

DECEMBER 2017



# VOCALIS LOOM

COUNTRY OF ORIGIN



<http://www.6moons.com/audioreviews2/vovox/1.html>

Reviewer: Srajan Ebaen

Financial interests: <http://www.6moons.com/financialinterests.html>

Sources: 27" iMac with 5K Retina display, 4GHz quad-core engine with 4.4GHz turbo boost, 3TB Fusion Drive, 16GB SDRAM, OSX Yosemite, PureMusic 3.01, Tidal & Qobuz lossless streaming, COS Engineering D1 & H1, AURALiC Vega, Aqua Hifi Formula, Fore Audio DAISy 1, Apple iPod Classic 160GB (AIFF), Astell&Kern AK100 modified by Red Wine Audio, Cambridge Audio iD100, Pro-Ject Dock Box S Digital, Pure i20, Questyle QP1R]

Preamplifier: Nagra Jazz, Vinnie Rossi LIO (AVC module), COS Engineering D1, Wyred4Sound STP-SE Stage II

Power & integrated amplifiers: Pass Labs XA30.8; FirstWatt SIT1, F5, F6, F7; Crayon Audio CFA-1.2; Goldmund Job 225; Aura Note Premier; Wyred4Sound mINT; Nord Acoustics One SE Up NC500MB monos; Linnenberg Allego monos

Loudspeakers: Albedo Audio Aptica; EnigmAcoustics Mythology 1; soundkaos Wave 40; Boenicke Audio W5se; Zu Audio Druid V & Submission; German Physiks HRS-120; Eversound Essence

Cables: Complete loom of Zu Event; Ocellia OCC loom: KingRex uArt, Zu and LightHarmonic LightSpeed double-header USB cables; Tombo Trøn S/PDIF; van den Hul AES/EBU; AudioQuest Diamond glass-fibre Toslink; Black Cat Cable redlevel Lupo

Power delivery: Vibex Granada/Alhambra and Three 11R

Equipment rack: Artesania Audio Exoteryc double-wide 3-tier with optional glass shelves, Exoteryc Krypton and glass amp stands [on loan]

Sundry accessories: Acoustic System resonators

Room: Rectangular 5.5 x 15m open floor plan with two-storey gabled ceiling, wood-sleeved steel trusses and stone-over-concrete flooring

Review component retail: Vocalis IC direct from \$280; Vocalis IC protect from \$305; Vocalis IC balance from \$330; Vocalis IC digital USB from \$230; Vocalis IC digital LAN Cable \$210; Vocalis power cable from \$250

**Vovox.** This Swiss cable firm launched in 2002 under materials engineer Jürg Vogt. He plays the bass. His band's guitarist had replaced his musical instrument cable with hifi cable and heard clear changes. Sacrilege. This incident became the impetus for Vogt's research into cables. Logically, his professional background looked at the issue not so much from an electrical as materials perspective. His musical background explains why Vovox pro audio sales (for musical instruments, stages, concert halls and recording studios) eclipse consumer audio. As a musician, it's not only where Jürg is from and began but, from a materials perspective again, professional installations need *far* longer looms than domestic



systems. Despite lower pricing for their pro cabling, one may sell Vovox by the kilometre not metre. Back to consumers, I first encountered Jürg's black polyester-sleeved leashes with trademark orange labeling—those cloth flags double as directional markers for the load—in Souolution's factory system. Vovox have long collaborated with their Swiss electronics colleagues to define their good-better-best hifi lines of vocalis, textura and textura fortis.



With Jürg soliciting a review without preference, I invoked editor's privilege of 'know thy readers'. Given their exhaustion with costly cables, I asked for his entry-level rather than premium stuff, albeit as a complete loom for total Vovox *immersion*. Here a 1m pair of RCA interconnects gets €355 direct/unshielded, €385 protect/shielded. A 1m XLR fetches €395. A 2.5m pair of speaker cable (this also comes in white or grey to appease the interior decorator) wants €460. A 1m USB 2.0 link is €267. Vovox power cords come in initio and textura flavours. For one metre, those cost €185 and €380

respectively. A standard hifi can thus be wired up vocalis style without a Swiss numbered bank account. For our system, getting vocal meant a 1m USB from iMac to DAC, 1m XLR from DAC to preamp, 6m XLR from preamp to amps, 3m speaker cables, numerous 1m power cords terminated US style to fit our Vibex power filters, one 1m and one 3m cord terminated with UK plugs for between the wall and the source/amp AC filters. For a look at the Vovox textura range, refer to our syndicated <http://www.6moons.com/audioreviews2/vovox2/1.html> by fairaudio colleague Frank Hakopians.



