

REVIEW

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聖HIJIRI

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I guess not many of the owners of high quality audio components even realize that brands that made their devices often actually belong to the same mother-company. Like, for example, Audio Research, Sonus faber, Wadia Digital, Sumiko, McIntosh – they all belong to the Italian holding Fine Sounds Group; Denon, Marantz and Boston Acoustics belong to Japanese D+M Group; and Wharfedale, Quad, Audiolab, Mission, Luxman, Ekco, Leak and Castle to Chinese capital group IAG Group. More and more such business ventures appear on the market and one should expect even more of them in the future. Recently Focal-JMLab bought shares of Naim Audio and the Muse SA, a company dealing with luxury goods, acquired Meridian Audio..



And there is no mystery to this process – audio market gets consolidated just as all others. It didn't happen long ago only because audio market never has been as big as we like to think, and never has generated as much income (despite what most of us think about top-high-end). So this consolidation of the market is an opportunity for these companies – they get access to additional capital and top class management. The goal is to make these brands stronger and, well... to generate profits.

It doesn't always work. I've seen such attempts that failed – brands lost their identity and were not profitable enough. Everybody lost. But in general it seems that such consolidation brings positive results as it strengthens not only particular brands but the whole audio industry, too. The reason is quite simple: the industry needs capital that, as we already know, can't really be generated without external help and without it audio industry will never be as successful as other luxury goods industry branches.

Combak Corporation

The case of Combak Corporation is different, though. It might look similar at first – the webpage combak.net clearly states that it is only a “mother company” of a few different brands like: Reimyo, Harmonix, Enacom and Encore! (until recently it was called Bravo!). On the same webpage one would find a lot of leads towards XRCD. The Combak Corporation didn't grow by purchasing new brands, but it's activity was divided between different brands from the beginning.

For a long time division was pretty simple: Reimyo was a brand of electronic components, Harmonix offered cables and anti-vibration accessories, Bravo! (now Encore!) manufactured loudspeakers, and Enacom different filters. XRCD – as all audiophiles know are Compact Discs. By the way the XRCD24 logo can be found more and more often on Combak Corporation products – one should know that Mr Kiuchi is a co-owner of XRCD technology, too. But not long ago it all started to change and the division between brands is not that clear anymore. From the moment first products with the word „Million” in their name were released this, previously clear, division collapsed. Have a look at the website with anti-vibration accessories. There is RFS-65m model branded Hyotan, RS-1502M TuningMaster feet with Harmonix logo, and RF-999M Million Maestro with Combak Corporation logo. And now

I am almost certain that the above mentioned mastering studio hasn't changed those cables they used for years. All the recording/sound processing/mastering word is quit reluctant when it comes to novelties and it even manifests this reluctance openly. And yet, even this “hostile” PRO environment accepts on rare occasions the fact, that some new cables might be better than the ones they used thus far. But the improvement in sound quality must be truly significant, nobody in pro business believes in small steps, in barely audible improvements – it is more of a binary approach – 1 or 0, there is a significant improvement or there isn't.



And that's the kind of change the new interconnect introduces compared to the previous one. It is the third time that a representative of the Million line is not just good – all Harmonix products in their price range were at least interesting – but simply remarkable. Every single aspect of the sound has improved so in fact this IC offers a new level of quality. What is even more important is that Million seems to be a proof of a new approach that Mr Kiuchi took – it is not just about improving, polishing qualities of previous models but about creating a new, higher quality.

Not that I have anything against constant quality improvement – that's basically how the audio (and not only audio) world works. When some company wants to make a bigger leap, to avoid making small steps, it often stumbles and finds such way even more difficult. Mr Kiuchi has been using this policy of small improvements, of taking one step at a time for years and it was a wise choice and a good decision. But even in our hobby, our musical lives moments of a breakthrough happen from time to time.

It makes sense only if a company implementing such a breakthrough has a proper experience and knowledge, if it already has made a lot of small steps. Then it is able to create something like the Million. It is obviously based to a point on previous products, I mean one is able to point out certain sound features that are and also were particularly important for creator of these cables, but now they are elements of a whole new creation/quality.

The new Mr Kiuchi's interconnect offers amazingly open sound. If you think that your cable does that too, that it sounds incredibly involving, with remarkable attack than you should listen to 聖HIJIRI and verify what you think you know. Unless, of course, you're using cable of Siltech Triple Crown kind, then – despite obvious sonic differences between Japanese and Dutch cables – you might actually know what I am talking about.

