

# Nordic Mythology

Nordost's exquisite (and expensive) cable series Valhalla has delighted us before. Could the new Heimdall series for only one fifth of the price open the door to Valhalla?

By Kurt Lassen

If you didn't know better, you could be tempted to believe that the cable specialist Nordost is a company from the Nordic countries. Thus, all the names in the new Norse series are from the Norse mythology. Baldur (the handsome and wise god), Heimdall (one of the gods of light, who can hear the grass growing), and Frey (god of water and fertility).

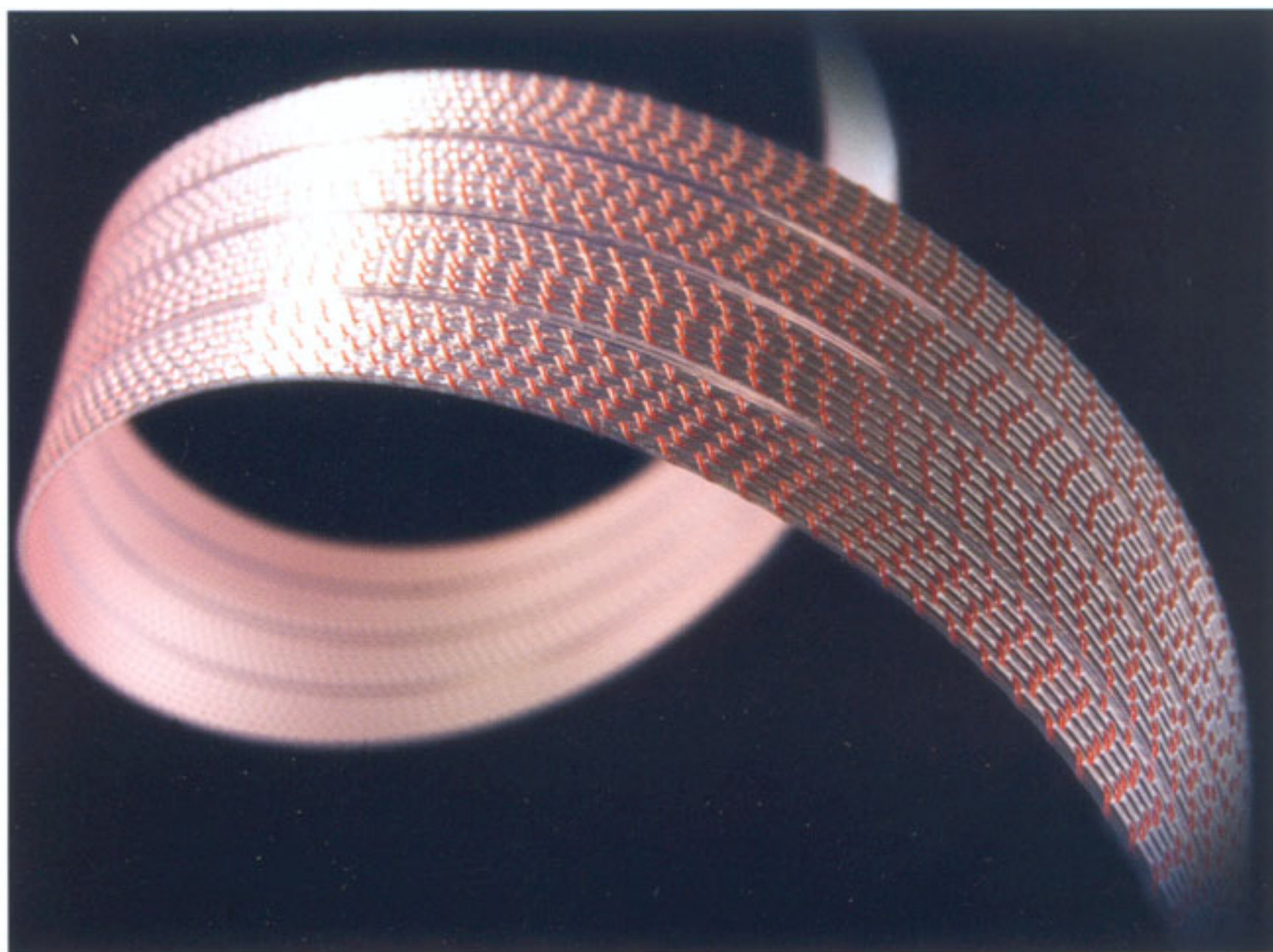
However, Nordost is a genuinely American company residing west of Boston, Massachusetts. The strongest link to the Nordic countries is their hard-working demo man Lars Kristensen, travelling around the world demonstrating Nordost's products.

