



Atoll 400 Signature

Statutory amplification

Davis Acoustics *The Wall*
Acoustic anti-conformism!

Musical Fidelity *A1*
Pure Class A for everyone

Interview
Michka Assayas
The sound of rock



Phono preamp cream

Kora Phono Stage
Hexagonal wonder

CH Precision P1 & X1
The best?



The true benefits of power treatment!

Nordost Heimdall QBase 8 MkIII

Vincent Guillemin



The quality of our listening protocols prompted Nordost to offer us a complete Heimdall 2 power line, a Frey 2 power cable and a Qbase 8 mkIII power strip for several months of testing. As one of our main systems already had exactly these elements, with a Qbase 8 mkII, we took advantage of these tests to review our entire installation and the contribution of each of the cables to our system, as well as to compare the mkII and mkIII strips with and without the addition of decouplers (AC, BC, TC) and harmonizers (QRT Qv2). Thanks to this update, we were once again able to identify all the reasons that had led us to invest in Nordost's treatment of the sector in the first place.



ORIGIN

United States

QBASE 8 MKIII

PRICE

€ 2.600 / \$ 2.299 / £ 2.300

SPECIFICATION

Eight Schuko sockets
Grounding separation

HEIMDALL 2

PRICE

From € 840 / \$ 825 / £ 780 (1 m; € 275 per additional meter)

FREY 2

PRICE

From € 2.245 / \$ 2.199 / £ 2.070 (1 m; € 420 per additional meter)

NORSE 2 CABLE SERIES

Positioned between the entry-level Leif range and the Reference and Supreme Reference ranges, Nordost's Norse 2 series is the one that already propels listening to a high level of fidelity, without reaching the prices of the Valhalla and Odin products. Comprising three series, the Norse 2 range begins with the Heimdall 2 and expands with the Frey 2 and Tyr 2. Suitable for almost every need, these cables are available in RCA and XLR interconnects, HP, SPDIF coaxial, RJ45, USB, 4k UHD or for phono turntable arms in RCA, XLR or DIN. But for this issue, we've chosen to draw only the first sap: that of mains cables, with Heimdall 2 cables ranging from 1 to 3 m, plus two Frey 2s of 2 and 3 m.

Founded in 1991 with an initial focus on the medical and audio sectors, Nordost has used research carried out jointly with NASA to make its cables as reliable as possible. Now refocused on high-fidelity, the American company continues to develop a wide range of processing devices, with a recent focus on Internet data via the Qnet, and ever finer development of current harmonization with the new QRT Qwave, QKoil and QSine. Nevertheless, the company continues to offer products that have been benchmarks for over a decade, including the Norse 2 range of mains cables. With a mono-filament construction to create a virtual air dielectric, silver-plated OFC conductors and FEP (Fluorinated Ethylene Propylene) insulation, the Heimdall 2 offers ultra-fast current and voltage transfer with low impedance and strong mechanical control. More developed, the Frey 2 uses conductors with a diameter of 5 x 16 AWG, compared with 3 for the Heimdall 2. Its resis-

tance drops from 4 Ω per 1.000 ft to 2 Ω per 1.000 ft - the Tyr 2 goes even further at 1,33 Ω per 1.000 ft' -, for a propagation velocity of 85%.

POWERSTRIP QBASE 8 MKIII

The latest powerstrip, the Qbase 8 MkIII replaces the MkII after more than ten years of service, which itself came after the first version by incorporating better sockets and offering the option of being selected for 20 A. Now plastic-coated at both ends, where the MkII was still edged in aluminum to frame the extruded aluminum main piece, the MkIII is still available in QB4 or QB8 versions for the USA and Europe, as well as QB6 for the UK. Mechanically, it adds a passive resistor to raise the impedance level on the seven sockets around the main one, forcing all grounds to refocus on the latter, indicated as «Primary Earth». This star-shaped process ensures perfect component isolation, while eliminating any conflicting flows between signal and ground paths. But the Qbase MkIII also breaks new ground with its internal current-carrying board, since it contains not just one, but two clearly dissociated boards, separating the ground connections from the voltage and neutral lines, with the result that interference and crosstalk are minimized. Optimized for width and weight, the tracks are even more effective when used with larger amplifiers, such as Wavac or CH Precision monoblocks.

