

## Epic Digital Tuned Aray lives up to its name

Tuesday, July 16, 2024  
Chris Baillie



### Chord Company Epic Digital Tuned Aray cable

The Chord Company has been revising its Epic range of cables these last few months. Keen readers may remember my review of the Epic X interconnects last year. I still owe them a big thank-you for coming to the rescue and supplying me with an Epic AES/EBU earlier this year to help with my review of the Denafrips Iris 12th DDC; this connection helped me to unlock the performance that Jason suggested the Iris 12th was capable of. Priced at £560, the Epic Digital Tuned Aray cable benefits from the company's exclusive Tuned Aray mechanical tuning technology.

This cable includes Chord's VEE3 plugs, which are finished with what they describe as a Choralloy multi-metal plating system. These plugs are said to provide sonic benefits over silver plating, offering lower intermodulation, while the conductor is made from silver-plated oxygen-free copper. Digital signals are susceptible to high-frequency noise; to combat this, the cable is shielded with a high-density, silver-plated braid and foil screen. The Epic Digital Tuned Aray, (which from now on I will refer to it as) proved flexible enough to slot behind my equipment rack with ease.

You can order your Epic Digital Tuned Aray with RCA, BNC or AES/EBU terminations. If your equipment has in- and outputs for both balanced and single-ended, Chord suggest trying both, as results can vary from system to system. I requested a sample with RCAs at each end as I had not reviewed such a configuration before and wanted to see if it could improve upon my ageing custom-made digital interconnect, which has been serving my Oppo 103D universal disc player and various DACs I have used over the last decade. An internet search revealed that my custom cable is still available from its maker and is now priced at £120.

### An Epic performer

Since Chord mentions that this new cable is also suitable for AV applications, I feel that I can freely say that I mainly use the Oppo 103D for watching movies. Yet this ageing machine still makes for a half-decent CD transport, which can be helpful when I want to listen to a CD without the hassle of ripping it to my Melco server. Although the 103D's internal DAC is pretty decent for what is a ten-year-old, affordable universal disc player, it is no match for the external DACs I have at my disposal. For copyright reasons, when playing a higher-resolution disc from the digital output of a universal player like the Oppo, the maximum resolution is 48kHz, so even if you play a 24/96 Blu-ray disc, it gets downsampled to 24/48. Doing the same with an SACD hybrid disc will mean you only hear the CD layer. The exception here is if you are using the HDMI connection between your player and a multichannel receiver or processor. So, for this part of the review, I just listened to CDs. I have always found ripping a CD to my Melco



produces better results than playing it via the Melco into the same DAC as the Oppo, but I was interested to see if using a better digital interconnect narrowed the gap between the two methods of playback.

I had a few CDs to hand that I had recently ripped, the first being *Scarlet's Walk* by Tori Amos. Listening via the Epic Digital Tuned Array cable produced a surprising uplift in performance over the cable it replaced. Immediately there was more sparkle and air to the sound, with increased levels of detail. Improving the high-frequencies benefits both perceived timing cues and bass definition, and this was the case here, which made the music more enjoyable and engaging. There was still a gap between the Oppo playing the CD and the ripped version on my Melco, but this gap was small enough that I won't feel short-changed next time I need to listen to a physical disc, or at least not whilst this tasty cable is still with me. Supergrass's *Life On Other Planets* via the Chord cable was similarly successful. This recording is a little on the 'earthy' side, but thankfully, that additional high-frequency information was not accompanied by any extra harshness. Which suggests that the Epic Digital Tuned Array's shielding against high-frequency noise appears to have been worth the effort.

The Epic Digital Tuned Array significantly enhanced the experience of movie soundtracks and dialogue. Its retrieval of fine detail made it easier to discern speech during busy scenes, a feat my resident cable struggles with, often producing rather woolly sound. The additional top-end air and crispness added a sense of drama to the soundtrack of the *Kill Bill* Blu-ray disc, to the point where I couldn't resist watching the sequel immediately afterwards, even if it meant sacrificing some sleep. With the Epic Digital Tuned Array in the chain, Nancy Sinatra's *Bang Bang*, which opens *Kill Bill Pt. 1*, was reproduced in all its cinematic glory.



Next up was a concert DVD, *Rush In Rio*. I was fortunate enough to see the band live some nine years after this performance, although in the rather less exotic location of Birmingham's Utilita Arena (formerly NIA). It was a great gig, but I have not er, rushed back to Birmingham since. Unfortunately, the soundtrack is highly compressed, but the Epic Digital Tuned Aray made the best of it and helped to make this DVD an entertaining watch. Switching between my older cable and the Epic Digital Tuned Aray demonstrated the superiority of the Chord, which sounded more extended at both ends of the frequency range, more detailed, airy and with cleaner and less aggressive leading edges. The cowbells at the start of YYY rang cleaner and were better resolved, with a more natural decay. The synths had more texture, and the cymbals sounded more natural and airy. This cable's laser-like precision also highlighted the changes in volume level as the compression kicked in and out; this could, at times, prove somewhat disconcerting, but I was hearing what the mastering engineer felt was appropriate.

### Conclusions

My experience with this Chord Company cable shows that not all coaxial digital cables are created equal, and there are genuine benefits to spending a bit more on one. The Epic Digital Tuned Aray cable continues its creator's work at reducing digital noise via clever cable construction and choice of materials. We are not told what Aray technology involves, but each product I have tested featuring the moniker suggests the Chord Company are doing something right. Here, they have created a digital cable that increases high-frequency air and detail without the unpleasantness that often accompanies it. Its maker says that this cable is suitable for use between any mid-range DAC, CD Transport or streamer, which perhaps undersells it; I feel that it will find favour in all kinds of systems, up to a reasonably high price point. If your digital replay system is lacking excitement, this cable could prove to be an Epic remedy.