Lars delivered the specimens for this test of the Heimdall cables and, as usual, had a few aces up his sleeve. We will return to this matter later on. Lars provides us with the opportunity to experience Nordost's exciting product range, from Blue Heaven to the impressive Valhalla series.

## The Technology

Using the principle of individually insulated solid core conductors, Nordost claims that skin effects and distortion are virtually eliminated.

The conductors are subjected to ultrasound treatment prior to extrusion, to fur-



ther optimise the performance. The copper conductors are plated with a 0.06 mm thin layer of silver and hermetically sealed with a soft Teflon layer, known as FEP (fluoridised ethylene propylene polymer, see box).

Apart from Baldur speaker cable, all other cables in the Norse series apply Nordost's advanced and demanding Micro Mono Filament technology (inherited from the Valhalla series). A thin FEP thread is spun around the conductor, which is then sealed with a layer of FEP Teflon. Several

protective techniques and processes in this advanced process will reduce the dielectric losses with up to 80 %, according to Nordost.

The technology was described further in High Fidelity 3/03 and 5/04, where we also tested several other Nordost cables.

Nordost claims that their manufacturing techniques result in a transmission speed approaching 90 % of the speed of light (and hence 20–25 % faster than conventional cable technologies), plus low capacitance and inductance.

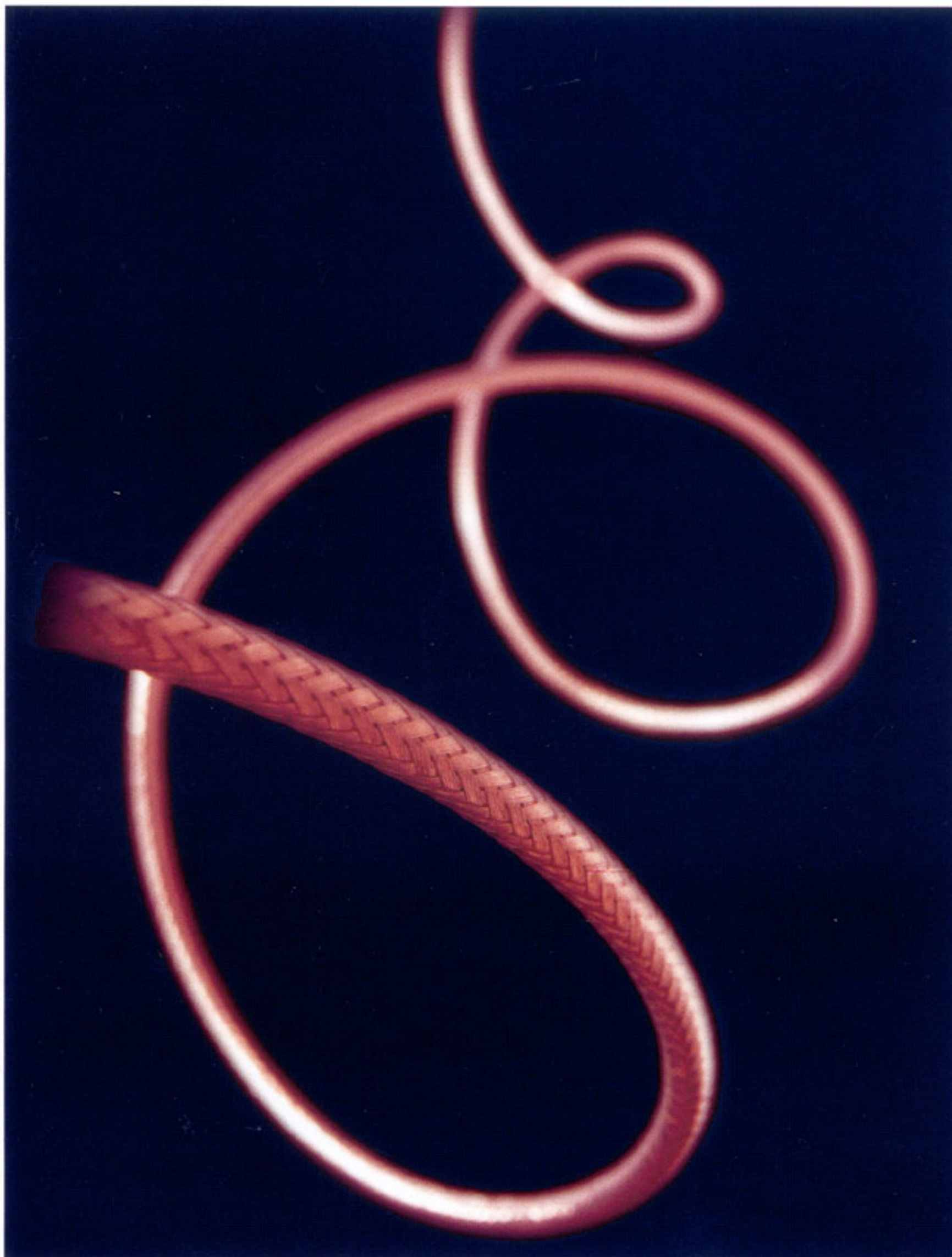
### Besides being well known

for making cables for audiophiles, Nordost is also very active in the computer, space, and medical industries, where thin wires (the width of a human hair) are implanted in patients. These thin wires replace human nerve cells and may save patients' lives and health.

**PRODUCT: NORDOST  
HEIMDALL, SPEAKER AND  
INTERCONNECT CABLES  
INFORMATION:  
WWW.SAS-AUDIO.DK,  
WWW.NOROST.COM  
PRIS (CA.): 16.600 /  
5.360 KR. SPEAKER- /  
INTERCONNECT CABLE**

### Pseudo balancing

In a normal unbalanced line the shield will function both as shield and return conductor. In a pseudo-balanced configuration, the signals travel in two insulated conductors and the shield is connected at one end – usually the transmitting end (source). The technique is also called "sneak balancing".