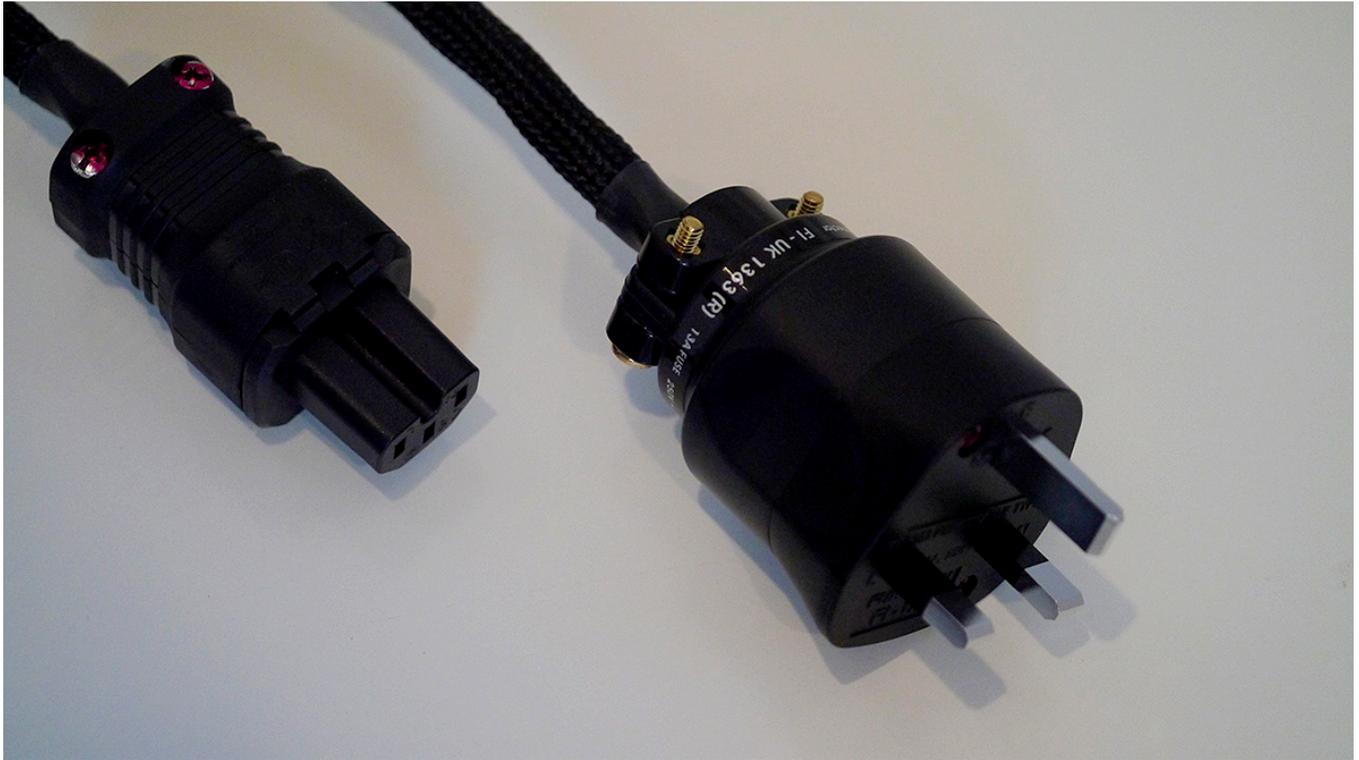
**Delivered in an amp-sized but *far* lighter carton**, the innards of my temporary but complete front-to-back Swiss loom broke out into these simple boxes. Each contained the cable type and length marked on its sticker except for the 6m XLR pair. There each channel occupied its own box. Our 6-month old Bengal kitten Chai sniffed out the inventory, then walked off satisfied that all was in order. His sister Nori couldn't be bothered. Cables. What do girls want with cables? She's into diamonds. There's a lesson in there. Somewhere.



The actual cables felt robust, springy and surprisingly light. For digital I had USB and AES/EBU links, for analog short DAC-to-preamp and long pre-to amp XLR, for speakers banana-ended 3-metre stretches whose ribbon-type makeup separated two outer solid-core conductors with a stiff inner cloth spacer.

And I had enough power cords to connect to our two Vibex conditioners from the wall; and from there to all the rest including our LinnenberG mono amps.

The massive UK-style Furutech plugs for my two wall connections looked positively fiendish hanging off their skinny leads but manufacturing options for quality UK terminations aren't exactly legion and we do like our knobs big.



