

Chord Company Loudspeaker Cables

the complete survey (part 1)



Chord Company Loudspeaker Cables

After our [review](#) of the Chord Company's streaming cables we now listen to the loudspeaker cables of this congenial British manufacturer, based in Amesbury. Their very strong philosophy is "If you think it sounds better, it is better". There is more to that simple vision that you may think. The hifi-subarea of Cables is subject to increasing scrutiny by 'Nonsense!'-shouting objectivists, so there is a certain confidence-inspiring quality to a manufacturer that says "Don't take our word for it, just listen for yourself and - by all means - make your own choice". In a practical sense however, it is not always possible to listen to everything you want, so hifi enthusiasts typically turn to the internet for information. That is where we hope to come in, with this comprehensive review that is - as far as we can determine - one of a kind. Never before has anyone subjected all Chord Company loudspeaker cables to a comparative listening test.

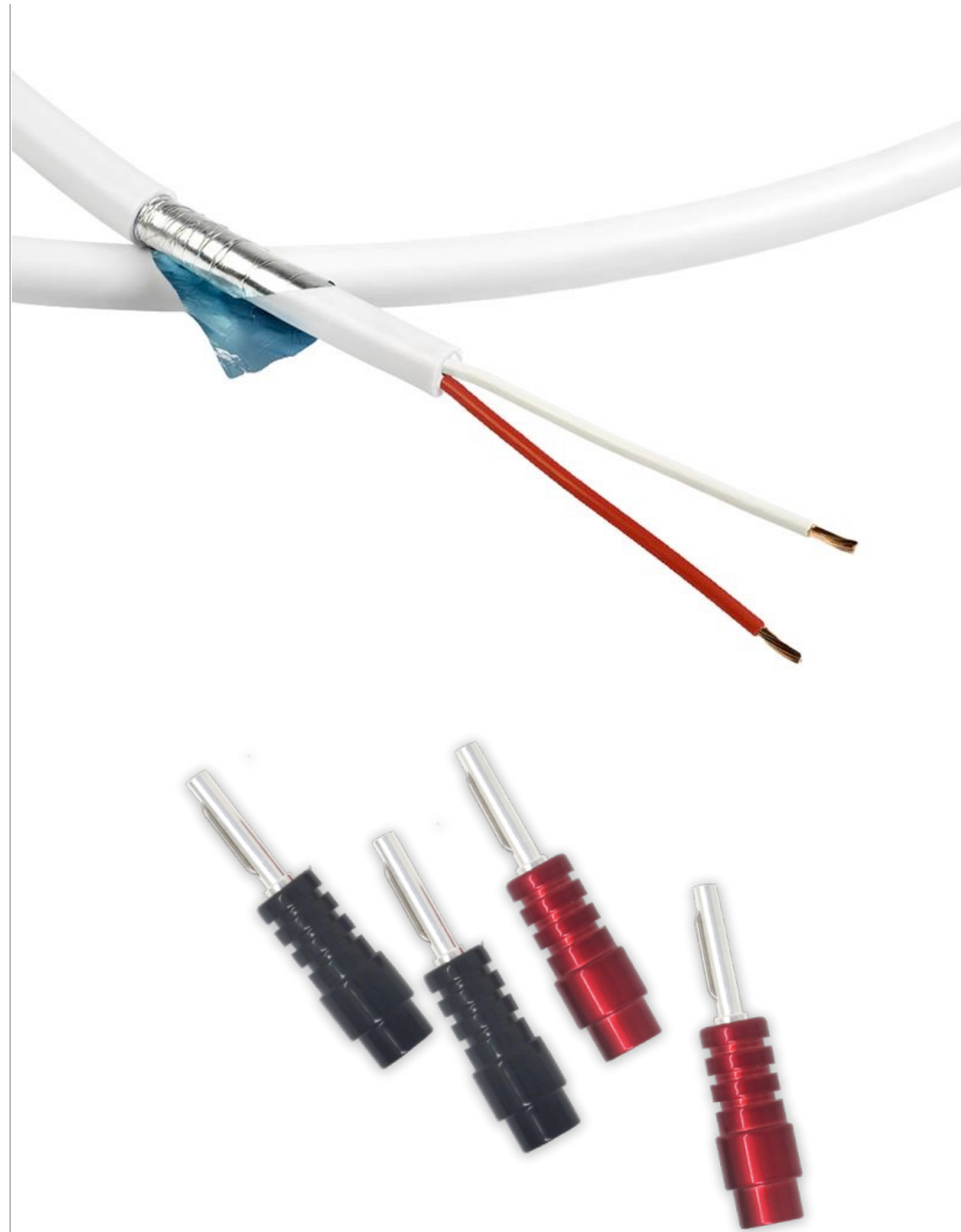


In two parts

The Chord Company has an extensive range of loudspeaker cables, and it can be divided into two categories in two different ways; cables for hifi and cables for custom install, but also cables that are available 'off the spool' and cables that are 'factory-made'. We deemed the entire range too extensive to fit into one review, so that division was a welcome opportunity to publish this review in two separate parts. This is the first part, in which we listen to the 'off the spool' cables. Save for one little exception we followed the price per meter for the order in which we listened.

