest sound is something that all equipment builders should strive for. That, ladies and gentlemen, is what I feel is honesty in sound, and that is what I am referring to when I use that word in this review.

The honesty of these cables extends to the products used to create them. Marc shamelessly posts each part used to create them on his website, there is no secret "Patent Pending" catch phrase products in these cables, just 24 gauge silver cable and Teflon isolation combined with silver solder and good quality connectors. Marc even gives you the brand of connectors he uses. The fact that nothing is hidden behind double speak or special phrasing is a welcome change to the cable industry that is for sure.

Silver is a magical conductor (compared to copper) in that, not only does it conduct better, but as it tarnishes its conductivity remains virtually unchanged while that of copper falls off precipitously. So not only do you get more signal with a smaller diameter wire, resulting in a lower capacitance, but you get to keep that quality over time. Teflon is known to be the best insulator. That is why some very expensive cables are made using pure silver and Teflon, and

one of the few places to get this mix in interconnects for \$100 per pair is from Marc Stager - or build them yourself. Even the DIY route will end up costing you dearly. My research tells me that for a meter pair (4 meters of silver wire, silver solder, and 4 Canare ends from an on-line vendor,) would cost almost \$100 plus shipping. While I am pretty good with a soldering iron, I think the extra few bucks to have a tested finished product is still a value.

When the package from Stager arrived; what really struck me was that the two pairs of cables each came with a letter from Marc Stager thanking me for purchasing his cables. At the bottom of the form letter the exact capacitance of the red and black marked cables was accurately recorded. This last portion is a handwritten by Marc before the cables are shipped out. This kind of from the top service is what high end audio used to be all about and that was what originally intrigued me about Quicksilver. Like Stager, Mike Sanders touches every piece that leaves Quicksilver. It used to be that if you owned something really nice you knew the name of the designer and probably even talked to him at least once. This transparency and intimacy with the designer isn't as commonplace as it used to be. This availability is just one more reason that I consider this product "champagne cables on a beer budget."

I put these cables up against some pretty steep competition in some A/B shootouts, and while some were more sweet, some were more smooth and several were more harsh sounding, none were more honest to the music and the complete system. I have written about 3 sets in the competition that were in a similar price range and some even with



similar components. I put all of these cables in three different unique systems. I used them in my Quicksilver/nOrh setup and was floored at how much more energy and detail I got from complete experience. I put them in my Antique Sound Labs/STR-3ES system and the subtle nuances that I love so much from the 6L6 tube came out so much more alive. I also used these with the Ideal Innovations amp paired with a borrowed Anthem Pre 1L. (Dynamite combo for less than a grand by the way!) Over a period of about a month I started going through my existing interconnects and trying to find the combination the was felt more honest and the results were surprising.

The long comparison of the Stager Silver Solids began with my Audioquest Diamondback cables. These cables have a retail price of \$150. The Diamondbacks are a pretty neutral cable with some bite on the top end. This bite is nice for harder rock and jazz but that "bite" isn't what I would call honest. The Stager Silver Solids were true to

the same music through the whole frequency spectrum and did not emphasize the higher frequency spectrum or as audiophiles like to say "brighten the sound" like these Audioquest cables did in my system. Next were the DH Labs Silver Sonic BL-1 cables. These cables are made from oxygen free copper, coated with pure silver, and cost \$99 per one meter pair. The BL-1 offering has all the brightness that silver cables are famous for but which isn't in evidence in the Stager Silver Solids. The BL-1, I feel, is typical of the \$100 offerings available; a good cable but not in the Stager Silver Solids league. I think sound differences comes from the gauge of wire and the type of insulator, but at DH Labs those things are hidden behind that "patent pending" trademarked cable-speak I mentioned earlier. There are one or two other \$100 silver interconnects, but unfortunately I don't have them.

The final contender was a bit out of the price league but when you are dealing with this level of quality you have to reach a bit high. Lastly, I introduced the upgraded DH Labs silver plated cables, the Air Matrix. At a cost of \$195 per meter this may well have been the closest contender but there was something that just didn't work right. I couldn't find the right synergy in any of the three systems. In the right system the Air Matrix could be a tie but I just don't seem to have access to that ideal system. The reasons I added the two DH Labs cables to the mix were that firstly, I had them

to compare, and secondly I didn't want to just compare these cables to other 100 dollar cables. I wanted to compare these cable to other giant killers. The two DH Labs offerings are among my favorite interconnects. I have more expensive cables available but they have always out-shined most of them. Every interconnect in this review is worth every penny of its price. They all shine in their own purpose, but I just don't feel all of the music like I do with the Stager Silver Solids.

Lastly is the bad news. Firstly these cables are only available directly from Marc Stager at www.Marc.Stager.com/silver. He does offer a complete satisfaction guarantee for 30 days. It is a risk free purchase, but you can't demo them at your local Hi-Fi store. Secondly, the Stager Silver Solids are the only unshielded interconnects I've had experience with. I say that as a something of a warning. When positioned too close to unshielded power cords there is a slight audible hum. Another concern some might have is with longer interconnect runs; some people would rather have longer interconnects as opposed to longer speaker cables because, at least, interconnects are shielded. Personally I prefer my interconnects either one or two meters, and my speaker cables 6-8 feet. At first I used unshielded power cables because of WAF concerns but my system isn't as conducive to a complete separation of power and signal cables as I would like. I ended up using Van Den Hul Mainserver power cords which are not only Halogen free, but highly shielded. In this configuration I could (and did) lay the Silver Solids against the power cable without any audible hum or other difference. I also found that if I kept the Silver Solids over a foot from any power cables, or crossed them at right angles I didn't have any of the bleed over issues from even the cheapest power cables that come with PCs or lower end components and whatnot. Shielding could be an issue for some, but it can be overcome for most. The rest might find spending much more money for a similar sounding shielded cables a wiser investment, that just isn't the case for me.

So if you haven't figured it out, I have a new favorite set of interconnects. I also have the very first product in my almost one year of reviewing that I won't be sending back! I didn't get in to the reviewing hobby to collect equipment. I have plenty already and my wife says too much, but I just can't seem to put these back in the box. I would give Marc and his Stager Silver Solids 2 thumbs up, but one of them is currently getting my wallet out! Thanks again Marc for enlightening me.

Equipment used for review:

- Roku Soundbridge M1000 Network Music Player
- Quicksilver Audio Silver Mono amplifiers
- Antique Sound Labs AV-20 Mono amplifiers
- Ideal Innovations Elite 80+ amplifier
- Sony STR-DA3ES Receiver
- Anthem Pre 1a preamplifier
- nOrh ACA2b preamplifier
- Fritz Frequencies loudspeakers
- LJM Originals Super Monitors
- Audioquest Diamondback interconnects (1 Meter)
- DH Labs Silver Sonic BL-1 (1 Meter and 2 Meter)
- DH Labs Silver Sonic Air Matrix (.5 Meter and 1 Meter)
- Audioquest CV-4 speaker cables (10 foot)

