

**W**hen Audio Advisors Wayne Schuurman contacted me about reviewing the Vincent Audio KHV-1pre headphone amplifier, I felt confident that I had everything I needed to handle the task, owning, as I do, both the AKG K701 and Sennheiser HD-650 headphones, which have long been my references. That oughta get er done, I thought.

Then I got a phone call from HeadRooms Tyll Hertsens. “Dude! You have got to hear the rewiring job weve done on the 701s. We hardwire a four-conductor Cardas cable directly to the drivers, eliminating at least two solder joints—then we put a Cardas ¼” plug on the end. Un-freaking-believable!”

I already considered the 701s pretty special, so I was skeptical about the level of improvement. I dithered. “Whats it cost?”

“It is kind of labor-intensive for us, since we have to disassemble the headphones, hard-solder the tinned leads directly to the terminal blocks. It works out to E 320,00 for a 10 set.” (Its also E 285 for a 5 set terminated to an 1/8” miniplug, if you want to use your 701s with a portable.)

While I pondered this, Hertsens explained that hed been inspired to open up his 701s by the improvement brought about by HeadRooms Cardas-cable upgrades for the Sennheiser HD-580, HD-600, and HD-650 headphones (E 210,00 for 4 with miniplug or E 220 for 10 with ¼” plug), all of which use a standard Sennheiser connector at the earcup. “The simplicity of replacing the cable makes it possible for people to quickly compare the stock cable and the Cardas cable,” he continued. “Pretty much everybody prefers the Cardas. You dont get that ability to quickly compare the AKG—unless you attend one of the HeadRoom road shows we do all around the country.” Then he sprang the trap. “Of course, I can send you a pair of 650s with the Cardas and 701s with the Fat Pipe, and you could compare them to your stock sets.” Oh, Tyll Hertsens, do lead me into temptation. And the original sample of the Vincent KHV-1pre would be the perfect testing device for this singular comparison: it has two headphone jacks and a huge amount of testicular fortitude.

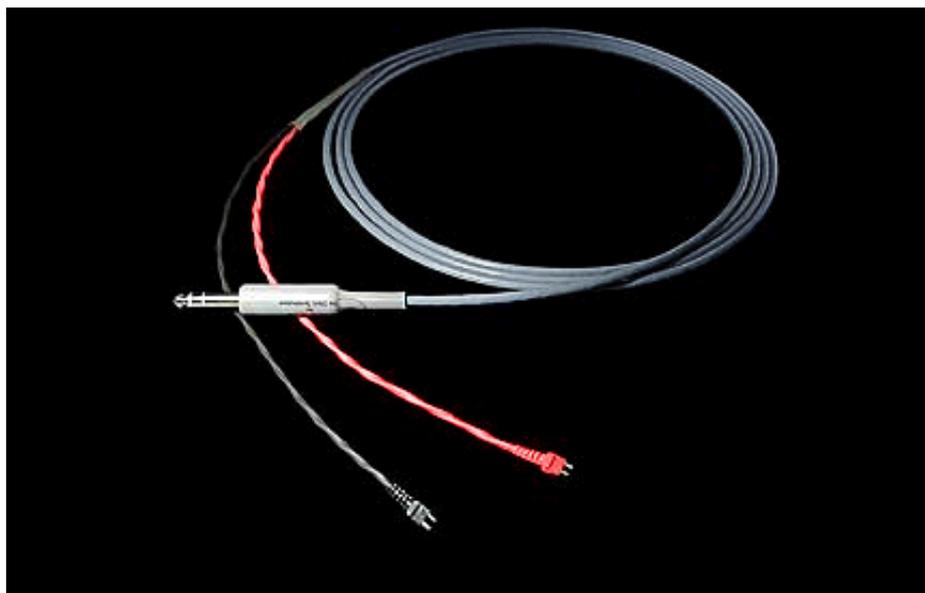
But . . . I didnt really want to hear un-freaking-believable differences between my stock cables and sets that

# HEADROOM

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## Cardas Fat Pipe headphone cables



Cardas Headphone cable was developed specifically for Sennheiser headphones, fitting the HD-650, HD 600, HD 265, HD 414 Classic, HD 525, HD 535, HD 545, HD 565, HD 565 II, HD 580 models. It is a shielded, lightweight, flexible, 4 conductor, design.

It has a Cardas, 1/4 inch stereo phono plug and custom molded headphone plugs which eliminate four soldered connections found in other replacement cables.

Two types of wiring configurations are available, the standard 1/4” or balanced. They are available in three lengths, 10, 15 and 20.

**Shield Type:** Double

**Conductor Type:** 4 Conductor, Golden Ratio, Constant Q, Crossfield, Pure Copper Litz

The 4 conductor design means there is no splice where the cable divides for the earphones, as with other replacement cords.

Id have to shell out extra for—besides, with minor cavils, I liked the sound of my 650s and 701s. Un-freaking-believable differences would make them sound, well, different. I realize that such grumpiness is inconsistent with the audiophile creed of Different is better. Sometimes I just want things to stay the same.

Heres what the cables have in common: They are four-conductor wires, built to Cardass Constant-Q, Golden Ratio configuration, inside and covered with a shield. Both terminate in a hefty Cardas plug with stress-relief wrap. Because standard headphone

jacks use a shared ground, the Cardas plug is designed to reduce crosstalk.