Tailormade termination

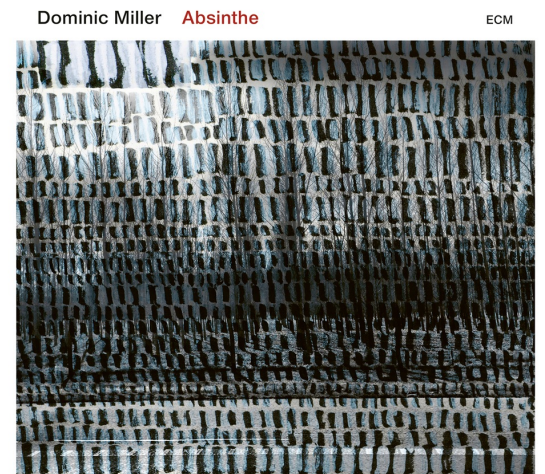
On the price list, the 'off the spool' cables are priced by the meter, but basically every length is available on request. You can order them 'nude', but the Dutch distributor for Chord Company - Latham Audio - also provides a termination-service. Every length can be fitted with the great looking but especially great sounding Chord Company connectors. This is done professionally, and insures that the cables are neatly finished too. That was the option we chose for this listening test.



Setup and music



Reviewing such a large amount of cables is quite a lot of work, so Latham Audio invited us to do the listening test in their demo-room. We gratefully accepted. We are quite familiar with that room, and what we hoped actually came true, Latham had set up the ultimate system for this review: the mighty Naim Ovator 800 loudspeakers, driven by what many consider as the best amplifier in the world, the Naim Statement. You may gasp softly but appropriately for breath now, so did we. The source was the new Naim NDX2 streamer with the Naim PS DR 555 power supply, and all the interconnects were Naim Super Lumina. It felt a bit odd the use this exceptionally good but also exceptionally expensive set to also listen to loudspeaker cables costing only a few euro's per meter, but as you will read in a moment, the ultimate resolution of this set made it very easy to hear what was going on, even in the lowest price range.



Dominic Miller Absinthe

ECM

To keep comparison easy, we used our tried and tested method of just two carefully selected tracks that together hold the complete spectrum of properties you may encounter in music reproduction, like deep bass, natural and artificial spaciousness, macro and micro dynamics, detail, neutrality, timbre and texture, timing, and placement. This time courtesy of Dominic Miller and Poppy Ackroyd. The Dominic Miller track (Ténèbres, from the album Absinthe, in 24/88.2 resolution) is a very natural acoustic recording, and the use of the bandoneon (a typical instrument from his nation of birth, Argentina) and brushes instead of drum sticks formed a considerable challenge to the micro-dynamic capabilities, resolution and neutrality of the set. Poppy Ackroyd is a British violist and pianist who makes an exciting cross-over between classical and electronic music. On the album Resolve Reimagined, tracks from her 2018 album Resolve get a remix by several prominent names from the world of experimental electronic music. We chose the track Light (remixed by Hauschka) because it has a lot of details and spaciousness, big dynamics and especially super low bass.

