

# Chord Company Loudspeaker Cables

*the complete survey (part 2)*



# Chord Company Loudspeaker Cables

*The Chord Company's family of loudspeaker cables is a large one, so when we decided to give it a unique and comprehensive survey-review it was inevitable to publish it in two parts. Fortunately, The Chord Company provides a perfect opportunity to split the review. One half of the loudspeaker cables (well, not the exact one half, but let's just say 'the cheaper half' anyway) is supplied of the spool, for which the Dutch distributor Latham Audio provides a professional termination service, in any desired length, with Chord Company connectors. We chose that option and heartily recommend it to everyone. You get professional grade connections, the quality of the finish is very high and you can get started with your new cables right away.*





# Factory made

In that first group you also find the four models of the Legacy AV and Custom Install series. Those are made for install projects, but they really hold their own in normal hifi stereo setups. Some of them have a 'twin' in the hifi series. Those twins have identical metallurgy and geometry, but with added multi-layer shielding. The Legacy loudspeaker cables are not shielded. In our previous listening test - that took place in Latham's beautiful listening room, we found that there were small but interesting differences between shielded and unshielded loudspeaker cables. You'll have to read the [first part](#) of this review if you want to know that those differences were.

The cables in this second part of the review are exclusively sold as 'factory made'. The main reason for that is their rather complex assembly. It's not that Chord Company doesn't trust their distributors with that, but most consumers will not be able to assemble these cables up to specification, and that could result in sub-standard sound quality. Not only is that a pity for the end-user, but the manufacturer's reputation could be at stake as well... That is why these cables are not sold off the spool. Besides that, the most expensive cables incorporate very expensive materials, some of which can only be processed with special equipment and with specific knowledge and experience.



# Setup and Music

For the readers who enter this review here - which is half way - we need to do a quick reintroduction of the setup and the music. The set we used consisted of the Naim Ovator 800 loudspeakers, powered by the Naim Statement amplifier. As a source we used the Naim NDX2 streamer with the Naim PS DR 555 power supply. The set was hooked up with Naim Super Lumina interconnect cables. The music we used was by Dominic Miller and Poppy Ackroyd. Dominic Miller's track (Ténèbres from the album Absinthe, in 24/88.2 resolution) is acoustic and very natural, and offers a major challenge in terms of micro-dynamics, detail and neutrality. Poppy Ackroyd makes an exciting crossover between classical and electronic music. For her album Resolve Reimagined, tracks from her album Resolve were remixed. We went for Light (remixed by Hauschka), which has a lot of detail and spaciousness, but also a lot of dynamics and especially very low bass.