THE SET UP

Already in possession of some of the components, including a Qbase 8 MkII, we first dismantled everything and reconnected all the system's devices with the origi-

nal cables, on a Legrand power strip. Then we gradually added the Nordost cables, first Heimdall 2, then Frey 2, and finally integrated the Qbase 8 MkII strip, later interchanged with the MkIII. Performed on Accuphase E-600, Mark Levinson 5101 and various power supplies (Forrester F1 and Ferrum Hypsos) to ensure the reliability of the Kuzma turntable and Internet data, the tests were developed on a smaller system with an Atoll ST300 source and a Luxman SQ-N150 tube amplifier. Once the listening system had been properly calibrated, two QRT QV2 current harmonizers (€ 430 / \$ 404.99) and TC (€ 460 / \$ 449.99 / £ 372), BC (€ 195 / \$ 184.99 / £ 153) and AC (€ 110 / \$ 104.99 / £ 87) decouplers were integrated, with the facility on the MkIII version of removing the rubber feet to screw on a pair of QRT Stand Mounts (€ 150) instead, on which to affix the decouplers.

THE SOUND

This isn't the first power strip we have tested, far from it, but it's been a long time since we have dismantled the whole unit and reassembled it as we went along... and rediscovered the sensations we experienced several years ago, when we had to integrate superior elements to ensure the reliability of the audio system's power supply. A few days after receiving the components, during an installation in Brittany in a much purer setting than Paris, a few kilometers from La Rance tidal power plant, the fact of having incorporated only the Qbase 8 mkIII into a system was already having a direct impact on the concentration of sound elements and the reduction of background noise.



In Paris, where the environment is far more polluted, the integration of Heimdall 2 cables instantly increases the brightness of the sound and the contour of the musical elements, whether plugged into an amplifier or a source, the best being to use several to reach all the elements. Even on the Kuzma turntable power supply, as recommended by Franck Kuzma himself, the result is real, with a smoother analog sound, simply due to the improved precision of the rotation.

When the Frey 2 is added to the amplifier, the diffe-



rence is even more impressive, as if the speakers had changed volume, in addition to having modified their drivers to better color the timbres. All components benefit, although we're still talking about audiophile-style musical transcription, which tends to improve sound substances without making them perfectly realistic.

The Qbase mkIII goes even further than the mkII in reducing noise and thus darkening the soundstage in favor of relief and realism, but the most obvious difference is between listening with and without the barrette. While our primary system has been on Nordost for over five years, and the new strip - which is simpler to isolate thanks to the Stand Mount - goes even further than the previous version, it's clearly on our second system, previously on an Oelbach audiophile power strip, that the brightening and aeration gained by the introduction of a Qbase explode to the ear, and finally do justice to all the tracks played back by eliminating all disruptive resonance effects.

OUR CONCLUSION

Already evident in a healthy environment, the fact of adding mains cables and reproducing the protocol in a polluted environment like a big European capital, by adding a power strip upstream of a system, demonstrates the importance of making the current processing of a hi-fi system reliable, an undeniable know-how of the American brand in this field. And if the question still arises as to when you should invest in a cable costing around € 1.000 / \$ 1.000 / £ 1.000 to power a hi-fi product, the answer with a power strip and an upstream cable is more obvious, since the improvement instantly affects all the elements of the system, rather than one product in particular. This real investment (Qbase mkIII at € 2.600 + 2 x Heimdall 2 at a minimum of € 840) cannot reasonably be made for a system costing less than € 5.000, but in view of the gain in clarity and the reduction in noise, even upon a small Luxman tube amplifier or a Sugden headphone amp, we cannot recommend it enough, as its contribution to music is so important! ■