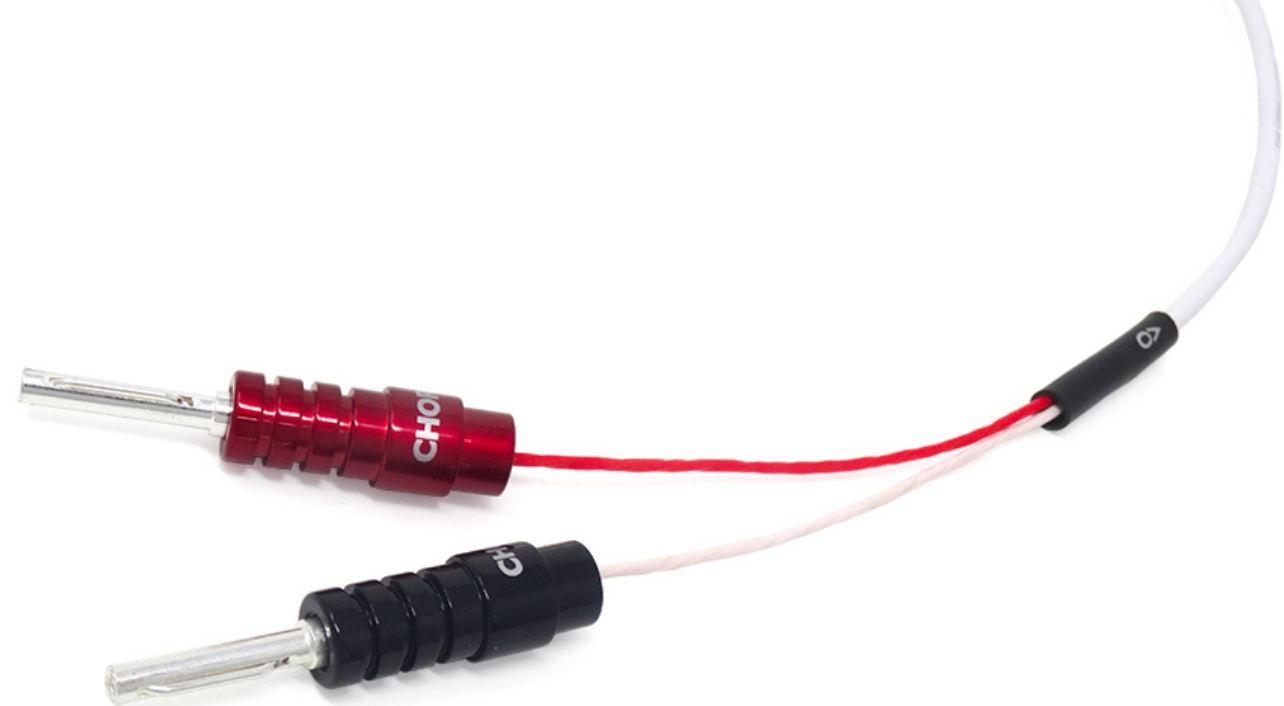
Chord Company Leyline

The Chord Company Leyline is the cheapest loudspeaker cable in the Legacy AV & Custom Install series. It has an official Low Smoke Zero Halogen designation (LS0H) for its PE (polythene) sleeve, which means you can use it as an installation cable in naval and aerospace construction. Its 16 AWG (1,3 mm²) conductors are made of tinned copper. This cable has no shielding.

When we listened to Dominic Miller, this very cheap cable gave a surprising amount of detail and depth, where small sounds were easily distinguishable and the bass was clearer than we had anticipated. With Poppy Ackroyd we heard substantial power and all sounds were nicely separated. Dynamically, this cable did not stand in the way of the music. We realised that this was only the beginning, and that the quality of the set we were listening to definitely had an influence on the sound quality, but what we heard was above average. A safe investment when you need a lot of meters on a budget.

