

INTERCONNECTS

VAN DEN HUL THE ORCHID

Music opened wide

AJ van den Hul never ceases to amaze. The godfather of the high-fidelity cable art has never been content to rest on his laurels, even though his products have garnered accolades from music enthusiasts and audiophiles around the globe for decades.

And let's not forget that Mr Van den Hul is also the producer of some of the world's finest phono cartridges, which he still personally hand-crafts, often to specific requirements of the customer. Here is someone who really understands both the art, and the science, of audio.

The Orchid is a brand-new interlink from Van den Hul – and one that looks quite unlike anything we've seen from the Dutch master up to now. It's a slinky sliver of a thing, terminated at both ends with gold-plated RCAs, and looking rather unsubstantial for the R4000 asking price.

By now, seasoned audiophiles will know, however, that you shouldn't judge by appearances. And that's certainly true of The Orchid. It may look thin and technically uncomplicated, but those first impressions couldn't be further from the truth.

The Orchid is the first product to employ an all-new Van den Hul technology, which the company calls 'tunnel technology'. As always, the description of the science behind the product sounds a little obtuse to my rather unsophisticated sensibilities.

The concept, according to Van den Hul, is based on the assumption that the longer the secured path of electrons or electromagnetic fields in an electrical conductor, the better the sonic results – or, put differently, the better the level of signal integrity achieved.

As always, the trick has been to turn science into a usable product. The Orchid is a triaxial interconnect employing a high-purity, matched crystal, oxygen-free copper conductor, coated with a layer of high-purity, high-density silver.

The single solid-core conductor is surrounded by a second, intermediate conductive layer consisting of 48 strands of linear-structured carbon-treated, silver-coated OFC. An outer, 80-strand shield of the same material ensures exceptional resistance to high-frequency interference.

The finishing touches are a Teflon outer insulation layer, and Van den Hul's proprietary Huliflex jacket – a more inert and durable alternative to the more popular PVC coverings sometimes used by other cable makers.

Although the pair reviewed here was terminated with gold-plated RCA sockets, the balanced construction of The Orchid also makes it suitable for balanced configurations using XLR termination.

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VERDICT

Loads of ambient and musical information make for an involving and intriguing listening experience. A memorable performer in every respect, and worth the investment.

PRICER3 995 (1m pair, terminated)

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What a pleasure to use an interlink as pliable and user-friendly as The Orchid. It's neither delicate nor difficult to handle, and because of its 2,9 mm diameter also takes up less space. After subjecting it to around 40 hours of running-in time, I used it in various roles – between pre and power amps, and source components and amplifiers.

It's difficult to credit The Orchid with a specific sonic signature. In the past, some of the interlinks from the marque have been accused of sounding too laid back and innocuous, often leading those in search of impact to look elsewhere. On the other hand, it's also been true that the Van den Hul interlinks have always sounded music-friendly and unfatiguing.

The good news is that The Orchid somehow manages to combine the best of both. It is uncompromisingly musical, easily getting to

grips with a performance and extracting the very essence of the music. As a result, the dynamics and energy inherent to a performance really come to the fore.

Staging was a particular strength of The Orchid, with the interlink seemingly able to open up the soundstage to the extent that some details and subtleties previously not obvious were now believably brought to the fore.

Ambient cues underscored the ability of the interlink to recreate spaces and contextualise performances from an acoustic perspective. And the harvest of detail was bountiful, so that listening to music via The Orchid sometimes gave the impression of a previously slightly opaque layer being removed from the sound.

Tonally, The Orchid is neither bright nor bloated, preferring a more linear approach. It's certainly easy to listen for long periods, but there is never any sense of the treble being muted. Overall tonal balance is quite superb, and with the right speakers and loads of power, you'll find The Orchid passing on very low notes indeed.

Also important to note here is how quiet The Orchid is, and how impervious to possible interference. Silences were deep, black spaces on the soundstage, and there was never even the slightest indication of ground hum or other noises.

But what I liked most about The Orchid was its energy, its frankness and its ability to express anything from Diane Krall to Dire Straits, from Motorhead to Mozart with verve and finesse. Articulate, engaging and ultimately entertaining, it's a great interlink. Another legend in the making? Time will tell...

Deon Schoeman