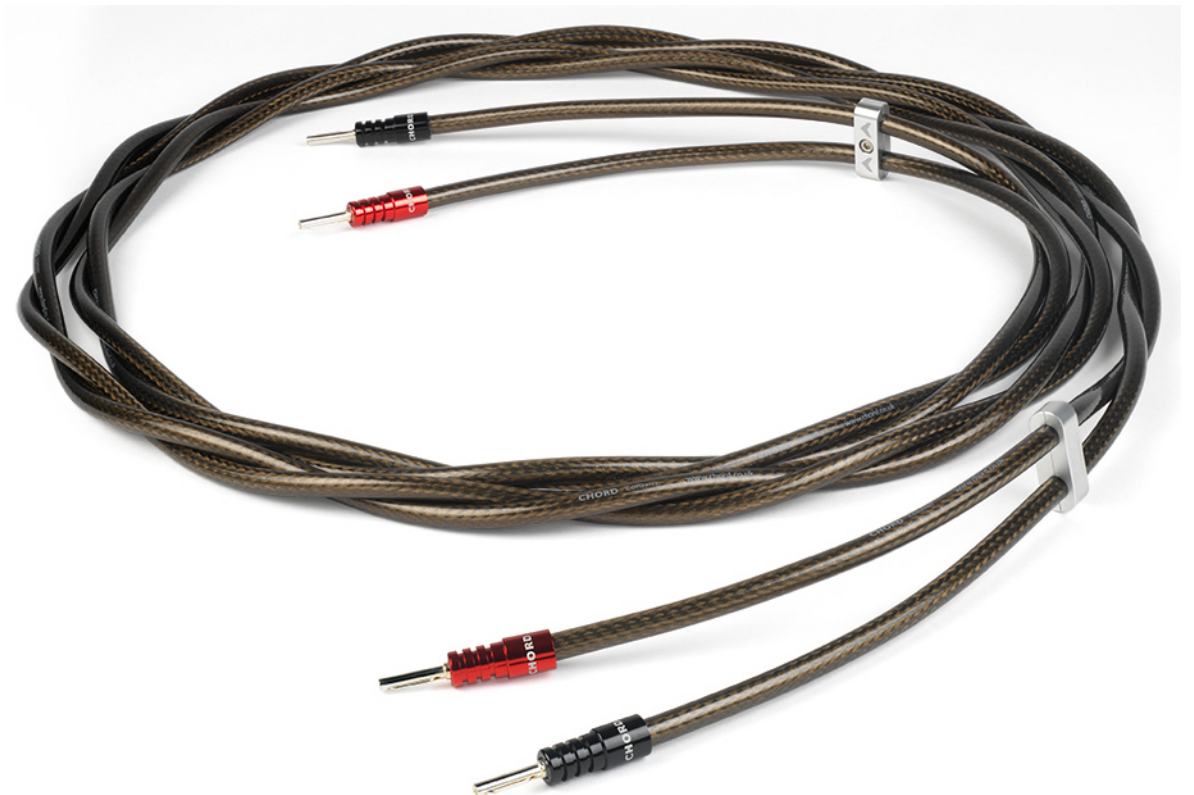


# Chord Company Epic XL

The Chord Company Epic XL is the successor to the Epic Reference. It is the entry level model in the 'factory made' series of hifi and home cinema loudspeaker cables by Chord Company. The addition XL shows us that we are dealing with the new insulation material XLPE (Cross Linked Polythene) that outperforms the the previously used PTFE (Teflon®), but at considerable lower cost than Teylon, which is used in the top series Sarum T and ChordMusic. When you take a look at the Chord Epic XL it is easy to understand why Chord Company prefers to assemble this cable in their own factory. The two individually shielded cables of the + and -, both in their Translucent PVC outer jacket, are 'optimally twisted' (according to Chord Company) around each other, and secured on both ends by a sleek looking but strong aluminum clamp. Its 12 AWG (3.3 mm<sup>2</sup>) conductors are made of silver-plated OFC and they have a coaxial geometry. The connectors are silver plated ChordOhmic bananas. The ChordOhmic connectors were developed by Chord Company for their Sarum T and ChordMusic loudspeaker cables, but they turned out to be so good that they

were also made available on a few cheaper models. And judging by the high end standards they meet, they are also quite cheap.

Where the 'standard' Chord Company Epic still missed the mark of that coveted three-dimensionality by a few hairs, the Poppy Ackroyd track made the speakers vanish from the sound picture completely. We heard more pressure in the midrange and lower frequencies and details got more speed. The music had more spatiality and airiness, which made the experience much more intense. In the Dominic Miller track the acoustic instruments sounded more lifelike. We could see the wood of the guitar, so to speak, because now, for the first time, we had the feeling that we were in the studio, instead of looking in through an increasingly well cleaned window. Because it appeared that we were standing closer, the reproduction became more involving, and we heard more coherence and is better timing. Timbres were more neutral and more correct, but not detached. On the contrary, the musicians and their instruments became almost tangible.



# Chord Company Signature XL



The Chord Company Signature XL is the latest version of this beloved high end loudspeaker cable by The Chord Company, that has been on the market since 2004 and was introduced as the Signature. At that time it was their first shielded cable. When The Chord Company started using PTFE as a dielectric this sound became more natural (by their own admission, the Signature may have been a little detailed) and the cable was called Signature Reference. The current Reference XL, that uses the new XLPE insulation material, they claim they have taken another large step ahead. This twisted pair cable has silver plated OFC conductors, each with a thickness of no less than 5.25 mm<sup>2</sup>, or 10 AWG. Each conductor is double shielded with a metallic foil and a metal braid.