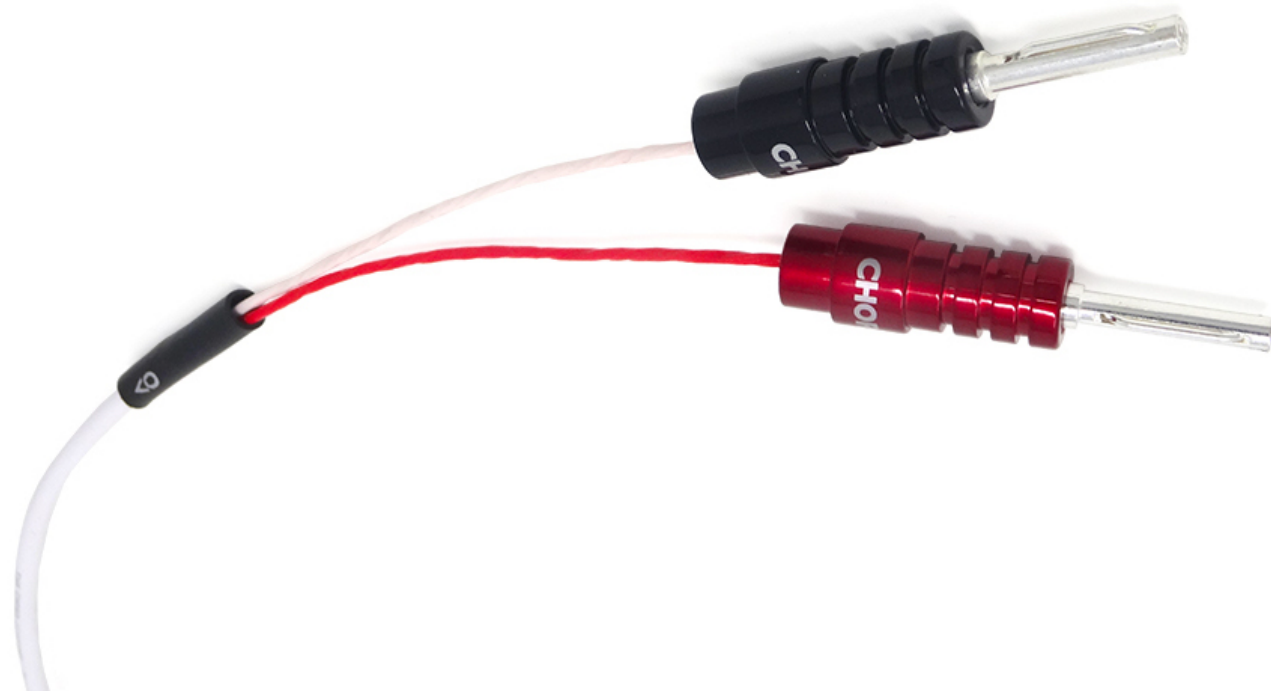


Chord Company Sarsen



The Chord Company Sarsen is the first step up in the Legacy AV & Custom Install series. It is named after the type of sandstone that was used for most of the monoliths of the famous Stonehenge monument, a stone's throw from the Chord Company factory. Rather than that mysterious monument there are no secrets shrouding this cable. It is a very thin 'high end' custom install cable. Its conductors are laid out in a twisted pair configuration, and are made from ultra pure OFC copper. Because the conductors are a mere 18 AWG (1 mm²) thick, the total diameter of the cable is only 3.5 mm.

With Poppy Ackroyd, the improvement in sound quality was evident. First of all, there was greater depth in the sound image. In hindsight, the Leyline proved to be rather flat sounding after all. The Sarsen also removed some edginess from the sound, and there was more push in the lower frequencies. Because twisted conductors sort of take care of their own shielding we also heard more space, detail and transparency. It all became a bit cleaner too. With Dominic Miller, that cleanliness manifested itself best in more audible space around the instruments, faster and more dynamic small sounds from the bandoneon and cleaner bass that was definitely more powerful, despite the smaller diameter of the cable. A little 'bump' in the lower mids that gave some coloration with the Leyline was also gone. A surprisingly good cable!



Chord Company C-Screen

The Chord Company C-Screen is the loudspeaker cable of the C-Series for hifi and home cinema applications. It is the entry level hifi loudspeaker cable of The Chord Company, and for many it will be the first upgrade from the 'lamp cord' that you get for free with a pair of loudspeakers. The 16 AWG (1,3 mm²) multi-strand conductors are made from OFC copper and they are double shielded with a metallic foil. And that makes a rather big difference, as it turned out.

With Dominic Miller there was more timbre than with the Leyline, and the music had more directness, but it also sounded a little dryer. Compared to the more expensive Sarsen there was a little less spaciousness and bass power, but we got a more relaxed, more fluid sound reproduction in return. With Poppy Ackroyd we also noticed the dryer presentation, but it still trumped the Leyline. There was a little more power in the spatial presentation and the total image was positioned a little more to the back, with more dynamics and timbre, but it also sounded more relaxed. In our experience that last property is quite typical for shielded loudspeaker cables.



Chord Company Clearway

The Chord Company Clearway is one step above the C-Screen in the hifi product range of The Chord Company. Its double shielded OFC conductors are 14 AWG (1,65 mm²) thick and are laid out in a twisted pair configuration. The dielectric material of the Clearway is made of FEP (fluorinated ethylene propylene), a material that has very similar electrical properties to the more expensive PTFE (Teflon®).

Poppy Ackroyd track sounded more spacious and airy, with greater depth and more low frequency power. The 'dryness' we noticed with the C-Screen was gone and we got more timbre and detail in return. The spaciousness started to show definite signs of three-dimensionality, with more stable positioning and a more relaxed presentation. Dominic Miller's track had more texture. The wood of the guitar, the skin on the snare drum and the brushes on it, everything became more tangible. This was the first cable that made us notice how fantastic the Naim set was. The loudspeakers had almost disappeared from the image, there was more spaciousness and we got a clearer view on what was going on in the back of the sound field. The 'sighing' sound of the valves that you hear when the bandoneon is 'breathing in' was much more audible.



Chord Company Rumour X



The Chord Company Rumour X is the second most expensive cable in the Legacy AV & Custom Install series. Its total diameter is 6mm, due to its 16 AWG (1,3 mm²) conductors made from silver plated OFC. The Rumour has been a Chord Company staple for over 20 years but this new version, recognisable by its X designation, is the first generation of Rumour that uses the new dielectric material XLPE (Cross Linked Polythene) that - according to The Chord Company - surpasses PTFE by quite a stretch. The Chord Company Rumour X has no shielding.

