

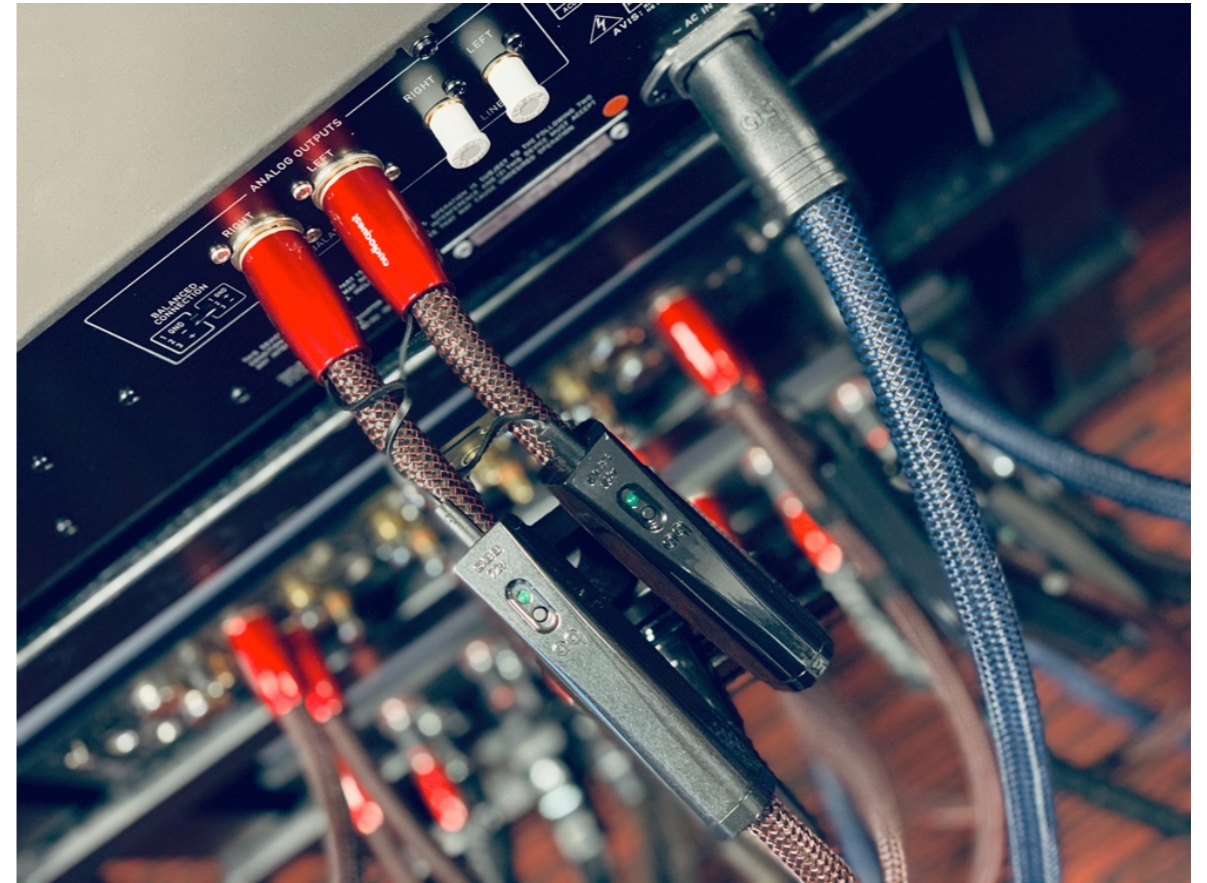
AudioQuest Folk Heroes loudspeaker cables

With a dash of Mythical Creatures



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It was out of pure enthusiasm that I wrote an impromptu [mini-review](#) (sorry, only in Dutch, but Google Translate or DeepL will give you a good idea) of my newly acquired AudioQuest Willam Tell Zero last summer. I also promised to follow it up with a far more elaborate review of the entire Folk Heroes Series line-up. So here is that review, in which I will also zoom in on the different possibilities of all the available configurations. Because there are many, and they all have unique characteristics. However, the logistic challenges of a review like this are substantial, so we gladly accepted the invitation to do the listening at AudioQuest's European headquarters in Roosendaal (The Netherlands). They have a well equipped and excellent sounding demo-room that we have familiarised ourselves with on several previous sessions. It became a pleasant and instructive day.



