Opinion 1

It is a strange coincidence, but at the hardware level, the division between the world of Hi-Fi / High-End and Pro-audio is very fluid and contractual, and the brands from both sides of the virtual barricade tend to make quite successful excursions on the other side, to the presumably unknown and hostile territories. Looking at our playground we can name for example the Bryston, B&W, Dynaudio, Focal, Manley, PMC, Tannoy or Yamaha, companies which products we can often see in studios, mastering rooms, and generally everywhere, where people tend to see them as tools, and their presence during creation of things, we then use to feed our ears, during audiophile listening sessions, should be amended by their long and failure-free operation. So those things, we tend to treat as things to take absolute care of, is used there as a drudge. Talking about the other side, then we should at least mention two "A"s and one "M" – Apogee, Antelope Audio and Marshall. There is however an area, which from the very beginning is a no-no at the pro-audio side. What am I talking about? Cables of course, because where we, mannered civilians, can listen for hours to their influence, the "sound-men" tend to divide them into two kinds – ones that work, and ones which don’t. So the good cables conduct current and the sound is there, while the bad ones do not and there is no sound. Clear? Clean as the sun. However there are some attempts known to man, to try and educate others, and this is the case we will be meeting today. Some time ago new products were introduced … power cables, from the Japanese Furutech, a company that does not need to prove anything to anybody on the audiophile market, which are dedicated to the professional market, as confirmed by the new product line, specially created for that purpose, called Studio Power Series. For today two models are in that line – the opening Astoria E and one notch higher the Empire E. Interestingly enough, the prices were calculated on a level, which is unseen on the audiophile market, and especially for Furutech. So if this leader woke your interest, then there remains nothing else than to invite you to read the rest.
Like I mentioned before, the position of Furutech on the consumer market seems unthreatened, and its audiophile customers do not need to be educated, as when someone is reaching for the products of the Japanese manufacturer, then at least most of them, know exactly what they are looking for, and what he or she can expect from the cables coming from the Land of the cherry blossom. But in case of the targeted buyer for the Astoria E and Empire E, the Asian proposal might seem bizarre and preposterous. This is the reason, why both cables have a role of verifying the approach of the pro “branch” as well as testing their reaction. Because what are they doing with those cables? They are telling – please look at them. Those were made by us, and this is not all we can do. And we open the eyes of disbelievers. Yes, the main role of those cables is to show to those, who claim, that cables, especially of the power kind, do not influence sound, that things are different, and even the things that are outside of the sound path have an influence, and not a marginal one, of the final sound effect.

Fortunately the team from Tokyo decided to keep some modesty, and at least for now, does not try to make anyone from the other side of the barricade happy with a baroque ornamentation of the braids or jewelry of the NCF, but both cables have a pure black braid and 11-type basic plugs, the copper version in the Astoria and the gold one in the Empire. But before we talk about the differences, let us concentrate on the similarities. In both cables the conductors were made from OFC copper in the new technology α (Alpha) Triple C, which consists on multiple forging at the same angle, which allows for a consistent direction of the copper crystals, and using a process designed by Furukawa during casting, contamination was eliminated at the micron level.

Also similar is maybe not the construction, but rather the cross-section, or being more precise, the layers – as going from the outside from the braid, we get an ultra-flexible layer of PVC, a shield made from braided copper wires, another layer of PVC, this time enriched with carbon particles and finally individual sheaths of PVC for each of the conductors. When talking about differences, then each of the three conductors inside the Astoria is made from 80 wires with a diameter of 0.18mm each, while the Empire carries 45 wires of 0.32mm diameter in each conductor. Of course the whole is de-magnetized and cryogenically treated. Please note, that I am writing this for our readers, and not for the “pro” people, for whom, at least till now, this is only a fairytale.