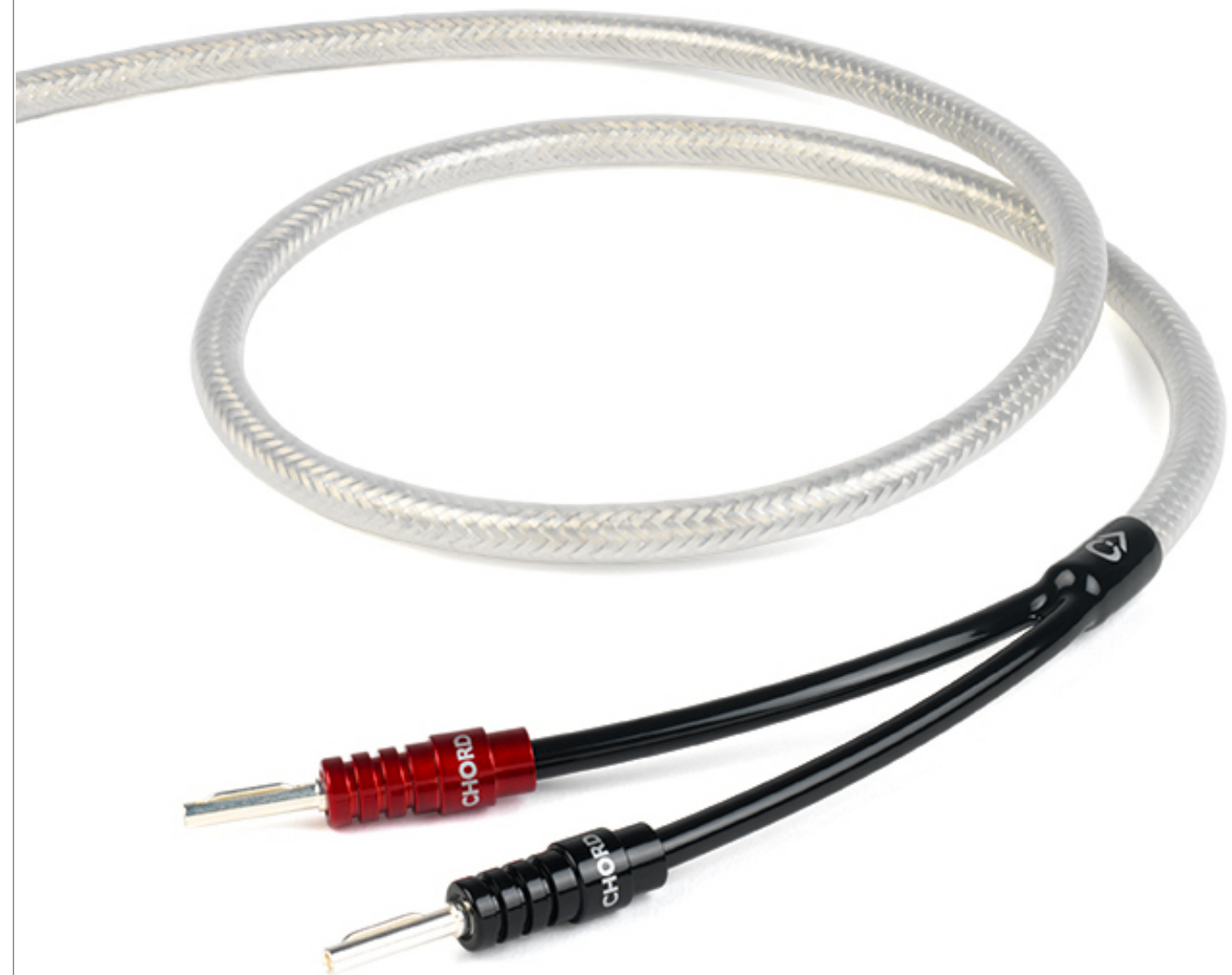
It was not quite clear if it was due to the silver plated OFC or the new isolation material (or both), but with the Dominic Miller track the Rumour X displayed a much opener and more detailed sound image. The music had more pressure and spaciousness. We heard more space around the instruments, and for the first time the reverb was audibly attached to the instrument that caused that specific reverb. With Poppy Ackroyd the music sounded more relaxed and we heard more small details. There was considerably more pressure in the low frequencies, and the bass also became and definitely more controlled. The sound image also got bigger, especially towards us, with more texture and a clearer view on individual sounds. That made them easier to follow in the mix as the music progressed.

