



# Chord Epic USB

Tucked away in the ranges of most large cable brands is a selection of USB interconnects, including Chord who topped our USB shootout in 2013. Review & Lab: **Paul Miller**

**W**e last ran a comprehensive USB cable group test over six years ago [HFN Jul '13 and '14] with Chord's entry-level SilverPlus coming top-of-the-heap and remaining in residence ever since as our cable of choice. The intervening period has seen the SilverPlus morph into the current entry-level C-series while the costlier Signature 'Tuned Array' USB cable became the template for Chord's more recent, intermediate Epic USB model. And, at £400 for a terminated 1m set (£160 per additional metre), the new Epic USB is no costlier than its Signature forefather in 2014.

So, the Epic USB employs a similar set of four PTFE-insulated, silver-plated copper conductors for the +5V line and ground plus the differential data pair, which are also separately shielded. This geometry deviates slightly from the USB standard (you'll notice that few 'audio USB' cables carry the official USB trident motif), but limited overshoot on the waveshape and a fast 9.6nsec risetime [see black waveform, Graph below] suggest its characteristic impedance is not too far under the 90ohm standard, at least at these data rates and frequency. Note that a 5m length of Epic USB has a slightly reduced bandwidth but exactly the same edge risetime [red trace]. A 2m length may well prove optimum.

Finally, a high-density double braid provides improved RF/EMI rejection, while the woven silver-grey jacket brings added



robustness. However, the Epic USB is not especially flexible so care must be taken not to stress delicate USB sockets when locating and inserting Chord's custom silver-plated A- and B-type plugs.

## **AN EPIC SOUND?**

Pressed home – carefully – between a Melco N1ZS20/2 music library [HFN Jun '17] and dCS Vivaldi One player/DAC [HFN Feb '18] the influence of Chord's Epic USB was subtle but nonetheless engaging – the intimate setting of Vov Dylan and Glenn Amer's self-explanatory *The Music Of Cole Porter Without Words* [Elkwood Sony ELK00004; DSD128] sounding especially close without sucking the air from the room. The rosin-rich tone of the violin was perfectly pitched against the gentle percussion of Amer's piano, the duet, in all likelihood, sweeping you along while you sing 'I Get A Kick Out Of You' and 'I've Got You Under My Skin' in the hope and anticipation that no-one's listening...

Compared directly with my long-term sample of Chord's SilverPlus, the Epic USB delivered a slightly darker and, on brief audition, fractionally less vibrant sound. Listen longer, however, and it's clear that the Epic USB is marginally more refined, possessed of great control and delivering energy and passion when required as slickly

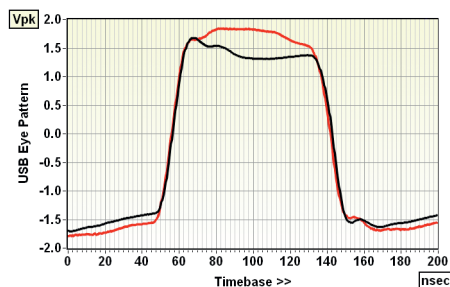
**ABOVE:** Terminated in bespoke silver-plated A- and B-type plugs, the Epic USB is inspired by Chord's first-generation Signature cable

as it will reveal subtle details. Never more so than in the prelude to 'Ride Of The Valkyries' from Wagner's *The Symphonic Ring* [Duisburger Phil/Jonathan Darlington; Acousence ACO21309, 192kHz/24-bit] as the stormy strings swell to meet the thunderous energy of the horns and flashes of percussion that sparkle in a broad and deep soundstage. Much of this resolution will depend on the scope and scale of your system, but if your kit has the capacity then Chord's Epic USB will surely open the door. ⚡

## **HI-FI NEWS VERDICT**

Just like Chord's original Signature 'Tuned Array' cable, the current Epic USB promotes a sound that's smooth, richly detailed and very expressive. On first exposure it might appear to lack some 'bite', but in practice there's no lack of colour or contrast to its richly hued performance. Yet this tickled-up Epic still faces stiff competition from, er, the more flexible C-USB, née SilverPlus, available at just £50/1m. Thinking of 5m runs? Compare before plugging.

Sound Quality: 85%



**ABOVE:** USB data pattern measured via a 90ohm host USB sink and comparing 1m (black) with 5m (red) of Chord Epic USB cable