So let us move to the next part, I mean to the functionality, as I cannot deny, that both Furutechs work, and the devices connected by them, as long as they are not damaged themselves, and in the socket we have more or less the declared 230V, will be powered on. So this means success, and for the pro market, that could be the end of the test. The problem is, that for us, such a result is highly unsatisfying, as the same result is provided when connecting a computer power cable. And the tested pair should have been better than those, and … to the frightening of the disbelievers and all those, who claim, a cable is only a cable, I must say, it is better, and that in all aspects. The cables supplied with the equipment as standard (and this is not true for all gear – there are manufacturers, who do not supply anything, making a buyer immediately become interested in the theme), allow for initial power-up of the devices and finding out, if they are not broken in transport. Using a transport analogy – when you buy a new car in a showroom, we get only enough fuel to reach the nearest fuel station. We must fill the car up, if we want to get home. Similar with a new audio gear. We come home, we unpack the new toy, and if the transportation parameters are far from the room temperature, we need to wait for the gear to reach it slowly, we connect everything to our system, power it up, we check if everything works as desired and … we power down, disconnect the cables that came with the gear, put them in the box, and the latter goes to a basement for storage.
Then we reach for something, what could unleash the full potential of the new purchase. Here … is the moment, when the tested Furutech should come into play, as they do release this potential. The first thing we hear is a drastic widening of the reproduced frequency range, precision in creation of the virtual sources, which were only signaled to date and the removal of any annoying granulation – a kind of rash, which takes away all pleasure from listening to music.

And now for the best part, meaning comparing theory / manufacturers claims against reality. On the Furutech web page, we can read, that the Astoria is characterized with great timing and speed, combined with deep and powerful bass, while the Empire provides a very balanced sound with incredible resolution, allowing to hear every nuance and detail. Fortunately I read those characteristics after the test, as when I would have them before my eyes while testing, or God forbid, before, I would have a big issue, as while I cannot deny the Astoria timing and speed, her bass, after connecting to the CD and the amplifier, I would rather describe as very dense, differentiated and crisp. Also on the field of depth and might the Astoria was beaten by the Empire. Yet the mentioned Empire really put emphasis on balance, but also swing, releasing the energetic potential hidden in the electronics. With this cable in the system, not only dynamic recording were great, but also complicated, multiphase ones, like for example „Otta“ Sólstafrí. I will warn you, this is not the easiest repertoire, or subtle for untrained ears, yet the Empire was able to reproduce not only the attack, mass and kick, but the progressive character, oscillating between the alt-rock and some vocal compositions, coming from the black-metal history of the band. On the other hand Astoria liked better the somewhat more balanced, in emotional terms, aesthetic areas, with special attention paid to natural instruments, and generally climates, where insight into the recording is an unquestionable source of pleasure. A great, and at the same time requiring concentration, “TARTINI secondo natura” of the trio Sigurd Imsen, Tormod Dalen and Hans Knut Sveen, showed clearly an amount of microdetails, delicate reverberations and nuances, which we cannot hear at all when using computer cables, and while those are not heard, they could also be omitted during the recording and mastering process, what would make the source material much poorer. And we would not like that, don’t we?

As I mentioned in the introduction, Furutech is opening eyes and ears of the disbelievers with the Astoria E and Empire E, showing clearly, what can still be extracted from the sound. And this is not only a cure, opening ears of the all-knowing and buried in concrete “pro” branch, but also to all cable sceptics. And in addition this cure is very reasonably priced, so almost painless. So if you did not have an occasion to check, what your system is capable of, from pure human curiosity, please take one of the cables from the Studio Power Series, and if you like what you hear, then … I would just faintly suggest, that this is just the beginning to a very broad offering of Furutech, and at the same time the first step to a very exciting journey to audiophile nirvana.