Chord Company Shawline X

The Shawline X is the 'hifi counterpart' of the Rumour X. Its conductors and XLPE dielectric are identical, the the Shawline X's 16 AWG (1,3 mm²) conductors are triple shielded with two layers of metallic foil and a metal braid that is visible directly under the transparant outer hull. It gives this cable a classy high-tech appearance, but it also improves the sound quality.

With the Poppy Ackroyd track we heard exactly what we had expected, based on previous experience with the shielded Chord Company loudspeaker cables. There were many similarities with the sound of the Rumour X, but the Shawline X sounded more relaxed and it imaged slightly less forward. But we also heard much more texture. Every sound was more

tangible, and small structural details stood out more. With Dominic Miller we also noticed that the image had not only moved a little to the back, but also that it had become much wider, stretching far beyond the loudspeakers, with the drums more clearly in the center of the soundstage without stretching the drumkit to 'bigger than life' proportions towards the sides of the image. An impressive achievement!



Chord Company Odyssey X



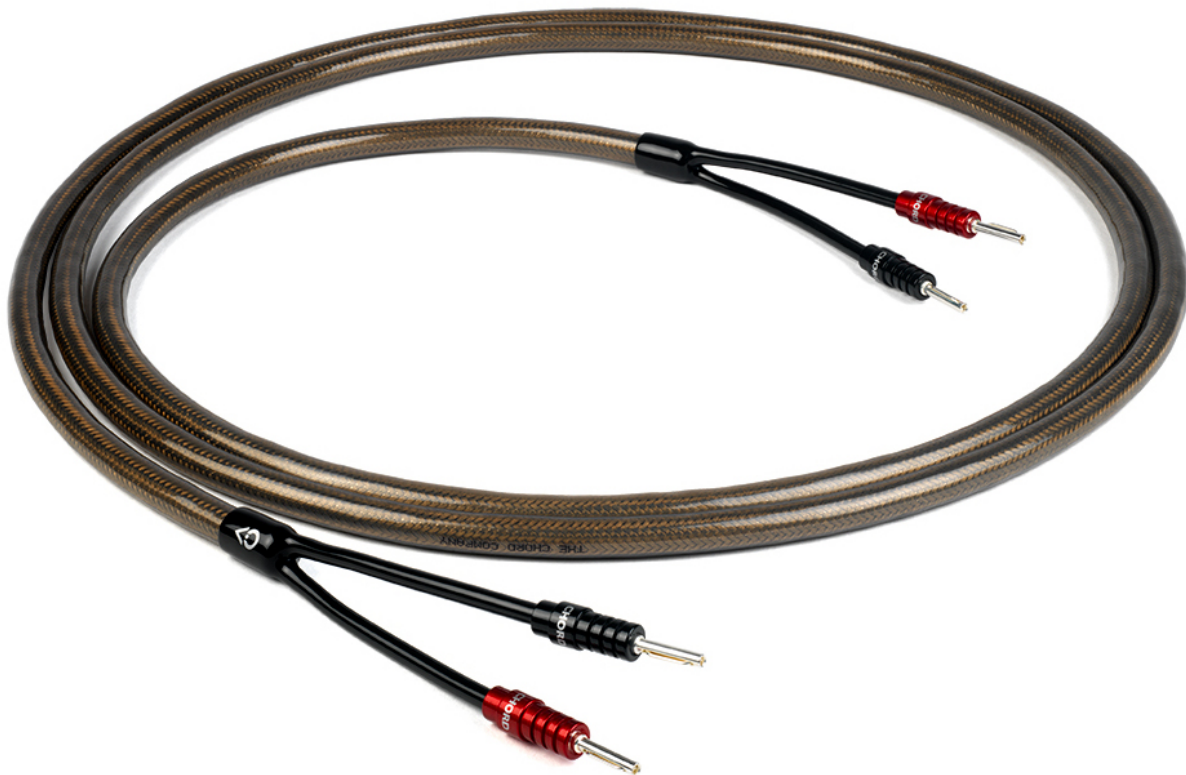
The Chord Company Odyssey X, like the Rumour X, has been a Chord Company staple for over 20 years. Its metallurgy and geometry are identical to the Rumour X, including the new XLPE dielectric material. The only difference is that the conductors in the Odyssey X are a lot thicker, at 12 AWG (3,3 mm²). The Odyssey X is not shielded, and by now we were confident to predict what sound signature that would amount to.

The Dominic Miller recording revealed a lot more music than with its thinner siblings Rumour X and the shielded Shawline. Everything got an extra spoonful. Timbre, dynamics, texture, spaciousness... This is where the more than double sized conductors proved their worth. Much like the

thinner unshielded cables the Odyssey X gave a more vivid sound, but it also excelled in neutrality. The timing of the music became a lot better too, which gave much better coherence to the musical performance. The bass benefitted from the much thicker conductors as well. It became more powerful and more agile and it filled the room with much greater ease. With Poppy Ackroyd the Odyssey X was a revelation as well. More small details, more air, more speed and pressure, and - again - a slightly more forward soundstage that gave a more intense and holographic listening experience.