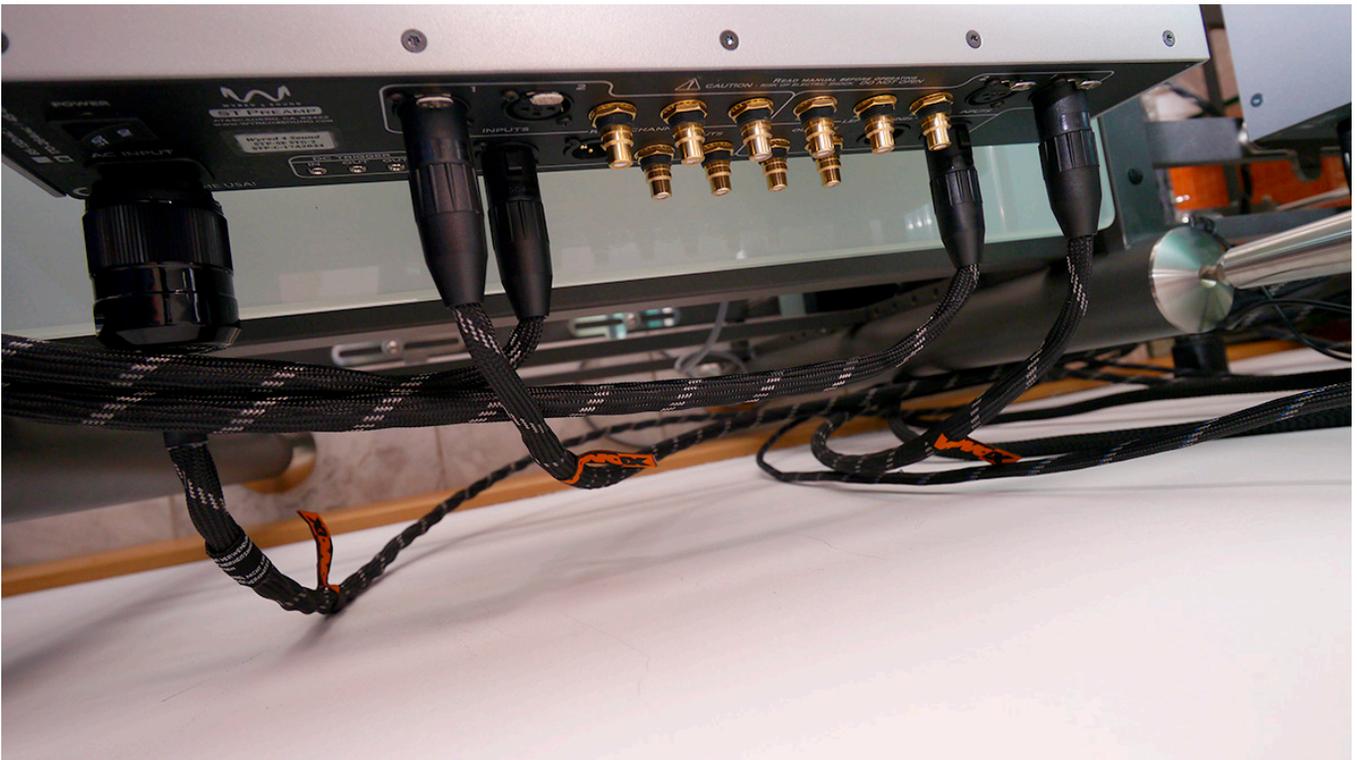
Befitting the vocalis price point, the bananas were of simpler non-locking pedigree and this overlay clearly shows the speaker cable's very basic geometry.



Boss Jörg Vogt plainly doesn't believe in blinging up their connectors so it's rubber rather than metal molds which shroud these USB ends.