▶ The signal cables come in a pseudo-balanced configuration with the new WBT NextGen phono plugs, or as fully balanced cables with XLR plugs from Neutrik. The speaker cables are terminated with Nordost's own Z plugs, made of gold plated beryllium copper, featuring low mass and large contact area.

All Nordost cables are terminated by hand, at their Massachusetts factory.

### **AWG,**

short for American Wire Gauge, is an American designation for wire diameter. Larger numbers equals smaller diameter.

If you want to know more about the subject, [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) will provide you with more than 4 million hits in less than 0.5 seconds.

### ***Nordost Heimdall speaker cable***

There is an obvious kinship with the company's top model, this shows when the light is reflected in the surface in the same way as on the much more expensive Valhalla.

The cable feels similarly alive: when you straighten it, it will curl in its own manner. The gold-plated 4 mm Z plugs look fragile, but believe us, since they withstand hundreds of Lars Kristensen's demos, they will tolerate normal day-to-day use. The dielectric constant of the speaker cable is 1.12, the same as Valhalla and close to the ideal number: 1 (in vacuum).

The colour of the cable is light red, flamingo pink if you wish. The flat design makes it possible to hide the cable under a carpet. There are 24 individual AWG24

(about 0.51 mm, see information box) silver plated OFC conductors and the cable is 34 mm wide. Nordost recommends at least 100 hours burn-in.

As a matter of fact, they have recently introduced a burn-in machine called Vidar and it should be able to take care of this. Our test specimen had been burnt in by the Danish importer Erik Hansen from SAS Audio, and it did in fact improve during the first couple of weeks when current flowed through it around the clock.

But how does it sound, the reader asks? Well, not much, I will tell you that promptly. Don't misinterpret that to think that no music or sound is emitted (that would be too silly), but the "smart thing" with Heimdall speaker cable is indeed that it does not sound like you have added anything to your system, but more like anything you removed. Subjectively, the listening window becomes larger and the speakers appear to have moved further apart. Voices in the middle are fixed, exactly where you want them to be. The sound cannot be described as analytical, but as a listener you are all the more happy about how good your system really sounds.

