

4: ACTINOTE LBD 530



Try as we might, we just couldn't disguise this cable. The photo doesn't quite do justice to its size, and it looks so much like our reference cable, the Actinote LB, that it wasn't difficult to guess that it had to come from the same family.

It is, in fact, the successor to our LB, though Reine and Albert were told that only after the session had ended. Actinote didn't provide much information about the construction ("just listen to it" seems to be all we're likely to be told), either this time or last time. This isn't the sort of company that publishes white papers. Our LB had clunky terminal boxes near each end. What was in them? Other companies using such boxes, including MIT and Transparent, fill them with what is billed as network termination. The boxes are now gone, and Actinote says their contents have been integrated in the cable itself.

The other change is in the connectors. Our LB cables came with WBT's elegant angled locking bananas. The new model comes with what is referred to as a lab standard banana, which has about the profile of the wire itself. That choice is in line with the current trend, which is to avoid a large chunk of metal at the end of the wire. The connectors don't fit as tightly, however, and they felt

a little loose in both our speaker binding posts and in the WBT binding posts of our Moon amplifier. Because the wire is so stiff, one banana will pop out when you try to insert the second. The solution is to guide them both in together. The wire is a bit fragile, too, and sharp bends are best avoided.

The cable we reviewed has a list price, for the supplied 5 metre length, of C\$1990 or US\$1800. A 3 m length, the LBD 317, would cost C\$1590.

We listened to *Now the Green Blade Riseth*, and one fact struck us right away: this Actinote cable really *does* sound like our reference, and this time we didn't need to turn up the volume in order to hear everything.

Well, perhaps we should correct that. We *did* note that, unless we ticked up the volume control by 3 dB, the music really was softer. We had settled for a lower volume originally because the great clarity of our reference cable had allowed us to hear so much detail. After a first listen with the LBD, we listened again at the higher volume, and we liked what we heard even more.

Where to begin? With this cable everything was in its place. Depth was excellent, as it should be with this wonderfully-recorded SACD, and the image was of remarkable precision. The bottom end was ample but clear at the same time,

and both the male and female voices were reproduced with a natural timbre that was at times startling. That is of course due to the quality of our Alpha system, including the acoustics of the room, but the cables let everything flow through.

Our notes were peppered with rather flowery adjectives, such as "superb" and "magnificent." We actually went back to listen a *third* time, and noted the delightful counterpoint between the solo flute and the singers. "You don't have to make an effort to maintain the illusion," said Albert. "The music just flows."

We moved on to the Margie Gibson recording, and we weren't surprised by the particularly attractive way it was reproduced. "I was really taken by the piano arpeggios," said Reine, "though the piano sounded great through the whole piece." The difficult "S" sounds were about as perfect as we have heard.

Of course in a song like this it's the voice that really counts, and Gibson's voice was warm and expressive. "I liked the cello too," said Albert. "It sounds more convincing when it plays along with her, matching the tone of her voice. Fine as each of the sonic elements were, what pleased us most was the way everything came together. Gibson seemed alive and full-sized.

But was this updated cable actually superior to our older Actinote cable?

We returned to our reference to compare. The similarities seemed more evident than the differences, as often happens. Both cables let though a clear, deep, lifelike sound that pleased us immensely. There *was* a small difference, but we weren't able to agree which of the two cables was superior.

This Actinote cable is expensive, more expensive than can be justified in most systems. If you read this review to the end, however, you'll discover that it is not the most expensive cable in this review of six cables. It is merely the best.