Chord Company Epic



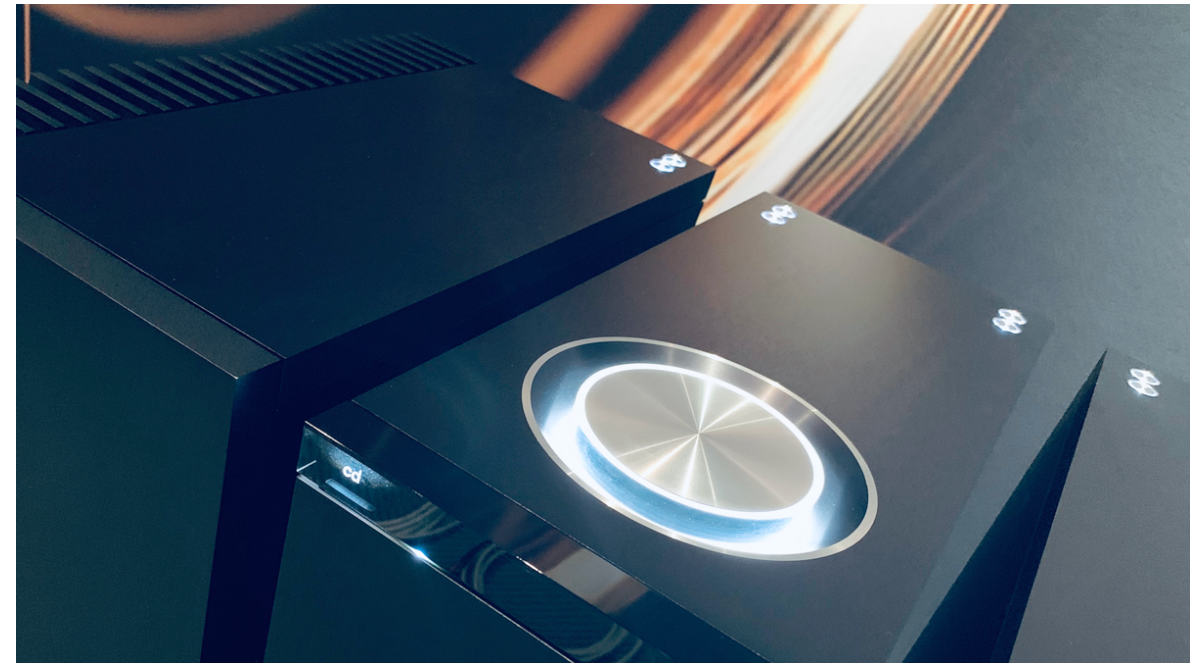
The Chord Company Epic is the triple shielded (metal braid and two layers of metal foil) 'hifi' version of the Chord Company Odyssey X. The 10 AWG (3,3 mm²) conductors are identical, but the Epic still uses PTFE (Teflon®) dielectric.

With Poppy Ackroyd we heard a little more texture in the bowed strings of the opening chords, but the biggest difference was that the Epic sounded more relaxed and gave better oversight on everything that happened in the soundstage. Small details were more prominent, the bass got more pressure and sharper edges on the starts and stops. The greater transference, temporal coherence and fluidity made the image almost completely three-dimensional and the loudspeakers vanished almost completely. In the Dominic Miller track, we noticed more 'rattling' of the valves in the bandoneon, besides cleaner and clearer timbres and increased detail in the drums.

Conclusion ad interim

At the end of the first part of this Chord Company loudspeaker cable review we need to come to an interim conclusion. What we liked - a lot - about these cables was the consistence in the way that more expensive cables expand the sound of their cheaper brethren. Their character stays basically the same, you just get more of it. The 'house sound' of The Chord Company - if we dare speak of it at all - is just as much about tone as it is about detail and precision. Which we think is great! In the lowest price range the Sarsen and the Clearway were the biggest surprises, and from the Rumour X and up we did no longer feel that the combination with the sublime but very costly Naim set was a bit odd.

And frankly, we were also charmed by the small but predictable difference in character between the unshielded Legacy Series and the more hifi-oriented types that did have shielding. In general you could say that the unshielded cables have a more lively character and the shielded cables sound more laid-back and - can we say this? Yes we can - audiophile. So the listeners preference will be determined by their taste and listening habits. All in all, that small differentiation - while maintaining the Chord Company sound signature - is something we applaud.