What attracts attention right from the very first moment one puts this IC in the system is the opening of the sound. Siltech's Double Crown sounded slow and rolled off in comparison. It offered richer, more fluid midrange, it presented everything that happened in this part of the range in a better way, but when it came to definition of the sound, to its energy 聖HIJIRI took the clear lead. It took Siltech's Triple Crown to top 聖HIJIRI's performance in these aspects.

there comes another logo: 聖Hijiri.

聖HIJIRI “Million”

As one can read on company's materials, 聖Hijiri means ‘maestro’ or ‘an important leader’. Mr Kiuchi chose this name for his new interconnect to emphasize that this is a new generation of product, a very important one for its creator. This interconnect belongs to the top line called Million and replaces the previous top models from Harmonix Golden Performance line. Already its look suggests that it belongs to the top line – similarly colored sleeve and wooden elements are a clear resemblance to Harmonix X-DC Studio Master Million Maestro power cord, that we recently reviewed and that proved to be absolutely remarkable.

As usually Mr Kiuchi doesn't share information about the design. I asked him once why he offered so few information about his products that were based on certain technologies and solutions and he told me that bragging about technical details was a mistake because all that really mattered was music: „whenever a product does not fulfill its primary role, which is conveying music in the best possible way (at particular price level of course), it doesn't matter at all how much one would know about the design, materials, parameters and so on”. One can agree with such approach or not, but it is a clear statement of Mr Kiuchi's philosophy.

The only information manufacturer shares are as follows:

- original design and special, directional conductor,
- cables are hand-made to ensure highest sound quality,
- independent, isolated ground wire protects against RF noise,
- original Hijiri plugs,
- available lengths: 0,75 m/1 m/1,5 m/2 m/2,5 m – other lengths upon order,
- available in two versions: unbalanced (RCA) and balanced (XLR).

As one can see at the receiver end there are ground wires terminated with gold-plated spades, that should be connected to devices ground or to some „virtual ground” using devices like [Verictum X Bulk](#), [Acoustic Revive RGC-24](#) or [Entreq](#). I compared 聖Hijiri to Siltech Double Crown and Triple Crown interconnects.

— A FEW SIMPLE WORDS WITH...



KAZUO KIUCHI Combak Corporation | Owner

How it differs (I mean in construction) from your other cables?

Please let me briefly explain about new "Million" signal cable. First, Million is a symbol mark for the best of Harmonix product lines, and the product shall contribute to loyal Harmonix patronage around the world who support us for years. Every "Million" to include Million Signal cables have been embedded the highest technology we have created in combination with the best materials we selected and meticulously handcrafted.

What did you want to achieve with them in sound?

We have discovered a infinite rule we call it Resonance Control technology. First, I selected materials that meet with this rule. It has been taken years to years to create the quality sounding cables. Then, I conduct listening test before going to final and it is a very important like Art of painting.

Are you going to make a Million Speaker cable?

At this moment of time, I am not considering to make "Million" Speaker cables. We have already HS-EXQ and HS101-SLC, they are both fantastic speaker cables none came close to them on the market.

Did you produce recently some XRCDs? What they were?

Yes, I did a quite many number of XRCD and have been producing XRCD since it is a very important job of mine to serve and satisfy serious music lovers around the globe. I am counting on music soft as one of important high-end gear, and without it, any expensive high end sound reproduction systems to include speaker systems can hardly evaluated but most often there is a very limited number of people got aware of this, I am sorry to say.



Tonal balance seems to be set bit higher than in both Siltech's cables, which reminded me more of top Acrolink cables. But compared to the latter it seemed even more “muscular”, richer. What's more, I never felt that lower midrange and bass range lacked richness or power. 聖HIJIRI energizes a room with low range in a similar way as Siltechs do. It is not only about the volume of bass but also about its quality. Level of bass is one thing and energy of it is the other. This new IC offers exactly as much bass as needed, and it fills it with incredible energy. It is never about gentle “knock knock”, but about lively, powerful, dynamic and thus natural, powerful PUNCH.

An absolutely fantastic phrasing is also an element of this package. It's a feature that is rarely mentioned in the reviews because either a particular product doesn't offer it, or one doing a review doesn't know how to describe it. What is it? It is about smooth transition between individual sounds and groups of sounds in terms of both, timbre and dynamics. These two elements together make the sound unconstrained. To give you a better idea of what I mean let me use an “automotive” comparison – this is more of a heavy limousine with powerful engine rather than a very light Formula 1 car, which is a huge engine with a place to sit for a driver.

