

Chord Epic X Aray hits the mark

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Chord Company Epic X Aray interconnect cable

The Chord Company is arguably become the best-known manufacturer of cables for high-quality audio systems in the UK and Epic X Aray, their latest interconnect cable, sits slap bang in the middle of their range. I have been impressed by their range of Aray noise-reducing products in recent times, especially the Power Aray plug and Powerhaus M6 distribution block. For the uninitiated Aray refers to a range of tuning technologies based on the mechanical grounding of signal-carrying cables. In plainer English, it is said to improve the sound of our systems by eliminating noise before it disrupts the music.

Aray technology is now incorporated into select products within Chord Company's portfolio with the Epic X Aray interconnect given the benefit of heavier gauge silver-plated conductors with updated geometry. It has more shielding than the company's popular Shawline cable, which sits one rung lower in the range. The Epic X Aray has upgraded insulation known as XLPE (cross-linked polythene), which can now be found in much of Chord Company's range of cables. The connectors, contact areas and pins incorporate Chord Company's Choralloy multi-metal plating system, which offers lower intermodulation, full solderability and a tarnish-free finish.

The Epic X Aray interconnect cable, priced at £760 in the 1m balanced XLR form reviewed here, is the updated version of the Epic Aray, which was priced at £700. A 1m RCA pair of Epic X Aray cables is also available and priced at £520. The interconnect can also be supplied with DIN connectors, which should keep Naim owners smiling. Half-metre lengths are available as standard, with custom lengths and terminations available upon request. The Epic X Aray is built by hand and has a lifetime warranty against defective materials and build.

On a personal note, although I have had many positive experiences with Chord Company's mains products, purely down to circumstances, this was the first time I had tried their signal cables at home for many years. It must be twenty-odd years since I enjoyed having the company's Chorus interconnects and Odyssey speaker cables in a previous system. The Epic X Aray arrived in an attractive box, with the cables contained in a bag labelled as 100% cotton which is apparently a fully sustainable, totally recyclable material. So a great first impression. The cables themselves appear well put together, and the XLR plugs do indeed seem to resist tarnish, despite my frequent cable swapping during a recent heatwave. The cable itself is covered with a material which at least resembles cotton – apologies to The Chord Co if it is something more exotic. The cable is slightly stiffer than the other balanced interconnect that I had on hand for comparison but far from rigid and will happily bend without resistance.

Epic X Aray Performance

I used the Epic X Aray cable between my Moon 780D DAC and Moon 600i integrated amplifier. I suspect it had been burned in as the tonal balance seemed to settle within a few days. Whilst I could not pair this interconnect with a speaker cable from Chord Co, the system was powered via the brand's Powerhaus M6 and Epic mains cables. My early impressions were of an increase in apparent musical detail, retaining the wide soundstage of my reference cables but



perhaps not quite the same degree of depth. The instrumental placement within the soundstage was precise, and I became more aware of the studio reverb and the leading edges of notes. The bass was present and correct, with even complex bass lines being easy to follow, but it was perhaps presented a little further back in the mix than I'm used to. After a few days in my system, I felt the soundstage opened up a little more, especially in terms of depth. I did have to swap the speaker cable to something with a fuller balance to get a good balance, but mixing and matching are nothing new in high-end audio.

A recent 24/96 Qobuz download of the latest album from Queens Of The Stoneage *In Times New Roman*... benefited greatly from the Epic X Aray's slightly spotlight presentation, allowing my system to produce an exceptionally clean and layered presentation of the album, the production of which I have read online criticism of as being somewhat compressed. Clearly, the Epic X Aray has the resolution to reveal the subtleties of the band's latest self-produced effort. A Qobuz stream of Leftfield's *This Is What We Do Version Excursion* (16/44) let me revel in the additional detail and insight that the Epic X Aray brought to my system. This album contains some serious bass, which the cable revealed, but kept under control. It is fair to say that with certain tracks, one appreciates the detail and dexterity of bass rather than fullness. Still, the Leftfield album proved the cable can plough the lows when required.



I have been enjoying another recently released album from a collective known as the Speakers Corner Quartet, who for the last 17 years have been the house band at South London club Brixton Jamm's open mic night Speakers Corner. The album features guest vocalists and poets, backed by the band's jazz and hip-hop fusion blend. The Qobuz 24/44.1 stream, while suffering a little from the usual dynamic compression found in much of this genre, has plenty of frequency extremes and kicks when needed. The Epic X Aray helped deliver a lively rendition of the music, with plenty of clean top-end detail, and remained free of any unpleasant harsh artefacts, despite the quantity of high-frequency information on the album.

Overall, the sonic balance of the cable is slightly more brightly lit than others in my collection, but not unpleasantly so. It majors on spaciousness and soundstage accuracy rather than bass energy, although the way it reveals powerful bass notes when required is impressive. These interconnects allowed dynamics to flow in an unhindered manner and their timing abilities are exemplary. An example of such qualities was demonstrated during an extremely enjoyable rendition of Led Zeppelin's *How The West Was Won* (24/96 FLAC), which revealed the exquisite playing of the rhythm section rather better than usual.

Conclusion

All signs point towards the Epic X Aray interconnect being another hit for Chord Company. Whilst it may not be the natural choice for those with systems that err towards a bright balance, it could prove just the tonic for those needing a little more lift and incisiveness. It delivered a very clean and musical performance in my system, with no nasty surprises. Backed by Chord Company's unrivalled warranty and reputation, there is much to love in this tasty cable.