Marcin Olszewski

System used in this test:
– CD/DAC: Ayon CD-35
– Digital player: Lenovo Z70-80 i7/16GB RAM/240GB SSD + JRiver Media Center 22 + TIDAL HiFi + JPLAY; Yamaha WXAD-10
– Digital source selector: Audio Authority 1177
– Turntable: Kuzma Stabi S + Kuzma Stogi + Shelter 201
– Phonostage: Tellurium Q Iridium MM/MC Phono Pre Amp
– Integrated amplifier: Electrocompaniet ECI5
– Loudspeakers: Gauder Akustik Arcona 80 + spike extenders
– IC RCA: Tellurium Q Silver Diamond
– IC XLR: LessLoss Anchorwave; Organic Audio; Amare Musica
– Digital IC: Fadel art DigiLite; Harmonic Technology Cyberlink Copper; Apogee Wyde Eye; Monster Cable Interlink LightSpeed 200
– USB cables: Wireworld Starlight; Goldenote Firenze Silver
– Speaker Cables: Organic Audio; Signal Projects Hydra
– Power Cables: Furutech FP-3TS762 / Fi-28R / Fi-E38R; Organic Audio Power; Acoustic Zen Gargantua II
– Power distribution board: Furutech e-TP60ER + Furutech FP-3TS762 / Fi-50 NCF(R) / FI-50M NCF(R)
– Wall Socket: Furutech FT-SWS(R)
– Antivibration platform: Franc Audio Accessories Wood Block Slim Platform
– Ethernet cables: Neyton CAT7+
– Table: Rogoz Audio 4SM3
– Accessories: Sevenrods Dust-caps; Furutech CF-080 Damping Ring; Albat Revolution Loudspeaker Chips

Opinion 2

It is widely known, that the “professional market” is shaking their head when hearing about the big adherence of the audiophiles to the cabling of their systems. Of course this thesis has a lot of exclusions, in the form of sound engineers known to me, but looking from a broader perspective, the surplus of disbelievers, regarding the importance of synergetic cabling of the sets generating sound, is vast. Also very often the main aspect of the resistance against measuring themselves with our (audiophile) belief is the price of such accessories. And this is something critical for many homo sapiens representatives, something they cannot surpass, regardless of the group they are feeling attached to. And this kind of cold war would go on forever, if not for a sneaky, but bold approach of the Japanese company Furutech, which came down with their prices to a level acceptable by the pro audio branch, and the common Smith as well. So what am I talking about? Our two heroes of the test in the form of power cables, from the, a little bit tricky named, series of cables called Studio Power Series. The model “The Empire” and “The Astoria”, distributed by the Katowice based company RCM.
Analyzing the pictures many of You will confirm, that the “Studio” part of the name does not determine the looks of those cables too much. Looking at them we see very neatly, if not to say nicely, covered with black, opalizing sheaths cables, which are not too thick, when compared to typical High-End cords. Not extending our today’s meeting too much, I leave the exact dissection of the cables to be verified on the manufacturer’s web pages. I will just add, that the model Empire has a slightly higher cross-section and
I think, that also You, just before reading this text, and I before starting listening, were nurtured by the question: "What is hidden behind the Studio Power Series name?". The Furutech name is a world leader in such accessories in audio, so why this masquerade? I do not know what are the aims of the decision makers at the company, but I think, that they want to bring the pro and the audiophile worlds closer together. Why? This I also do not know, but I imagine, that this convergence might be a very positive thing, which results in more attention being devoted to the final sound effect of the produced discs already at the mixing tables, what would result them having better sound quality. So what came out of this? I would say like this – applying the tested cables in your systems, instead of the supplied computer type cables manufactures tend to add to their products, you would perceive a kind of shock, that there are so many undiscovered sound nuances in them. Of course you should not expect the differences on a level reserved for the best, which costs really big money, but I can say, that the changes compared to the computer cords will be big. What changes? This will depend on the model of the cable, with the information, that the more expensive one, in this case the Empire, will sound better in all aspects than the Astoria, when compared in absolute terms. But you would be mistaken, if you think, that the more expensive model would be better in all systems. What is the reason? I will explain now. When we look closer at the world painted by the Empire, then it will turn out, that we get a bit upped, in terms of amount, but still coherent bass and vivid upper registers. This naturally results in the sound stage being slightly brought closer to the listener, but in exchange we get a solid amount of breath in the music reaching our ears, what will probably appeal to audiophiles, who suffer due to a slight overheating of the sound in their systems. Drawing the truth about the Astoria I am obliged to its slight contrast to its predecessor, so a slight pacification of the higher notes, denser midrange and bottom of the acoustic frequencies. Due to this, we can immediately feel a touch of rounding off the edges of the sounds creating the musical spectacle in front of us, but at the same time they are pushed back half a step behind the speakers. Summarizing, both cases are typical for getting one thing on the expense of another, but you should already be accustomed to this. So how did those changes fare when music was played? Frankly speaking, despite plugging those cables in different places in my system, due to being most easily able to catch all the nuances, I looked at them, when they were powering my DAC. This is the reason, that you need to put all the information in context of powering the sound source, while the reaction when powering, for example, a power amplifier might be completely different. I used two productions for comparison. The first, and probably telling everything about the two cables, was the Maciej Obara Quartet and its newest production “Unloved”. Conclusions? The listening using the power cable with the bigger cross-section (Empire) showed, that this session sounded very mature, with a special emphasis on the monumentality of the piano (its work in the lowest registers) and the significance of the saxophone, together with the openness of the reproduced sound due to more vivid treble. Going over to the second contestant, I must confess, that the sound was much less offensive and fresh, but the slight softening of the cymbals and general smoothness of the sound showed the music with a more intimate, and due to that, a more engaging climate. Those were two different worlds, but I am sure, that each one of those would easily find its followers. And more, I am sure, that the absolute higher quality of the sound of the more expensive cable, when put against the needs of a given audio system, and the expectations of the listener himself, may mean nothing, as those differences are not on the level of bad and good, but more or less refined sound. Why? Please remember, that the quality level of the systems those cables will be used in, due to the fact that the test system is much more resolving, will not be able to show things as clearly as I noted, what will make the cables being assessed in terms of opening up or quieting down the music, and not in terms better or worse, what will result in them both being successful.