This IC offers some inherent features. It brings sound closer to the listener. It is a function of a fast, distinct attack and of high dynamics. This cable is also remarkably resolving which obviously helps too. But it is still not all it has to offer – all that one can find in Siltech Double Crown. And yet 聖HIJIRI presents everything that happens in the front of the stage closer to the listener. It does not bring everything else closer so listener focuses on what's exactly in front of him. Soundstage is particularly deep. And despite that this incredible energy of the sound creates a different image than most other top cables do, it allows more air to the sound, it makes it more lively.

The key, and at the same time, most difficult to present midrange is surely not rolled off, its presentation is not in any way worse than what this cable so remarkably presents at both extremes. Midrange, it volume, is perfectly coherent with the rest of the range. And yet Siltechs present it in a bit different way. The Dutch cables offer even smoother, warmer and slightly darker sound. They have this unique ability to present very long decay that build up both, three-dimensional image of the instrument and of the room that recording was made in. Japanese cables offers that too, but it attracts less attention, because it concentrates rather on the energy of the attack and sustain. This is probably why 聖HIJIRI seems to offer faster, more direct sound.

Summary

To come across a cable that offers the same level of performance that the absolutely best cables one knows do is a fantastic, unique experience. But it is also a great responsibility. Naming every two, three months the new, best of the best product in the world is simply stupid and it tells more about writer/magazine than about product itself. This is why I keep using quite “old” Tara Labs Omega Onyx speaker cables, Harbeth M40.1 loudspeakers, Soulution 710 power amplifier that is not even produced anymore, or even Beyerdynamic DT-990 Pro headphones that I bought maybe 15 years ago. That is why I use Siltech interconnects and Ancient Audio AIR V-edition CD Player (although, to be honest, it is time to replace it). But I am not interested in replacing one (or more) of these components just for the satisfaction of a change itself.

HARMONIX in „High Fidelity”

SOUND

2007D

Recordings used for this test (a selection):

- *Now the Green Blade Riseth*, The Stockholm Cathedral Choir, Proprius/JVC, XRCD 9093, XRCD2 (1981, 1993/2001).
- *Paganini For Two*, Gil Shaham, Göran Söllscher, Deutsche Grammophon/Universal Music Ltd, Taiwan 480 246-5, XRCD24 (1993/2009).
- André Previn, *After Hours*, Telarc/Lasting Impression Music, LIM UHD 051, CD (1989/2011).
- Count Basie, *Count Basie Live at the Sands (before Frank)*, Warner Bros. Records/Mobile Fidelity MOFI UDSACD 2113, “Special Limited Edition No. 0197” SACD/CD (1998/2013).
- Dexter Gordon, *A Swingin’ Affair*, Blue Note/Audio Wave AWMXR-0023, XRCD24 (1964/2013).
- Ed Sheeran, *X*, Warner Music UK/Warner Music Japan WPCR-15730, CD (2014);
- Eva Cassidy, *Songbird*, Blix Street Records/JVC VICJ-010-0045, XRCD24 (1998/2010).
- Hank Mobley, *Soul Station*, Blue Note/Audio Wave AWMXR-0001, XRCD24 (1960/2009);
- Judy Garland, *Over The Rainbow*, Going for a Song GFS236, CD (?).
- Nat ‘King’ Cole, *Penthouse Serenade*, Capitol Jazz/EMI 94504, “Super Bit Mapping” CD (1952/1998).
- Yes, *The Yes Album*, Atlantic/Warner Music Japan WPCR-15903, “7 inch mini LP”, SACD/CD (1971/2014).

Japanese CD editions are available from



But when I come across something so fantastic as **X-DC Studio Master Million Maestro** power cable, I don't have any doubts and even though I can't afford it I don't have a problem with calling it what it is: an unbelievably fantastic product, maybe even the best there is (of its kind). The new Combak Corporation interconnect started a new brand for a reason – compared with what Harmonix offered so far this cable brings a true, relevant change. I think that this new power cable, Million, should be a part of this new brand too. IC might not be as refined in the midrange as Siltech Triple Crown and Double Crown are, and probably not as coherent either. But no other cable that I know can match Siltechs in this area either. 聖HIJIRI represents an absolute top of cables I know and like. It might be a worthy culmination of Mr Kiuchi's work and I am sure that JVC Victor studio that is using these cables now will offer even better XRCD24 than ever before. So maybe, just maybe, it is time for another name for them...

Harmonix cables are well known around the audio world for one, due to the sound quality they offer, and secondly because of their creator, Mr Kiuchi. There is no doubt that XRCD technology is widely accepted as one of the key advancements in CD format quality, and the following XRCD2 and XRCD24 only confirmed the value of this solution. Knowing that the JVC Victor studio in Tokyo uses exclusively Harmonix cables is a great recommendation.