When we queued up the track by Poppy Ackroyd, our mouths fell open. Whamm!!! There was an image so large and so high that we could walk through it, in a manner of speaking, like we were watching a good 3-D movie with a soundtrack that was almost surround, that is how far the image was stretched beyond the loudspeakers. Tonally there wasn't much more that could be improved, but essential characteristics like coherence and timing became a lot better, something that we noted before with more expensive components - so not just cables. Tone is basically easier to get right than texture, placement and timing. With Dominic Miller the recording room seemed twice as large. We could hear the metal reeds that make the tone of the bandoneon much more clearly, which gave the instrument a lot more texture. We also heard more pressure with soft drum sounds, increasing the tangibility once again.

# Chord Company Signature Reference

This one is out of competition, because its successor is already in the shops, but Latham Audio also had a Chord Company Signature Reference ready for us, which is the predecessor of the Signature XL. The construction of both cables is identical, accept the new XLPE insulation material. On this level it offers a great chance to hear if the differences in sound quality really exist and how they manifest themselves. To give it at least some scientific Blind Test credibility, we weren't told if we were listening to the old or the new model. It didn't take us very long to hear differences, and we were happy to find out that the cable we liked best actually was the new Chord Company Signature XL.

Honestly commands to say that the differences are small. With Dominic Miller the Signature Reference sounded a lot like the Signature XL, but it came across just a little cleaner and more laid-back, and the image was flatter. The Poppy Ackroyd track confirmed that observation. Especially the smaller percussive elements in the production didn't come as far forward, and didn't float around the room as freely. The Chord Company Signature Reference is really quite a nice loudspeaker cable, but when it came to spatiality, it had to yield to the Signature XL.