The Sennheiser cables are hardwired to custom-built Sennheiser connectors that grip the Sennheiser jacks more firmly than Sennheisers stock plugs. (My biggest beef with the HD-580s, 600s, and 650s is how that connector loosens as time goes by and you repeatedly toss your cans in your go-bag for monitoring recordings. Problem solved—I think.) The Fat Pipe needs to be hardwired to your 701s by HeadRooms techs.

My worry that the Cardases would turn either of my fave headphone

into something else proved unfounded. The AKGs sounded warmer and punchier, with extra detail throughout their response range. Extra detail isn't code for too much, but an attempt to explain why I heard more air within soundstages, and why those soundstages grew slightly more voluminous. This may well be attributable to that crosstalk-reducing plug—in my experience, quieter usually translates to more detail and space. The bass response was more solid, and extremely tight.

Simone Dinnerstein's recent recording of keyboard works by J.S. Bach, *The Berlin Concert* (CD, Telarc CD-80715), was clangier through the Fat Pipe. The acoustic of the Berlin Philharmonie sounded not larger, but more convincingly large. Dinnerstein's percussive technique sounded sharper, the leading transients of her notes crisper, faster, more athletic. And man, the Fat Pipe gave that Hamburg Steinway a super bottom end.

In other words, the Cardas Fat Pipe did nothing bad to the qualities I liked in the AKG 701s, and made very subtle but noticeable improvements in those areas where I felt they could use them.

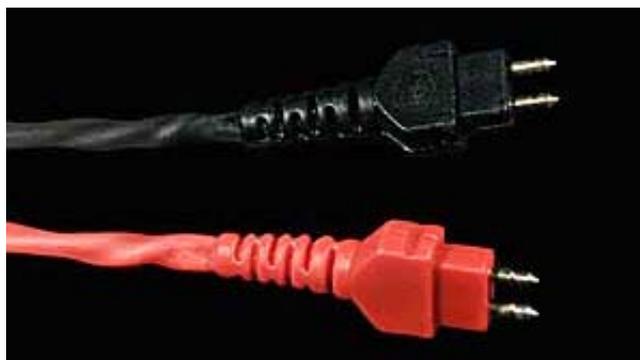
The Cardas opened up the top end of the Sennheiser models. I can't say it actually extended their HF response, but it gave them some of that sparkle I'd grown to think they needed. That added clarity to all recordings, and expanded the soundstages of those that had any. Another benefit of that Cardas plug? Can't be sure—but that's my guess.

With "The Colors of Chloë," from the Gary Burton Quintets Ring (CD, ECM 1051), the stock Sennheisers had a slightly more closed-in sound that made it harder to distinguish any given note of Mick Goodrick's guitar from any single note of Pat Metheny's. Following the lines of the two guitarists was easy enough, but individual notes seemed buried deeper in the mix than with the Cardas. What was revelatory, however, was the way Burton's vibraphones cut through the arrangement with the Cardas. The leading edges of his mallet strokes were crisper, and the harmonic overtones were more integrated with the fundamentals.

These are subtle differences. I could be very happy—was very happy—with the stock cables, but now



**the Cardas 1/4", stereo phone plug is non-magnetic, eutectic Brass, with Rhodium plating over Silver plate. It has Brass cover, which is Gold plated. The Cardas phono plug reduces crosstalk at its connection.**



**The headphone connectors are molded on to the cable's continuous conductors, which eliminates additional splices found on other replacement cords. These molded connectors are designed to fit snugly and accurately into the Sennheiser earpieces.**



**Cardas teamed up with the headroom Corporation to develop a Headphoe Interconnect cable called HPI. This thin and flexible, 1 ft. cable is terminated with 1/8" stereo plugs on each end. It can link portable players and outboard amps. Available in 6", 12", 1m. and 2m lengths.**

**Outside diameter:** 0.127"  
**Dielectric Type:** Teflon, Cotton  
**Cable AWG:** 20.5  
**Shield Type:** Single  
**Conductor Type:** 3 Conductor, Golden Ratio, Constant Q, Purer Copper Litz

that I've heard the differences, I may not be able to be. This is the problem with being an audiophile: There's always

something better, and it usually costs money. People who are happy with good enough aren't attracted to this hobby.

Are the differences too subtle to justify E 300? Only you can answer that. Probably, if you're really happy with the sound you're getting from your AKG K701s or the top Sennheisers.

But—and this is a BIG but—if you rely on your Sennheisers and AKGs to extract from a recording every damn thing on it, and/or if you won't be satisfied with even a close second, it's not an unreasonably costly upgrade. Of course, that doesn't mean it can be taken lightly: If I can afford to have only one of my two favorite cans upgraded, which do I choose?

But that's my problem. Your problem, assuming you're brash enough to experience the difference HeadRoom's cable upgrades can make, will simply be, Should I? Sure you should.

**Wes Phillips** 

#### **Specifications:**

**Description:** Cable upgrades for AKG and Sennheiser headphones.

**Price:** **AKG Fatpipe:** E 320,00 set terminated with a 1/4" plug, E 285,00 set terminated with an 1/8" miniplug.

**Sennheiser upgrade:** E 245 set with 1/4" plug, E 210,00 with 1/8" miniplug.  
 Cable: 1.25m/4ft.  
 Available: 3m, 4.5m, 6m.

#### **Distributor:**

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