As you can see from the text above, we deal here rather with products showing differences between themselves, than evidently better quality of one of them going down to the smallest nuances. This is because the manufactures decided to help people with a thinner wallet. And this always calls for compromise. But when real experts tackle this, like Furutech, then it will turn out, that we may not catch God by his feet, but we can have a sound, which is at least interesting, if not expected during the time we spent on audio. And this surely is sufficient to warrant a test, which, I hope, will not only empower the true audiophiles, but also the people, who are making the audio recordings.

Jacek Pazio

Distributor: RCM

Prices:
Furutech Astoria E: 1 150 PLN / 1,5 m
Furutech Empire E: 1 790 PLN / 1,5 m

System used in this test:
- CD: CEC TL 0 3.0 + Reimyo DAP – 999 EX Limited TOKU
- Preamplifier: Robert Koda Takumi K-15
- Power amplifier: Reimyo KAP – 777
- Loudspeakers: Tremer & Friedl “ISIS”
- Speaker Cables: Tellurium Q Silver Diamond
- IC RCA: Hijri „Mîlon”
- XLR: Tellurium Q Silver Diamond
- Digital IC: Harmonix HS 102
- Power cables: Harmonix X-DC 350M2R Improved Version, Furutech NanoFlux NCF Furutech DPS-4 + FI-E50 NCF(R)/ FI-50(R), Hijiri Nagomi
- Table: SOLID BASE V1
- Accessories: Harmonix Beauty Tone Milion Maestro, Harmonix TU 505EX MK II, Stillpoints „ULTRA SS”, Stillpoints "ULTRA MINI"; antivibration platform by SOLID TECH; Harmonix AC Enacom Improved for 100-240V; Harmonix Room Tuning Mini Disk RFA-80i
- Power distribution board: POWER BASE HIGH END

Analogue stage:
- Turntable:
  Drive: SME 30/2
  Arm: SME V
- Cartridge: MIYAJIMA MADAKE

Phonostage: RCM THERIAA

Link do tekstu: Furutech Astoria E & Empire E English ver.