



Photo: François Desaulniers

BIS Audio VIVAT speaker cables

Disappearing act

JAN-ERIK NORDOEN

It's inevitable in the world of high fidelity that, just when you think you've reached a summit in audio reproduction, along comes a product that reveals a new peak, higher and neatly hidden behind the existing one. Despite this inevitability, satisfaction is possible at all

levels, as long as the music moves us. If you are happy with your speaker cables, you can stop reading. However, if you're looking for more accuracy or are just curious to see what the new summit looks like, allow me to introduce you to the **Vivat** cables.

Progress comes in various forms and in this case, it's through high-performance materials sourced by Bernard Brien, BIS Audio's designer, from a supplier that he prefers to keep secret, and with good reason. The conductors are thicker than those used in BIS' Maestro cables, and consist of 4 mm ultra-pure copper, silver-plated and Teflon covered. BIS is confident that the performance of these new cables surpasses that of the Maestro series. These high performance materials cost more and the Vivat cables retail at a price 40% higher than the Maestro.

Each cable is hand built, with form following function. The paired conductors are held in place at regular intervals by fasteners and the pairs covered in a woven black sheath. For connectors, **Bernard Brien** uses the Eichmann Bayonet plugs, for their proven musical performance. The combination of black sheath and black plugs gives the cables a discreet and purposeful look. The cable is relatively flexible and holds its shape, which makes installation easy, but still requires a minimum of care to avoid kinks when handling.

CABLE DIRECTIONALITY: MYTH OR REALITY?

A month before reviewing the Vivats, I sat in on a listening exercise at BIS Audio aimed at identifying the correct orientation of the Vivat cables. After listening to the same track with the cables in one direction, then reversed, I guessed correctly four times out of five. Heard in the right direction, music seemed slightly louder with a wider soundstage. With the cables back at home, I repeated the exercise in reversing the cables, and with the same findings. In the wrong direction, the soundstage decreased in size, while the location of instruments became more diffuse. The difference was not huge, but enough to make me quickly reconnect the cables in the right direction.

What causes this phenomenon? This is the subject of a separate article, but I leave you with this explanation by the founder of Naim Audio, Julian Vereker (1945 - 2000):

"It doesn't seem to matter how the bundle (of copper) is drawn, single direction or mixed direction, but as soon as the insulation is extruded onto the bundle, the directionality is established."

LISTENING

Installed in system 1, the Vivat cables, despite being new, yielded immediate gains in definition and notably in expansion of the sound stage, almost as if instruments were suspended on a cushion of air. Despite this high level of definition, I initially felt a slight lack of engagement with the music, but Bernard Brien had advised me that this aspect would settle in over time. I left the cables in place while I continued some writing work, but the compilation of electronic music playing in the background kept insinuating its way into my consciousness. So there it was just

after just a few hours of listening, a rendition that was impossible to ignore. Journalistic diligence required me to check if it wasn't just me having become accustomed to the sound, so out came the cables and in went my reference cables, for a listening session that lasted barely a minute. It was really no contest and the conclusion was obvious: my system had taken a significant step towards reality.

The Vivat's fidelity operates on all levels, noticeable initially by increased definition and authenticity of instrumental timbre. Attention is then drawn to the pinpoint imaging and a substantial opening up of the soundstage which gains in width and, to my great surprise, in depth. A good test for this latter aspect is the track "Les lundis" from the album *Dans ce Monde Poutt Poutt* by Edgar Bori. In this track, Bori plays with the phasing of his overdubbed voice to give the effect of someone mocking us (poutt, poutt, poutt, poutt...) as he circles around. The effect is achieved only if the phase relationships are tightly preserved¹. The Vivat cables pass this test with flying colours.

Continuing with Bori, the Vivat cables easily deliver the subtle acoustic cues of the recording venue, as shown by the track "Le Penitencier" from *the Incontournables* album. The acoustic space added to Bori's voice by reverberation is clearly presented. Even though it's an effect added in the recording studio, the impression of being in the «virtual» room in which Bori sang is clearer than ever, adding a whole new dimension to the song.

