



Nordost - Blue Heaven Headphone Cable

JEAN-FRANÇOIS LAPOINTE

Now in their 25th year, the American company Nordost stands apart with their long tradition of developing and marketing high-fidelity audio cables. Their extensive range of cables covers the entry level (Leif), the intermediate (Norse 2), the high-end (Valhalla 2), right up to their reference range (Odin 2). Nordost has also applied its expertise to other audio accessories, notably their power bars, pro-audio products and anti-vibration devices.

For headphone cables, **Nordost** has developed two types of products. Situated in the Leif entry level, the Blue Heaven cable is available in lengths of 1.25 or 2 metres, for single-ended headphone amplifiers, terminated with 3.5 mm or 6.3 mm plugs. The Heimdall 2, in the intermediate Norse 2 range, is only available in the 2 metre length, for amplifiers with balanced inputs (XLR), although Nordost does offer adapters of all types for connecting the Heimdall 2 to other types of headphone amplifiers. For this review, we're using the **Blue Heaven** 1.25 metre cable with the 3.5 mm and 6.3 mm plugs, connected to a pair of Sony MDR-Z7 headphones..

DESCRIPTION

Physically, the Nordost Blue Heaven is markedly stiffer than the original Sony cable. I would suggest opting for the 1.25 metre model, as the 2 metre length can get in the way during mobile use. Fit and finish are up to Nordost's usual high standards. The cable is built using oxygen-free copper conductors (4 x 34 AWG) insulated with fluorinated ethylene propylene (FEP), which Nordost favours for its sonic benefits. The cables are manufactured in the United States.

Our test cable came equipped with 3.5 mm plugs to fit the Sony MDR-Z7 headphones. As mentioned, Nordost offers different terminations to fit a wide range of headphones; the Blue Heaven cable is available in nine versions, for left-right output dual push-pull 'phones (Sennheiser), dual 4 pin mini XLR (Audeze), dual 2 pin (Sennheiser), dual 4 pin Hirose (Ether), dual 2.5 mm mono mini (Oppo), single 3.5 mm mini stereo (Focal, Aëdle, Master & Dynamic ...), double eight contacts (Audeze), dual 3.5 mm mini stereo (Sony) and dual 3.5 mm mono mini (McIntosh). Who says too much choice is bad thing?

As this upgrade can be a significant investment, representing about half the price of the Sony headphones, let's get to the crucial question, their sound.

LISTENING

All listening for this review was conducted using the Fabrizioolo Carot One tubed preamplifier/headphone amp and the new Arcam rHead preamplifier, a review of which appears elsewhere in this magazine.

As I had recently tested the Sony headphones, I returned to exactly the same albums for comparison purposes. As readers of this magazine will know, cables really can make a difference to a system's performance, but in the case of the **Blue Heaven** cable, the difference was truly spectacular! While the basic Sony cable always maintained my interest in the music, moving to the Blue Heaven cable simply added another dimension. While not quite in paradise, it felt awfully close... Bass notes gained substantially in precision and took on a tonus that was missing with the Sony cable. The sound of the headphones remained as fast as it had been with the original equipment.

Returning to some of the tracks feature in a previous review, I queued up Lush and their *Split* Album (4AD). The musical punch was there, and the bass that had somewhat disappointed with the basic headphone cable was now revived. The only drawback that I noticed with this album was the track "Hypocrite": although the guitar solo lost some of its presence, this never clouded the gains in bass and in the clarity of vocal harmonies. With Lou Reed's *Ecstasy* album (Reprise Records) voices are clearer and more present. On the track "Baton Rouge", the echoes that trail off the voices gain a clarity that was absent before.

Changing horizons, in David Bowie and Nine Inch Nails' collaboration "I'm Afraid of Americans", my interest is piqued by the overproduction of this track, and yet everything hangs together nicely. The broad spectrum of this music is reproduced well. I don't feel that any information is lost or that distortion is introduced. The drums have real

depth compared to the more neutral presentation that some equipment can impart.

MOVING TO THE BLUE HEAVEN CABLE SIMPLY ADDED ANOTHER DIMENSION. WHILE NOT QUITE IN PARADISE, IT FELT AWFULLY CLOSE...

Let's end with Björk's "Bachelorette" from her *Homogenic* album (One Little Indian), an interesting piece for its marriage of string arrangements and electronic music. The Nordost Blue Heaven cable reveals the texture of the electronic beats and captures the engagingly fast sound of the track.

CONCLUSION

I truly enjoyed the time I spent with this **Nordost** cable. While the **Blue Heaven** is a substantial investment compared to the cost of the Sony headphones, the cable lifts their performance to another level. The purchase of this cable will likely be inevitable if you try it, at least with the Sony headphones. As, always, its performance with other headphones needs to be trialled to see if it is as significant. In short, this purchase seems easily justifiable, given the level of performance seen here.

For

- Bass precision
- A clear upgrade
- Availability for other models of headphones

Nordost Blue Heaven Headphone Cable
 Manufacturer-Distributor: Nordost
 1.800.836.2750
www.nordost.com