It was not until we connected a better and more expensive cable that we realised that it could sound even better. Thus we could compare directly to Frey, Tyr, and Valhalla. The conclusion is that, all the way up to the top cable, we could recognise the same fluent manner of playing and – forgive the expression – lack of cable. And even compared to Valhalla, Heimdall has nothing to be ashamed of, as long as you remember the difference in price.

### ***Nordost Heimdall interconnect***

This interconnect cable is based on four silver-plated AWG26 wires of 99.99999 % OFC (oxygen-free copper). They are terminated with WBT's new NextGen phono plugs, or Neutrik XLR connectors in a balanced configuration. The resistance is reportedly 20.0 ohm per 304 m.

The colour is not as quiet as the Heimdall speaker cable; it is redder and ca. 4 mm in diameter. The outer jacket is a combination of 80 % Teflon and 20 % PVC, and is chosen in order to make the cable more flexible.

The cable feels very light and elegant,

and the new WBT plugs weigh next to nothing. It doesn't look too impressive, you may think, but try and connect it.

The sound is – funnily enough – a lot like the Heimdall speaker cable. That is, there is not very much to notice. You don't miss anything, everything just sounds right. Perhaps a bit like driving a super car, and forgetting about the sublime tires that contribute to the pleasure.

Once again we were able to meet the big brothers Fry and Tyr, and eventually Valhalla. And once again the double doors opened more and more, while voices in the middle remained rock solid. The Heimdall interconnect has a lovely non-aggressive way of delivering the music. It feels like instruments and voices that sound a bit hard become “softened”, there is no more “shouting”, and even cds that were avoided in the past become easier to approach. There is no loss of detail. On the contrary, you are served plenty of those – on a silver-plated copper plate.

Equipment from (among others) Marantz, Croft, Gryphon, TacT, Bertram Audio, Parasound, Technics, Nordost Thor,



Crystal Cable, Eben, GamuT, Onkyo, Infinity, and Martin Logan were used for this test.

### *Lars and lengths*

As I mentioned earlier, I would like to tell about a little curiosity that Lars Kristensen had up his sleeve. The theme is: influence of cable length on sound. Oh yes, we all know that shorter is better. “No, on the contrary”, he said with a Jack-Nicholson-like smile, and connected a 0.5 m interconnect (I think it was Blue Heaven) between the cd player and the integrated amplifier that were used on the occasion. We then tried 1.0 and 2.0 m respectively, with identical character and termination in the system. We looked around in bewilderment. The sound was clearly better using the longer cable.

This peculiarity milled around in the back of our mind until the very end, when all possible combinations, with the perhaps 12 to 15 different cables (counting speaker and interconnect cables separately), were tested. “Apart from one”, smiled Jack – eh – Lars Kristensen. We tested a power cable (Nordost Valhalla) with the length recommended by the manufacturer, i.e. 4.365 m.

Shocking! Resolution, image focus and soundstage improved one order of magnitude. It corresponded to a change from one

cable to another. And so we had done, but the difference was only in length, from 2 to a good 4 metres.

### *Conclusions*

We think that, considering the relatively modest prices (not only in Nordost terms), these cables may become a success.

To sum up, we unreservedly recommend the Heimdall series. The relaxed, but very precise reproduction, combined with a very fine soundstage is a really good match in the many systems where we tested them. Words like rock bottom, near perfect timing, and phase correctness turn up time and again in our notes.

Modern manufacturing methods and new suppliers have brought down the prices to levels where not only the rich guys can participate. ■

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### **FEP**

- is a copolymer of PTFE (polytetrafluoroethylene) and hexafluoropropylene, and is a very soft plastic material with a high tensile strength, high chemical resistance, low friction coefficient and a low dielectric constant. It is equally usable in low and high temperatures, states Nordost.

When the cable is enclosed in extruded FEP it will not change or oxidise any more, and the quality of sound should not change over time.

In cable manufacture, two pieces of Teflon are usually laminated around the wires. This is not very exact or flawless, and over time the joints will come apart and result in oxidation in the worst case, according to Nordost.

Therefore, they melt granulated FEP at high temperatures to a liquid mass that will enclose and seal the wires, before they are cooled and hardened in a water bath. Thus the FEP insulation is made in one piece, totally joint-free, thus eliminating the possibility for oxidation and subsequent degradation of performance.