

Mad Scientist YANAM interconnect cables

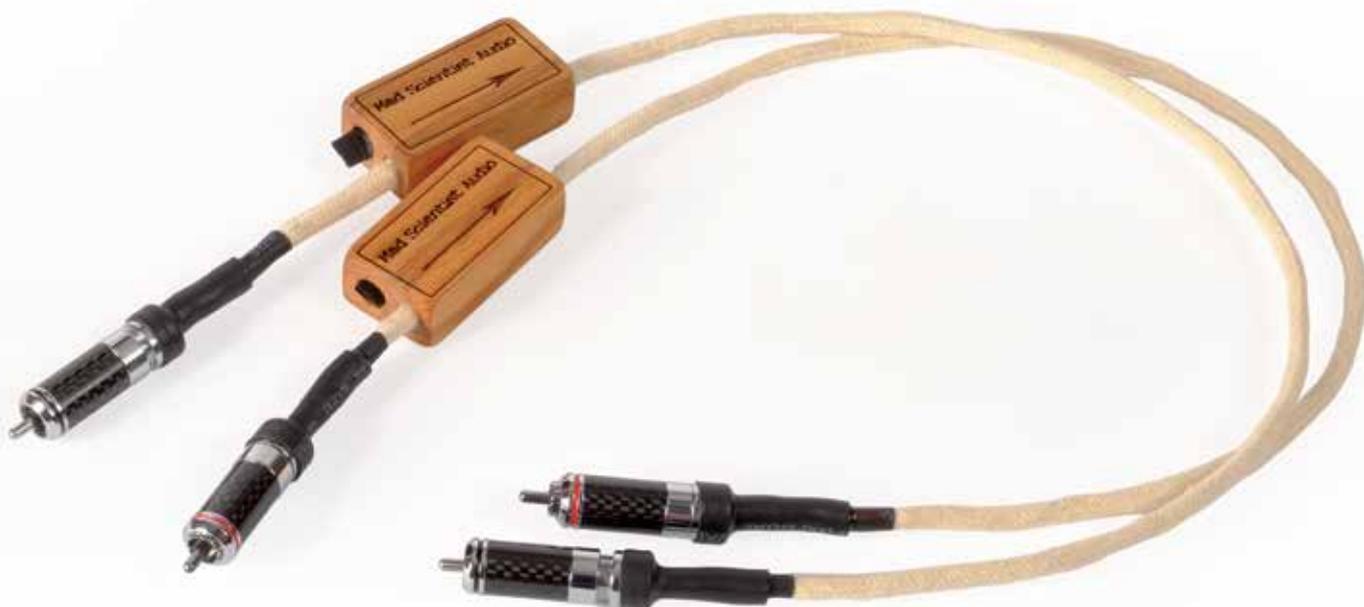
by Jason Kennedy

This isn't the mixologist Mad Professor nor the dub maestro Scientist. Mad Scientist turns out to be Bob Prangnell, a British expat who lives in New Zealand and clearly likes to tweak audio. He makes a small range of cables and tweaks that are sold direct in US dollars to the world at large. All the cables have strange names, but these are not merely random, as they relate to songs by Patricia Barber. So YANAM is an acronym of 'You And The Night And The Music' while the top interconnect TORFORB is short for 'Too Rich For My Blood'. In fairness, it's as good a system as any and more memorable than most: who knows, it might even snag the 'Scientist' some customers in the Barber fan club.

Mad Scientist's interconnects are unusual in that they use carbon fibre rather than

copper or silver for the signal conductors. This is something that Van den Hul started doing in the 1990s and continues with today, but thus far Bob is the only one to have joined the crusade. The main reason why carbon fibre is unpopular is that it has considerably higher resistance and early examples had distinctly rolled off treble, but Bob reckons he has cracked it by using carefully selected carbon fibre for signal conduction and various combinations of wire and foil for the earth or return conductor. Apparently the relatively high resistance of carbon fibre makes it unsuitable for return paths but fine for the signal wire. I noted that the Mad Scientist interconnects are relatively short, with the longest being just 1.5m, but Bob tells me that this is because they get increasingly harder to make the longer they are as he works by hand rather than with a machine.