Tech Talk

Zero

Apparently, some people find AudioQuest's subdivision into Zero, Bass and Zero + Bass complicated, but it's really quite simple. So we gladly diverge from our "No Tech Talk" adagium to explain - in layman's terms - why AudioQuest chose this path. In our [review](#) of the AudioQuest Wind Series powercords we already explained the Zero Characteristic Impedance and Ground Noise Dissipation technologies. Those were originally developed for the Storm Series powercords, but it turned out that they could also be applied to loudspeaker cables. So let's start with the Zero versions of the Folk Heroes series. They are meant for full-range use (when you need only one pair of loudspeaker cables because your loudspeakers do not have a bi-wiring input). Their name is derived from the Zero Characteristic Impedance technology. With the use of an electrostatic network in the cable, and a meticulously constructed conductor-topology, Garth Powell managed to eliminate the Characteristic Impedance of the cables in the Folk Heroes and Mythical Creatures Series completely. Because of that, the

signal can move through the cable more easily and it will also accumulate far less distortion along the way. In turn that results in more speed, dynamics, spaciousness and timbre in your music. The downside of this construction is that you should not let two lengths of Zero cable run alongside each other, because that can lead to an unwanted interaction that causes an audible resonance peak in the higher frequencies. When you need two cables per loudspeaker, it is wiser to choose a Bass version for the low frequencies, that prevents this resonance from occurring.

Bass

The next step are the Bass cables, that you use next to the Zero cable in a bi-amping setup with a separate amplifier for low- and mid frequencies. The Bass cable has a (slightly less complicated) network for Zero Characteristic Impedance on the + conductor and it is fitted with an elaborate Ground Noise Dissipation system. So on top of the advantage of no characteristic impedance the broadband filtering of the Ground Noise Dissipation System (12 octaves) gives you even less distortion that is caused by RFI and 'dirty power', at least according to AudioQuest. Compared to the Zero Version the construction of this cable is quite different (asymmetrical). Like the Zero technology, the Bass technology has a 'built in' compromise. Because of the broadband filtering (across the entire length of the cable) the Bass version has a slightly lower conduction for frequencies above 10.000 Hertz. Those frequencies carry much micro-detail, spatial information and overtones for natural timbres, so it's better not to use a Bass cable in full range applications.

Zero + Bass

This is where things get a little more complicated, but they are still easy enough to explain. The Zero + Bass versions of these loudspeaker cables are meant for Bi-Wiring setups where one amplifier is used to drive a loudspeaker with bi-wiring inputs. These cables consist of a Zero and a Bass cable, that are joined together in an excellent looking breakout-box on the amplifier side of the cable. It is truly a manufacturing tour-de-force to build these sales by hand, remember that when you listen to them. Because of

the way they are built, something remarkable happens when you feed a signal through them. By joining these differently constructed cables on one side, the signal naturally 'splits' itself. Lower frequencies 'choose' the Bass cable, while the mid- end high frequencies prefer the Zero cable. That is why, according to AudioQuest, a Zero + Bass cable in a bi-wiring setup may sound a little different than separate Zero And Bass cables in a bi-amping setup. Unfortunately, AudioQuest didn't have four identical monoblocks in their demo room so a full bi-amping setup wasn't going to happen, but that 'splitting of the frequencies' had us sufficiently intrigued to settle for the integrated Zero + Bass cables only.



The Setup and the Music

The reference set in AudioQuest's demo room is of very high quality. It consists of a pair of expertly placed Dali Epicon 8 loudspeakers, driven by a pair of Mola Mola Kaluga monoblocks and a Mola Mola Makua preamplifier. The available sources are an Accuphase DP-750 SACD player and the built-in streamer of a Primare Pre60 preamp, all tied together with Fire analog interconnects from AudioQuest's Elements Series, Storm Series Thunder and Wind Series Monsoon powercords and a Niagara 7000 power conditioner. A set that is able to reveal even the smallest differences between all connected loudspeaker cables, right up to the highest level.

We used three very different tracks for this listening session. The first one was the electro-acoustical The Bridge from the album The Empire Line by Konntinent, to check out bass response and the - electronically created - spaciousness, the impact of micro-detail and the timbre and integration of electronic and acoustic instrument. The second track was Eja Mitt Hjärta from the album Pasodoble by bassist Lars Danielsson and pianist Leszek Mozdzer, for the intensity of timbres of the grand piano and the - both bowed and plucked - double bass, and the natural reverb of the recording room. The third and final track was Good Morning Little Schoolgirl from the legendary Folk Singer album by Muddy Waters, for dynamics, placement and the rawness of a one-take recording session.