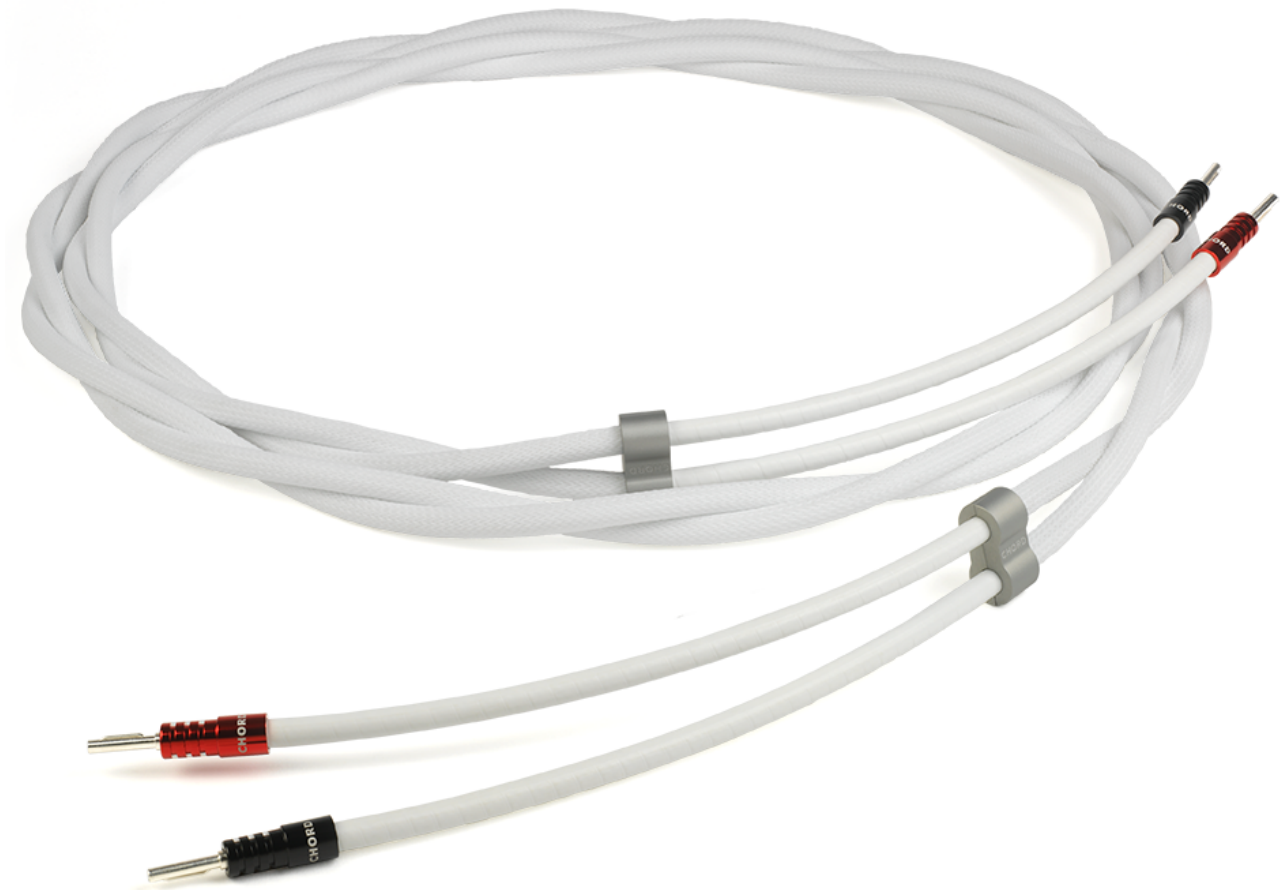


# Chord Company Sarum T

Until recently the Chord Company Sarum T was the absolute top cable of the Chord Company. Its conductors are sourced from the American military Aerospace industry, and they are very hard to make. That is why huge lengths are not possible. For normal home use however there are no limitations. In its previous version, this cable used PTFE insulation, but that was replaced by Teylon, hence the letter T in its name. The Chord Company Sarum T's conductors are made of 'high polished' silver plated 'high purity' OFC. The thickness of each conductor is 3.3 mm<sup>2</sup>, or 12 AWG, and each conductor is double shielded.

It was astonishing how much the difference with the Company Sarum T loudspeaker cable looked like the difference that the digital Chord Company Company Sarum T streaming cables made in an earlier [review](#) we

did. With the Dominic Miller track the amount of musical information appeared to double. The involvement with the music grew enormously. Once again there were no great tonal differences, although the drumroll with the brushes had a lot more colour. With Poppy Ackroyd we did here a tonal difference. The bass became warmer, but it also lost some of its tightness. A comparison with good tube amplifiers forced itself upon us. All the little jingles that were whirling through the sound image were much sharper and easier to follow, and they all had their own sound. But the mere fact that almost immediately after noticing these properties we took a deep dive into the music and I enjoyed it, actually says it all.





