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## EQUIPMENT REPORT

### Nordost Frey 2 Speaker Cable and Interconnects

Evolving and Improving

Neil Gader

Recently upgraded, Frey 2 cable is the sweet-spot wire of Nordost's mid-priced Norse 2 collection. In truth it's actually only one player in a much larger bloodline that, in its complexity, begins to resemble the competing factions in *Game of Thrones*—the addictive HBO series overflowing with intrigue, swords, and sex. And like that TV show, the cables are christened with Scandinavian names that whisper of royalty and kinship. Nordost's four collections lead off with Leif and Norse 2, and ascend to reference-caliber Valhalla 2, and culminate with *supreme* reference Odin/Odin 2. Frey 2, though not quite a noble, is flanked in the House of Norse by Tyr at the top end, and finally, a couple of ranks lower by Heimdall 2. I know—it's complicated.

I spoke with Nordost's Jon Baker regarding changes that have elevated Frey to its current "2" status. Carried over are the silver-plated 99.99999 OFC copper solid-core conductors, but first among the Frey 2 upgrades are increases in gauge size: the speaker cable from 24 AWG to 22 AWG, and the interconnects from 26 AWG to 24 AWG. The WBT RCA connectors have been replaced

by MoonGlo, but Neutriks still prevail for XLR. Additionally, the Frey 2 interconnect has adopted Dual Micro Mono Filament technology compared with its predecessor's Micro Mono Filament. Finally, new mechanical tuning algorithms have re-optimized the line as well. The Frey 2 power cable (successor to Brahma) uses a new proprietary connector, enhanced mechanical

#### SPECS & PRICING

Price: Speaker \$2924/pr. 2m;  
interconnect \$1459/1m; power  
cord, \$1679/1m

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tuning, and improved spacing of the Micro Mono Filaments.

My experience with Frey 2 reinforced some impressions that I've noted about Nordost recently—a gradual evolution of tonal qualities that has caused me to rethink some earlier critiques. To my ear, Nordost frequently emphasized sharply focused detail and electrifying micro-dynamic energy with a general forwardness and a drier push. It excelled at speed and lightness of foot at the expense of the darker color, energy, and full-bodied weight in the mids and lower octaves. These elements just seemed baked into the DNA-cake of Nordost's conductors and geometry.

However, Frey 2 (and to a lesser extent the fine, entry-level Purple Flare that I reviewed in Issue 236) has rebalanced the scales, taking the transient and micro-dynamic elements of the past and integrating them with richer mids and a brawnier, meatier bottom end that gives orchestral music more discernable atmosphere and weight. In a word, there's more fidelity to the live event. A great example was the "Venus" movement from Holst's *The Planets* [LSO/Previn: EMI]. Predictably, the Nordost reproduced the finer details like the tambourine with distinction right down to the last rattle. The solo violin, which is prominently featured, was still slightly forward, but more sweetly so and more warmly illuminated. Further along in *The Planets*, the deepest underpinnings of the orchestra—the low strings and winds—were rich and refined, conveying the weight and mass of our solar system's largest planet "Jupiter." In this aspect, Frey 2 was startling in the way it delineated these complex and powerful passages that are the hallmarks of this movement.

In this lofty class of cables I expected the presentation to go beyond mere surface reproduction and reveal the air and ambience both in front of and behind the players. In the case of the nouveau-bluegrass band Nickel Creek's *This Side* [Sugar Hill], this was largely accomplished. I easily heard just how "clean" these acoustic players' articulation was—the guitar and mandolin strings sang out with transient speed and authority. But I also noted the wave launch of energy propelling off the soundboard and at least some three-dimensional physical presence of the players and their instruments. As flat as Nordost cable might appear to the eye, to the ear Frey 2 retrieved the ambient information of my favorite recordings with 3-D ease, including the soaring acoustics from Laurel Massé's *a cappella* folk singing from *Feather and Bone* [Premonition] and the "found sound" chirps and creaks that find their way onto the tracks in Tom Waits' converted barn/studio during *Mule Variations* [Asylum]. Another important beneficiary of the Frey 2's balance was its more finely faceted timbre, particularly in complex

groupings of string instruments, such as those heard in a classical chamber ensemble; its ability to sort out the voices of cello, bass violin, and fiddle during selections from *Appalachian Journey* [Sony] was equally impressive.

Certain aspects of Frey 2 performance remain familiar. For example, during the superb Reference Recording LP of *Nojima Plays Liszt* [RR-25], Frey 2 expertly captured the artist's concussive dynamics during "The Mephisto Waltz." And the cut "Joan of Arc" from Jennifer Warnes' *Famous Blue Raincoat* [Impex] conveyed a lighter and more illuminated signature that finely honed the edges of the boundaries of images, and underscored the lowest-level details. On the other hand, while there was still a little added astringency on the massed strings during "Song For Bernadette," the vocal air riding high above Warnes' vocal more than made up for this minor coloration.

In comparison to the pricier WyWires Platinum or a personal reference like the Synergistic Research Atmosphere Level 4—cables that closely resemble each other in terms of mellow timing, rounder edges, and greater ambience—Nordost Frey 2 conveyed a slightly cooler, more modern take, and seemed a bit faster but dimensionally just a bit shallower. During Peter, Paul and Mary's "500 Miles" [Warner Bros], Frey 2 presented acoustic guitar and vocal harmonies that were very discrete although the volume gradations of each note sung were not as finely expressed. By comparison, the WyWires and Synergistic offered up the same track with darker resonant textures and finer low-level contrast. Whereas the Nordost was bit tighter and punchier in the bass, the other pairs contrasted with a more musically tuneful and acoustically looser low end. It almost became a matter of comparing the best of solid-state with tubes—different but equally valid presentations according to one's preferences and listening biases. Frey 2 power cords deserve some special props and probably a separate review, but space restrictions limit my remarks here. Suffice it to say, they imparted supernaturally quiet black backgrounds for supporting the low-level resolving power that the Frey 2 cable displayed.

In my world—a little neck of the woods I call Reality—a cable of the class that the Nordost Frey 2 represents is a damned serious expenditure. However, its cost is commensurate with high-end systems in the \$15k–\$25k range, the sweet-spot for advanced audiophiles. In that context Frey 2 is an exceptional performer from a proven brand that through the decades has continued to evolve and improve. Audition with confidence. You will not be disappointed. **tss**