The extra level of detail provided by the Vivat cables is not at the price of coherence. I never felt that voices or instruments became disembodied, emerging from two or three different places in the soundstage, an effect that some cables produce by a highly detailed but false accentuation of certain parts of the sound spectrum.

The most interesting effect I noted with the Vivat cables is that I quickly forgot that they were in the system. Hyper-transparent, these cables deliver their increased definition in a very natural way, to the point where attention is focussed solely on what's going on in the music, not on the sound nor the cables. This is an effect that I associate more with the subtraction of a component in a high fidelity system, as if the signal path has been shortened. What remains is the feeling of being more directly connected to the musician, to the intent of the music and the subtle nuances that make all the difference between a good and a transcendent performance. I'm not only discovering loads of details and subtleties of interpretation in well-known records, but other levels of feelings and emotions. For example, the Largo in the "Cello Concerto in

¹ When transmitting a signal through a cable, medium and low frequencies arrive very slightly after the high frequencies. The delay is minuscule - we're talking nanoseconds - but according to some cable designers, it leads to an audible confusion in the midrange.

	System 1	System 2
Digital source	Naim UnitiServe hard-disk player, (Teddy Pardo linear power supply) With BIS AC-20 Power Cord	Shared with system 1
Digital cable	Naim DC1	Naim DC1
DAC	Audiolab M-DAC	Naim DAC Power Cord BIS Audio AC 20)
Interconnect cable	BIS Audio Expressions	Naim HiLine
Amplifier	Integrated amps : NVA AP50 Naim Nait 5, Ion Obelisk 2	Naim NAC 82 preamp, Naim HiCap (Power Cord BIS Audio AC 20), Naim NAP 250 power amp.
Speaker cables	Naim NAC A5, Tellurium Q Black	Naim NAC A5
Speakers	Amphion Argon 3	Two-way 8" bass-reflex, using Peerless components
Power accessories	BIS Audio Power Bar Power Cord BIS Audio AC 20	BIS Audio Power Bar Power Cord Naim Power Line)

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"F Major" by Giuseppe Tartini, played by Roel Dieltens and the Ensemble 415 in *Tartini – Concertos* gains remarkably in majesty and splendour: a pure delight.

BIS Audio is parsimonious with technical details, preferring that each cable speaks for itself. Through my listening sessions I came to realize that BIS' statement to the effect that the cables are built in the "simple respect of the fundamental laws of signal transmission" implies a very wide bandwidth and lightning-fast signal propagation speed. In other words, the cables present the least possible obstacle to signal transmission between the amplifier and the speakers. The result is convincing, note attacks are immediate and the spontaneity of micro-and macro-dynamics are concert-like.

NAIM COMPATIBLE?

Ah, the killer question... Naim amplifiers have no additional inductance networks in the output stage, because Naim prefers to use the speaker cable – NAC A5 preferably – to provide the inductance needed to extend the amplifier's output stage all the way to the speaker. Plugged into

the Naim NAP 250 amplifier in system 2, the Vivats showed the same benefits described above, without any loss of rhythm or timing, always a risk when trying other cables with Naim. The amplifier showed no signs of distress and there was no overheating during listening sessions that lasted several hours. The long-term effects remain to be determined, but you'll probably hear from me again on them, because the Vivats are now part of my reference cables.

IN A FEW WORDS

With a timbral authenticity that is evident throughout the sound spectrum, the Vivats are quickly forgotten, leaving the listener in communion with the musicians and the composer's mindset. They excel in their ability to portray subtle cues of the recording venue's acoustics.

The timing precision of these cables is edifying, revealing musical subtleties with ease and without exaggeration. The Vivats represent a significant step towards reality, and very good musical value for money. In fact, achieving this level of performance in competing products can easily cost twice as much. Very highly recommended.

BIS Audio VIVAT speaker cables

8 ft: \$1,190

10 ft: \$1,430

12 ft: \$1,670

15 ft: \$2,030

www.bisaudio.com – (450) 663-6137