# Chord Company ChordMusic

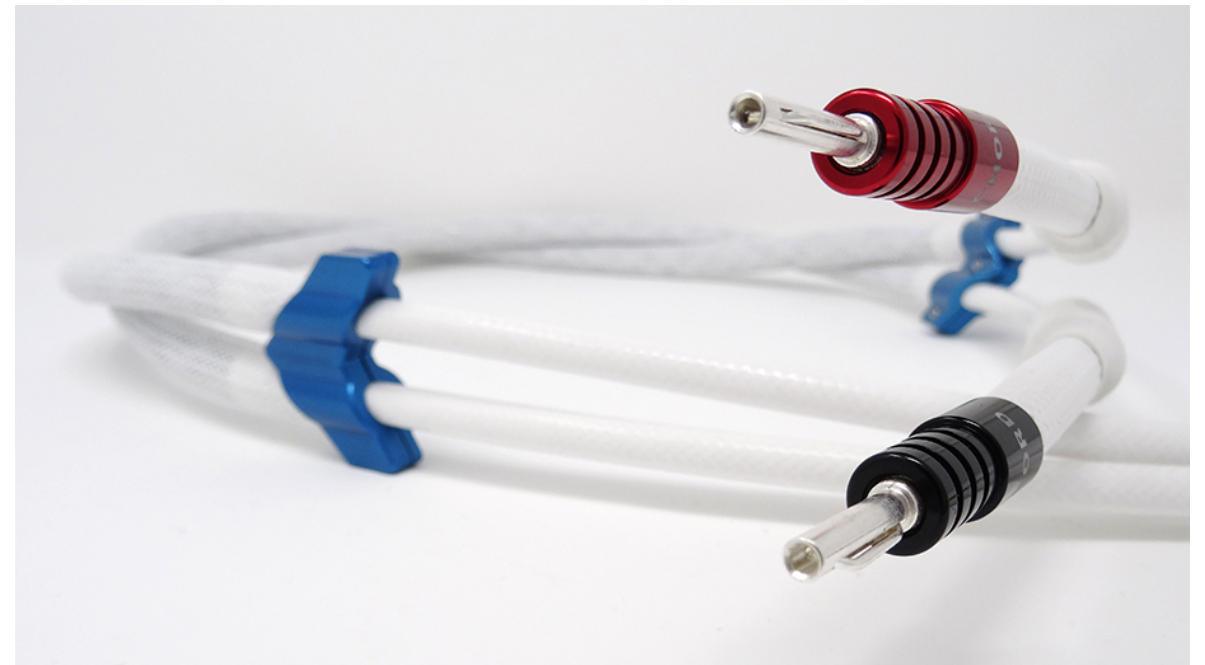


When the Chord Company ChordMusic were introduced, they were not only the first loudspeaker cables to use the new and very expensive insulation material called Tylon, but they were also the first loudspeaker cables that were constructed according to the Tuned ARAY principle, which was originally developed for the Chord Company's digital cables. Besides Tylon, the ChordMusic's construction leaves nothing to chance. Only the best materials are used. The conductors, each with a thickness of no less than 5.25 mm<sup>2</sup>, or 10 AWG, are made of very pure, heavily silver plated OFC copper, and they are individually shielded with a heavily silver plated metal foil and a double silver plated OFC copper braid. Its outer jacket is made from PTFE (Teflon®).

It sounds like a huge cliché (and it is... sorry...) but the Chord Company ChordMusic really represented the superlative degree. It was no longer useful to focus on individual differences. The Chord Company ChordMusic put the music in the room in full 3-D, and combined the tightness of the Signature XL with the musicality of the Sarum T. And with that it turned out to be the ideal loudspeaker cable in the Chord Company catalogue. This is the best loudspeaker cable they can make at this moment, Chord Company says, and we like to believe them. Expensive, even very expensive, but worth every penny because boy oh boy oh boy oh boy (etc etc). Sublime and ultimate.

# Final conclusion

Chord Company loudspeaker cables offer something for everyone. Their selection is so wide that there is a cable for every budget. And because we have found out that the Chord Company loudspeaker cables are beautifully consistent in the sound quality they offer, you can rest assured that the Family Sound is present at every price. That is good to know when you like to do an upgrade, but keep the character. We already told you so in our interim conclusion: Chord Company cables are just as much about tone as they are about detail and precision. Our favourite? We don't have to think about that. In the system we use for this review, that was clearly the Chord Company ChordMusic. But as far as we are concerned, the cup for best price to performance ratio goes to the of the spool Epic, and the 'factory made' Epic XL, with an honorary mention for the Clearway and the very thin Sarsen. What it all comes down to in the end, is that the Chord Company has its act together in all price ranges. Those who are looking for excellently constructed, realistically priced loudspeaker cables that do not skimp on tone and detail should really give these a listen.



# 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 \(Hi-Res\)](#)

Dominic Miller **Absinthe**

ECM



POPPY ACKROYD

RESOLVE REIMAGINED







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