Robin Hood Zero

The appropriately 'green-clad' AudioQuest Robin Hood Zero has Perfect Surface Copper+ (PSC+) conductors with a total diameter of 1.55 mm². Each channel is shielded with a carbon based Noise Dissipation System and the cables are fitted with a Carbon-level DBS module. The Robin Hood Zero produced a deep and wide stereo-image with plenty of spatial information. It had a great impact in the bass, and the sound of - in particular - the piano was colourful and fluid. On this 'entry level' it created a beautiful sound-picture. Our only complaint was that the Muddy Waters recording sounded rather flat. Relatively clean as well, but it lacked coherence.



Robin Hood Zero + Bass

The Bass cable of this integrated combination has Perfect Surface Copper+ (PSC+) conductors with a total diameter of 2.33 mm². The Zero cable is identical to the separate version. Each channel is shielded with a carbon based Noise Dissipation System and the cables are fitted with a Carbon-level DBS module. The Robin Hood Zero + Bass sounded a lot better. More powerful and the image was extended towards us. There was more soundstage depth too, and more involvement. Transparency was up and there was more push and speed in the lower frequencies. We had a stronger feeling of 'being there', and we could hear more details in the mix. The Muddy Waters track sounded more like a whole and was much more convincing. The spaces around the instruments now connected and Muddy's voice had more body.



Robin Hood Zero Silver

The separate AudioQuest Robin Hood Zero Silver has conductors made from Perfect Surface Copper+ (66% PSC+) and Perfect Surface Silver (34% PSS) with a total diameter of 1.55 mm². Each channel is shielded with a carbon based Noise Dissipation System and the cables are fitted with a Carbon-level DBS module. There is also a Zero Silver + Bass version but we didn't include that in this review. The sound of the Robin Hood Zero Silver was more 'audiophile', with lots of detail and texture. To some it may be a little overwhelming, but in a warmer sounding system or a heavily damped listening room this might just be the perfect solution. The increase in detail could be compared to switching from HD video to 4K. The inevitable downside is that this also demands more from the material you play. To our ears, the Robin Hood Zero Silver sounded less colourful and a little distant, but others would call this 'more neutral' or 'quieter', and they would be just as right!



William Tell Zero

The AudioQuest William Tell Zero has Perfect Surface Copper+ (PSC+) conductors with a total diameter of 2.65 mm². Each channel is shielded with a carbon based Noise Dissipation System and the cables are fitted with a Carbon-level DBS module. Of course, I already had quite a lot of experience with this cable in my own listening room, and we were not disappointed here. The William Tell Zero provided more tone and drive and the instruments in the mix sounded more visceral and tangible. There was a little less refinement compared to the Robin Hood Zero Silver, but overall there was more detail, texture and transparency. The loudspeakers started to disappear from the image and the music gained in fluidity and self-evidence, and the bass became more powerful. The Muddy Waters recording became more balanced.



William Tell Zero + Bass

The Bass cable of the William Tell Zero + Bass integrated combination contains Long Grain Copper (LGC) and Perfect Surface Copper+ (PSC+) conductors with a total diameter of 3.97 mm². The Zero cable is identical to the separate version. Each channel is shielded with a carbon based Noise Dissipation System and the cables are fitted with a Carbon-level DBS module. This is not the first time that we mention the fantastic 'consistency' that AudioQuest shows in their cable series. Because of it, you can more or less predict how a more expensive cable is going to perform. The William Tell Zero + Bass definitely proved that, because the increase in sound quality exactly matched what happened with the Robin Hood Zero + Bass when we compared that to the Robin Hood Zero. Only (subjectively) twice as much. Especially the impact of the bass improved spectacularly. We also noticed that it became easier to follow each individual instrument in the mix, there was more audible 'room' behind the loudspeakers and the tangibility and sound pressure on low volume levels got much better too. There was a greater sense of coherence, which increased the feeling that we were in the room with the musicians.



William Tell Zero Silver

The separate AudioQuest William Tell Silver has conductors made from Perfect Surface Copper+ (80% PSC+) and Perfect Surface Silver (20% PSS) with a total diameter of 2.65 mm². Each channel is shielded with a carbon based Noise Dissipation System and the cables are fitted with a Carbon-level DBS module. Another piece of evidence for our theory about AudioQuest's consistency in the sound quality of their cables. The William Tell Zero Silver had the same character as the Robin Hood Zero Silver, only two times better. Well, maybe more than two times. Where our 'man in green and silver tights' still sounded a bit distant and very neutral, our Swiss 'red and silver' apple shooter sounded much more complete. So, ultimately, our Alpine Friend almost tripled the performance of his colleague from Sherwood Forest.