The reason for choosing carbon fibre given on the Mad Scientist's website is not that radical, as Bob feels it comes down to 'skin effect'. First discovered with microwave cables, skin effect means that higher frequencies travel closest to the outside of metal conductors. Bob states that carbon fibre is effectively immune to skin effects, as high frequencies travel through the entire conductor. This conflicts with the fact that early examples of carbon fibre interconnects had rolled off treble, but the proof is in the listening and in this respect the product delivers easily as much bandwidth as metal conductors. ▶



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- ▶ All the Mad Scientist interconnects have cotton outer jackets, an uncommon material, but one that is popular in Japan. Cotton is used here for the usual reason espoused by the empirical audio enthusiast - it sounds better. Cotton makes for a distinctly handmade looking product but the addition of wooden blocks with directional arrows helps it from looking *too* handmade! These are designed to hold Magic Tubes, which appear to have been designed to bait the sort of people who inhabit audio forums, so I won’t encourage them by going into detail!

YANAM is the middle model in the Mad Scientist range. The cable shares the topology of the top model in the range, but uses less expensive carbon fibre and copper (rather than silver foil) for the earth, alongside copper and silver wire. Because you cannot solder carbon fibre, YANAM has crimped RCA plugs from SonarQuest with rhodium plated metalwork and carbon fibre inserts. They seem quite chunky next to the cable, but do help with perceived value. Prices start at \$499 for a 0.7m pair and come with a 30 day return option.

Cables bring out the cynic in me and those that purport to having any sort of magic doubly so: maybe this approach means I am more impressed by products that actually work, but suffice it to say this cable is actually rather good. In fact, it is among the best I’ve put into the system and assessed. The first system it was tried with was one of the most thrilling I have assembled in recent times and consisted of a Leema Libra DAC, Rega Elex-R DAC and RX3 speakers, also from Rega. This is an ‘air’ musician’s system par excellence, as it is impossible to sit back and listen – you have to leap about and join in, which is a lot of fun. Putting YANAM between source and amplifier relaxed the pace a shade, but improved the tonal richness. The presentation was marginally less percussive, but had better flow and it seemed less mechanical, which is usually a good sign. A cable or any other component should preferably not impose itself on the signal in any way and it seemed that this cable avoided this more successfully than usual.

I reverted to my reference system which is more revealing and effortless overall: here YANAM did a similar thing, it brought out the languid tempo of Herbie Hancock’s version of ‘It Ain’t Necessarily So’ [*Gershwin’s World*, Herbie Hancock, Verve] and delivered very clean high frequencies in the context of a solid, three dimensional image. The tempo is delivered precisely but without a hint of glare, which made me wonder if the treble was being rolled off, but the brilliance of cymbals suggested otherwise. Nor was the bass softened, instead it remained taut and solid, helping to place the band in the room with plenty of space between instruments.

It also makes cymbals and high hat sound more real, as if the actual thing were in the room. In a system that was already wired for maximum transparency and minimum coloration, this interconnect increased resolution

and revealed more subtlety in the phrasing of a sax, and brought out greater extension in the bass. I rediscovered the brilliance of the Hadouk Trio thanks to the gorgeous timbre that YANAM exposed on their *Live à FIP* recording of ‘Vol De Nuit’ [Mélodie]. This sounded hugely evocative and present with this cable, the tympani producing a huge image and the reeds a deep and chocolatey tone.

It seems that this particular ‘scientist’ (actually an engineer) has hit on something with his interconnects, namely that there really are serious alternatives to metal when it comes to audio signal conduction. Bob Prangnell has succeeded where others have failed and offers the fruits of his labours at what, by cable standards, is a very good price. If you want to hear the music more than the hardware, I highly recommend you try a bit of Kiwi madness. +

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: Analogue interconnect with RCA jack terminations

Length: 0.7m pair

Conductor: carbon fibre

Dielectric: not specified

Shielding: copper foil, copper and silver wire

Capacitance: not specified

Resistance: 40 Ohm/metre

Inductance: not specified

Price: \$499

Manufactured by: Mad Scientist Audio Ltd

URL: www.madscientist-audio.com