*This was the first part of our review of all Chord Company loudspeaker cables. The **second part**, in which we listen to the 'factory made' cables, features the top of the range models. Including the costly Chord Company **Sarum** and **Music** models.*

Music and Information

More information and prices about the Chord Company Loudspeaker Cables can be found in our webshop:

[Chord Company Loudspeaker Cables](#)

Spotify

[Dominic Miller - Absinthe](#)

[Poppy Ackroyd - Resolve Reimagined](#)

Tidal

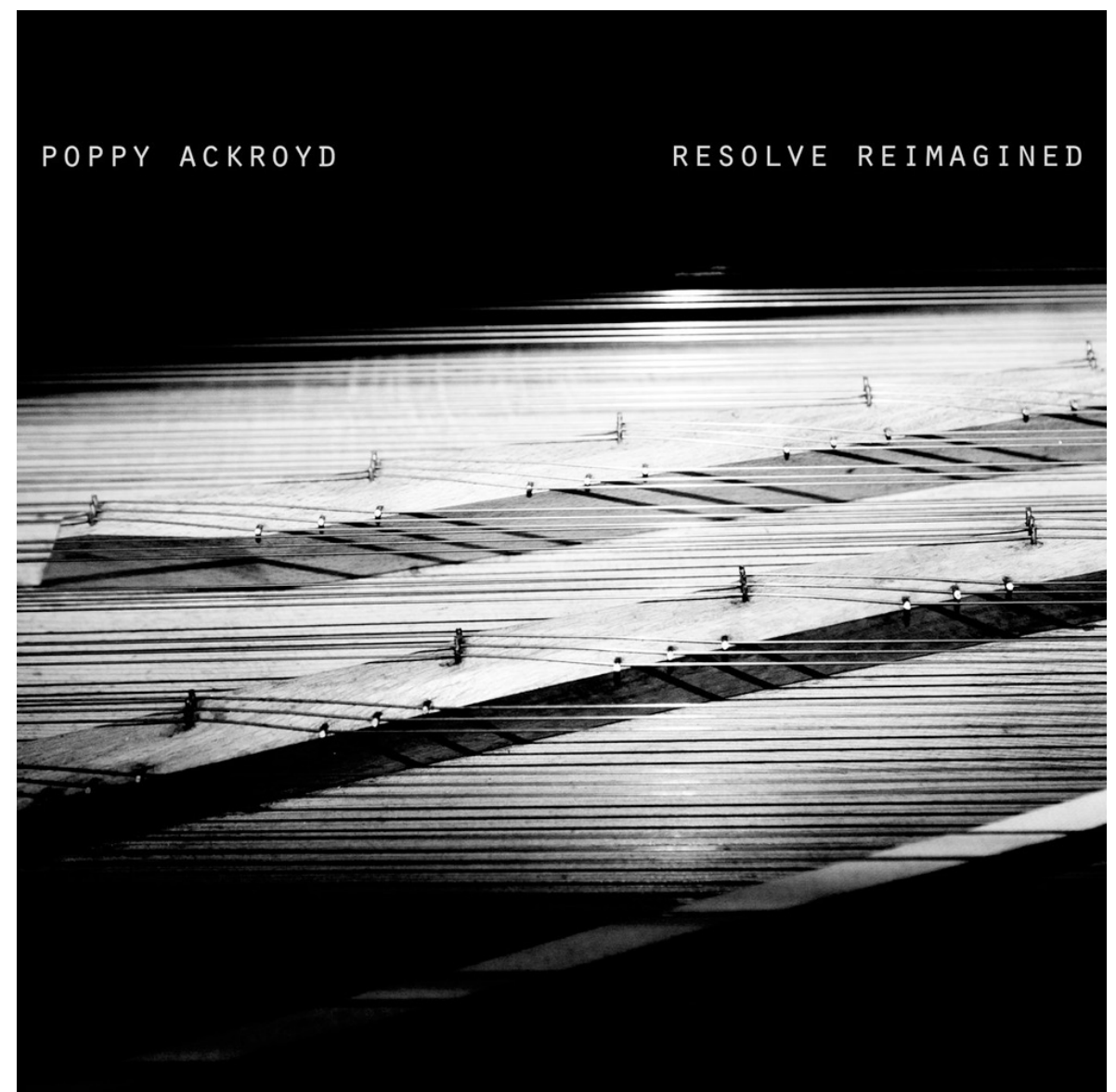
[Dominic Miller - Absinthe \(MQA\)](#)

[Poppy Ackroyd - Resolve Reimagined](#)

Qobuz

[Dominic Miller - Absinthe \(Hi-Res\)](#)

[Poppy Ackroyd - Resolve Reimagined \(Hi-Res\)](#)





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