

Chord Company

Signature Super ARAY, Tuned ARAY, SignatureXL and SignatureX cables

Alan Sircom

Signature is the real-world top-of-the-range for most prospective Chord Company owners. While both Sarum T and ChordMusic stand above Signature in price and performance terms, a significant number of Chord Company users fall into that mid-to-high end bracket typified by Naim Audio's Classic Series or Linn's Akurate line. People who might conceivably spend around £1,000 on a really good 1m interconnect but find £2,100 (or £4,000) a step too far on a cable no matter how good it sounds.

Chord Company's Signature also covers a very broad church, with everything from analogue, digital and networked audio interconnects, loudspeaker cables and even power cords. The brand has been building and refining Signature for the longest time, too; the first cable to carry the name was launched back in 1998. From the outset, Signature was the cable that took shielding seriously, investigating the (at the time) largely ignored problems generated by high-frequency interference. Now that we exist in a soup of such interference thanks to Wi-Fi, the research that gave us Signature was not only prescient, but also quickly filtered (pun intended) through the Chord Company's products ever since.



There's therefore something of a sense of completeness in looking at Chord Company's long-running Signature range of cables. But with that completeness comes a lot of acronyms and neologisms for technologies and configurations relating to different products in the range. The terminology needs a spot of decoding.

The most significant of these neologisms is 'ARAY', which is a form of mechanical tuning at one end of the interconnect, originally developed for digital cables in order to maintain a consistent impedance. The design began with S/PDIF because the need to keep a 75-ohm cable at 75-ohm is paramount, but quickly spread to analogue, digital and network cables alike.

An ARAY of cables

The original Tuned ARAY is reserved for interconnects, but even greater – Super ARAY – precision is used in Signature digital because listening tests found the added precision is of greater benefit in digital at this level. ARAYs are also used on the SignatureX power (and above) cables, plus ChordMusic speaker cable. Elsewhere, the company's recently incorporated XLPE (Cross-linked Polyethylene) insulation brings similar improvements, according to Chord Company. All feature silver-plated copper conductors, with the power cord and speaker cable using a braided/twisted pair layout. >>



Chord Company's SignatureX, XL, Super and Tuned ARAY cables come in just about every connection you could think of, but they all perform the same way.

» It's relatively easy to pour on the superlatives when it comes to products like ChordMusic with its innovative Taylon insulation and a price and performance that both cause a sharp intake of breath. Part of the reason that hyperbole is easy to get is these cables are used in cost-no-object settings. Signature has a tougher job; it must sound good and open the sound of a system, but not so wide that it undermines the performance of the sort of components with which it's likely to be used. You want the ear-opening experience, but not so ear-opening as to highlight the limitations of the system. It's a task many cable brands get wrong, usually either by making a 'MiniMe' of their top cables or applying a touch of 'The Peter Principle' to lower end cables and pimping them too far.

The Middle Ground

Signature, by way of contrast, gets all these things right; it's a cable designed specifically for really good audio systems in this middle ground, and it does this beautifully. That's not to say it fails to hit the spot when used with some exotic or humble audio equipment, but when used in the right context it shines like few others. Considering this, a combination of Primare electronics (a fully Prisma'd up I35 and the excellent R35) into a pair of KEF LS50 Meta on their own stands were nigh on perfect partners.

Signature has the right blend of raucous fun and civility no matter what music you put its way. Bass lines are taut and deep and extremely musically infectious; the midrange is open-sounding and articulate with just the right degree of forwardness to the presentation needed to give such

systems a bit of emphasis and a lift. Then the treble was at once clean, extended and almost impassioned sounding. It was one of those cables that clearly defined the two very similar voices of Maddy Prior and June Tabor [Burning of Auchindoon, *Silly Sisters*, Chrysalis] singing in harmony. This album from 1976 also highlighted the rhythmic and soundstage solidity that Signature brings to a system. It's a very organic sound; measured, yet not so precise it deadens the music.

While there's the merest hint of softening at the edges, the effect is curiously not cumulative and works well in the context of the sort of electronics used here. But perhaps most of all, the smooth and satisfying performance is extremely true-to-life, making a sound that is more than detailed and informative enough for systems in this price point.



One of the two big things that come from Signature is consistency. I initially thought about breaking this review down into the individual performance characteristics of each cable, but quickly realised this would be a simple repetition of the same review for each cable. They all do the same uplifting, fun yet solid sound and do it well. That consistency works well in a complete cable system, and it points you toward a complete Chord Company Signature system if you try one of the cables. And that leads to the second big thing; its sense of balance. This is a perfectly poised cable, regardless of which of the Signature models we are discussing. If it has a sonic intent, it's one of musical enjoyment rather than stark detailing. But it's so well balanced in terms of price, performance, partners and probably some other things that don't begin with the letter 'P'.

Chord Company's SignatureX, XL, Super and Tuned ARAY cables come in just about every connection you could think of, but they all perform the same way. They are all about making music enjoyable and satisfying and are some of the best all-round bang for your buck you can get in cables today! +

Price and Contact Details

Signature Super ARAY streaming cable £1,000/1m

Signature Super ARAY digital cable £1,000/1m

Signature Tuned ARAY RCA interconnect cables £1,000/1m pair

SignatureXL speaker cable £700/1m terminated pair

SignatureX power cord £1,000/1m

Manufacturer Chord Company

🌐 chord.co.uk 📞 +44(0)1980 625700