

Review: **Epiphany Acoustics 'Atratus III' interconnect cable**

By Mark Holterman

Introduction:

It's over two years (doesn't time fly) since I wrote about the newly introduced Epiphany Acoustics Atratus interconnect. My findings were that the Atratus was an audio bargain and compared very favourably to cables costing significantly more; as such it took up residence in my system connecting my phono stage to my pre-amp and has remained there ever since. However, the Atratus is no longer the only cable and there have now been two more added to the Epiphany Acoustics interconnect range; the Atratus II and Atratus III. Impressed as I was with the original I was keen to hear what these new offerings had to offer and when I heard that they were in development I requested samples. As such I was sent a number of preproduction samples to audition, some with different connector choices and some with alternate wiring configurations. The rest of this review relates to the Atratus III and a separate review will cover the II.



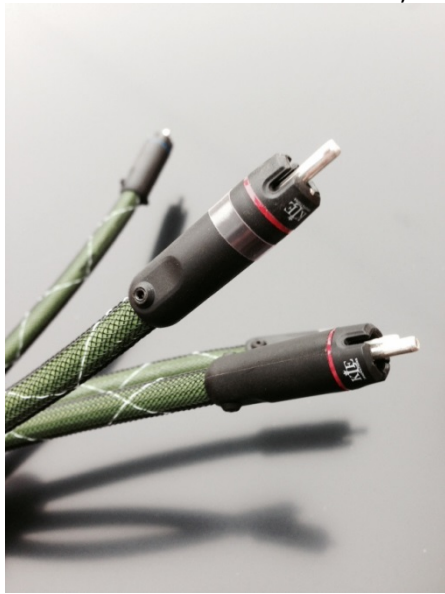
So what do you get?

Well, superficially at least, the Atratus III isn't wildly different to its predecessor. It's the same diameter, a reasonably chunky 9mm, but instead of the retro 'braided kettle lead' look of the old it is now green and covered in a black open weave sheath with a white thread running through it. The overall look is smart and restrained in my view but then it's not something you are going to see very much once it's plugged into the back of your hi-fi. Despite its diameter it is a reasonably flexible cable, but it wouldn't be my first choice if space is at a premium. The RCA plugs used are the excellent KLEI Harmony plugs* and not just the copper variant, these are the more costly silver! Plugs and cable are neatly joined together with high silver content solder and Epiphany Acoustics branded heat-shrink provides additional cable strain relief where cable and plug meet.

As to the construction of the actual cable, Epiphany Acoustics say this:

"Specified for a low resistance, the design incorporates a dual shield construction – utilising both a copper braid and foil – to protect the internal heavy gauge OCC copper signal conductor from extraneous noise pick up and interference."

The samples I tried were from early pre-production they didn't yet have the normal heat-shrink fitted. As a result, I was able to unscrew the barrel of the RCA plugs and have a look at what exactly the cable construction consists of



. Inside there are two twisted conductors and each of these is made out of a number of individually insulated solid copper wires (the insulation is apparently Teflon). These two bundles are soldered to the signal pin. Around that there is a foil braid and then a dense copper braid that forms the return – in all, there is a lot of good quality copper involved!

So what does it sound like?

Well the inevitable comparison is against the original Atratus. I still rate the original very highly, it's dynamic and bold and conveys the musical joie de vivre. To this the III brings an extra level of sophistication and transparency, a remarkable 'hear into' the musical event quality and strength of image focus. In comparison the soundstage of the MkI

sounds rather flat and upfront, less layered; there's a subtlety to the rendering of the III that eludes its predecessor. I've also had the chance to compare the Atratus III to a number of other well regarded cables, both of similar price and significantly above and the III is simply the best I have heard. The Atratus has the ability of making some sound rather dull and lacklustre whilst others are almost brash and monochromatic. In short, the Atratus III has supplanted the MkI in my system and I've now been happily using it for a couple of months. So, how does the III compare to the II I hear you ask? Well, the II is more like the original Atratus in that it is a bit less transparent, polished and refined but carries the rhythm and tempo well. One of the things I was able to try was the III fitted with both the copper and the silver KLEI plugs. The silver option bringing a greater sense of focus and layering to the soundstage and more nuanced shading in the upper mid and lower treble – a relatively subtle improvement but, I think, worthwhile in this context.

Conclusion:

The Atratus III retails for just under £100 for a stereo metre (£89.99 for 0.5 metre and (£119.99 for two metres). At this price I consider it to be the nearest thing to an interconnect bargain one is likely to find, particularly as it includes the finest RCA plugs I know of (on their own these cost two thirds the cost of the entire cable) and is the best cable I have used (though far from being the most expensive). Epiphany Acoustics only sell direct from their website (<http://epiphany-acoustics.co.uk>), not through retailers, and there is obviously a huge saving in doing so. Obviously ordering something like this mail order means that you are unlikely to be able to audition it first but to give you peace of mind Epiphany Acoustics offer a "14 day no-quibble return policy to allow you to evaluate their performance in your own system". I've been very impressed with this cable and thoroughly recommend it, even if you are using something that is more expensive and, superficially, more exotic I think you will be pleasantly surprised.

* The KLEI Harmony plugs used on this cable deserve special mention I think. I've tried many different RCA plugs and have concluded that they make a significant contribution toward a cables performance. The KLEI Harmony plugs are a further development of the Eichmann Bullet plug (designed by the same man, Keith Louis Eichmann) and are my

clear favourites, even over some costing very much more! They come in three variants, Copper, Silver and Pure. The ones fitted to the Atratus III are the Silver and use a solid silver ground pin and double silver plated pure copper signal pin. The KLEI plugs have terrific detail, focus and transparency with a very coherent sound and great subtlety of texture. In my opinion these are, quite simply, the best RCA connectors on the market.

Declared interests:

As mentioned earlier, I had the opportunity to audition a number of preproduction versions of this cable. However, I was not paid to do so and I don't have any connection, financial or otherwise, with Epiphany Acoustics.