

Review of WAY Cables' Champagne USB, by Roland Schmenner, 09/2018, on :



## Way Cables Champagne MkII USB The Touch of Sound

The Way Cables Champagne MkII USB cable not only looks stunning but delivers incredible sound quality, too.



Music is at risk of disappearing altogether, at least in terms of its physical manifestation. It began with gatefold LPs, in all their tangible glory, meeting their demise when plastic CD cases entered the scene. Now the advent of streaming and downloads is sounding the death knell of physical materials playing any role in music playback. Disembodied data streams flit between our computer and the D/A converter, leaving only a tiny icon on the laptop or streamer's display to remind us of the human factor at the heart of the music we listen to. Realizing it's only tiny chips or ICs that convert our saved files into music just serves to reinforce this. But as audiophiles, we're well aware there's much more to enjoying music. The look, the feel: The high-end experience encompasses everything that wants to be celebrated. And in terms of sound quality, we also know the promises of salvation made by Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and all wireless connections are nothing more than a pretense. And that's just where the connections from Way Cables come in. They instantly transport you back to the good old days of audiophile bliss the moment you hold them in your hands, sense the exceptional workmanship that went into making them, and, most of all, experience the technical perfection and incredible sound quality they can produce. Behind Way Cables is a Serbian team of specialists led by engineer Miroslav Popovic that handcrafts in Belgrade a wide range of real gems.

## **A unique combination of first class materials**

Whether intended for an analog or digital connection, all the cables in the top-notch series are instantly recognizable with their striking red cotton sheath, which can't fail to bring a smile to your face when you pick up a cable to connect devices. This is a sensual experience and will remind you of the physical, material nature of music playback. But concealed within the cloth insulation lies a cutting-edge cable-technology concept yearning to be discovered. The design principle behind Popovic's cables, including the Champagne MkII, is anything but ordinary: Encased in a dielectric made of cotton, solid conductors comprise the cable's core. Its raw materials are UK-certified silver with 99.99% purity paired with oxygen-free high-conductivity (OFHC) copper. The copper used by Way Cables has a conductivity of 101.5% to 102.0%; the highest-purity silver it uses will, according to the company's website, achieve 106% conductivity. Usually, normal copper only achieves just over 99%. Let's take a closer look at the unusual cotton sheath: Way Cables is keen to highlight that the cotton used in this special design has particularly good dielectric properties. This composition is apparently also exceptionally good at damping mechanical vibrations. What's more, the cotton sheath also leaves the cable wonderfully flexible and therefore also easy to manipulate.



## Perfect results in every setup

Anyone who's spent some time tinkering around with connection cables knows it's not just the cable that impacts the quality of the connection; this depends just as much on nonstandardized electrical input and output variables of the connected devices. For that very reason, I tested the Champagne MkII in a variety of different configurations. First, I integrated the cable into my pure headphone system, where I had it connect a Linux laptop to the no-nonsense Schiit Bifrost DAC that would in turn send its signals to the Valhalla 2 tube headphone amplifier made by the same company. The sound produced by the Focal Utopia headset was completely free of any digital artifacts and interference. The high-res version of Keith Jarrett's early work *Facing You* came across as faultless and as if it were floating in the air — but always filled with a clear, pronounced bass and imbued with the richness and weightiness needed. When I in the past used a different connection cable to listen to this recording of Jarrett's performance, I found the music to be grainier. Top-of-the-range headphones act as a kind of acoustic magnifying glass and can sometimes make even the slightest bit of unpleasant interference in digital playback very noticeable. This is not, however, the case when using the Way Cables Champagne MkII.

"But what would happen if the Way Cable were used to connect truly high-end devices?" I thought to myself. Luckily, I had Playback Designs' ultimate MPS-8 DAC available to me. This time, my Mac mini acted as the sound source, using Audirvana+ to send the data to the Playback Designs device. The amazing thing about the MPS-8 is that it always upsamples the data rate of the files being played and can also be fed with all DSD variants.

Regardless of the type of data the Mac sent out, the Way cable would transmit everything with a stoic sense of calm and never experienced a single digital blackout to tarnish the whole affair. Even tumultuous and rhythmically tricky orchestral sections such as those found in the high-res recording of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (The Rite of Spring) from Reference Recording were conveyed with such an analog flow that, for comparison purposes, I actually placed the 45rpm LP of the same recording on the turntable platter to determine that the Champagne MkII was ignoring all the sharpness and edges of the digital version and only passing on the flow of the music. Digital reproductions really don't get more natural and analog than this. The combination with Playback Designs' MPS-8 is nothing short of a dream-team combo. And connecting your home DAC or streamer and your preamplifier or integrated amplifier with an XLR/RCA Way cable will really boost everything to the next level and ensure constant, consistent highend sound.