Thunderbird Zero + Bass



Out of competition really, but we found this AudioQuest Thunderbird Zero + Bass openly lying 'for grabs' on the demo room floor, just like someone had left it there for us to find. Our resistance was brief and futile. So we hooked it up and from the first note it put a huge smile on our faces. Oh boy, this was SO much better than the William Tell Zero + Bass... Again, very consistent in character (so that also works between series) but the music was so much more exciting, involving and emotional. The coherence in the mix was of another level and left us awe-struck. The better the recordings, the better this cable sounded, there seemed to be no limit.

Firebird Zero + Bass



But there WAS a limit, and it was set by the AudioQuest Firebird Zero + Bass (that we found - what a coincidence - lying next to the Thunderbird Zero + Bass). The 'until here and no further' that the Thunderbird had been trying to hide from us was overtaken by a confident 'from here and even further'. Although honesty commands to say that the difference between the Firebird and the Thunderbird was smaller than the difference between the Thunderbird and the William Tell. While the Law Of Diminishing Returns dictated a formidable increase of the amount on the Firebird's price tag. So maybe it was for the best that we could not find the vault where AudioQuest keeps their Dragon Zero + Bass. No matter how hard we looked...

The Moral To This Story

AudioQuest have seriously surpassed themselves with the Robin Hood and William Tell loudspeaker cables in the Folk Heroes Series. The leap in quality compared to the previous mid-range series of loudspeaker cables - Castle Rock, Comet, Meteor and K2 - is significant. If we were allowed to highlight only one characteristic that made us particularly happy, it would be the increase of 'tone'. There is simply more timbre, and we like that. A lot. But if it's neutrality you're after you could choose either one of the 'Silver' versions. When you are limited to just one length of loudspeaker cable we think it is absolutely worth saving for a William Tell Zero. We found that cable to sound quite a lot better than the already great Robin Hood Zero. But if you have the possibility of bi-amping, both Zero + Bass versions will give you superior performance compared to their single brothers. At a price, of course, but with AudioQuest you can at least rely on the fact that you will know how the more expensive version will perform. You're allowed to dream of Mythical Creatures, but remember that it is the Folk heroes that stand the best chance in the everyday reality of most music lovers. Centuries of adoration? Well deserved!



Music and Information

More information and prices about the AudioQuest Folk Heroes loudspeaker cables can be found in our webshop:

[AudioQuest Folk Heroes speaker cables](#)

Spotify

[Konntinent - The Empire Line](#)

[Lars Danielsson & Leszek Mozdzer - Pasodoble](#)

[Muddy Waters - Folk Singer](#)

Tidal

[Konntinent - The Empire Line](#)

[Lars Danielsson & Leszek Mozdzer - Pasodoble](#)

[Muddy Waters - Folk Singer](#)

Qobuz

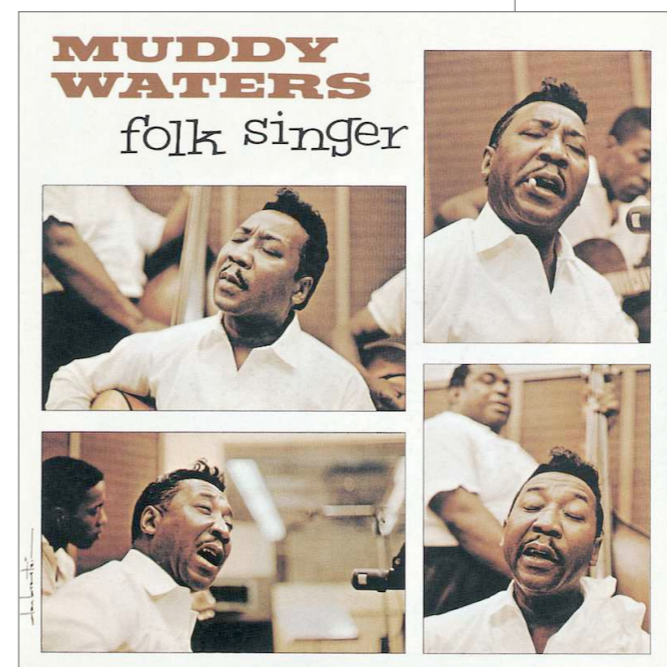
[Konntinent - The Empire Line](#)

[Lars Danielsson & Leszek Mozdzer - Pasodoble](#)

[Muddy Waters - Folk Singer](#)



Lars Danielsson & Leszek Mozdzer **PASODOBLE** ACT





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