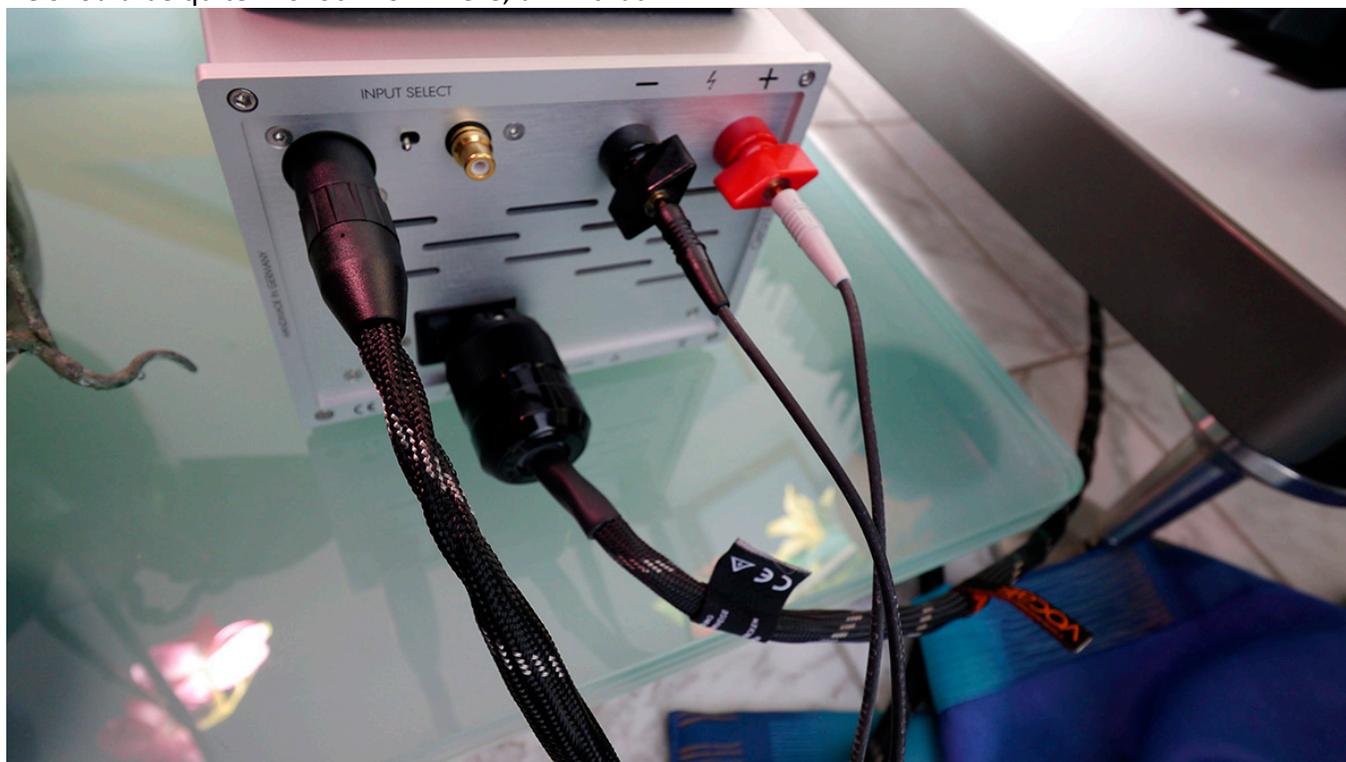
Concluding my physical inspection, I would side with Chai and Nori whose entire life philosophy—play, eat, sleep, go to the bathroom, repeat—is best summed up with "why make things more complicated?" Quite.



**Climate. Aroma. Mood. Perspective.** The resultant acronym C.A.M.P. could be shorthand for the type discussion showgoing audiophiles might have about certain rooms. They hear one of these qualities very strongly. They wonder why. What brought it about? Sometimes it's obvious. An mbl room's

outrageous soundstaging points directly at its 360° radiation pattern. The same exhibit's relative brightness also points at it, particularly the big omni tweeters. Those disperse far more HF into the room than directional 1" dome tweets. That clearly causes a different power response. Those are the easy cases. When it's about a particular *feel* not hard spec-anchored aspect, it's down to fancy guesswork. What bits of hardware or strange interactions might be responsible? "This room sounds particularly easeful and elegant. If I wanted more of that quality in my own system, what would I have to change?" If the room was hosted by a speaker maker, their personnel is likely to highlight specific design elements of the transducers as causes for your observation. You walk off thinking that you must buy new expensive speakers with Beryllium and nano this-or-that drivers. Drat. If the hosts make a flagship passive preamp, they'll point at that. Sayonara shiny active tube preamp you already own? Sniff.

Welcome to the rabbit hole. From here on out, guesswork is mostly downhill. It'll be the rare occasion that you suspect and rightly identify a specific cable loom as the prime contributor for the special quality you're tracking down. Yet my experience with a full set of Vovox vocalis brought home just how potent 'lowly' cables can be on C.A.M.P. Just one of its terms suffices by the way. I gave you four to increase chances that one of these will really speak to you. That's because we're not chasing soundstaging, tonal balance or other basics. We're inquiring into a change of gestalt or milieu. Today our unique advantage over blind guesswork at hifi shows is clear. We know *exactly* what happened. We made the swap. We tore out our own wires and replaced every last one with this Swiss stuff. When we hit 'play', we suddenly found ourselves in a very different - well, pick one... climate, aroma, mood, perspective. If we believed that only amp or speaker changes could do that; or preferred that they did - we should be quite in shock now. Here, drink that.



Before we get to today's 'what', let's reiterate the simple 'how'. Experience suggests that only by going *full loom* can we expect any profound course correction. Replacing just one connection inside a willy-nilly mix of assorted cables tends to not come close. That's pulling and pushing in all different directions. It confuses the issue. It's when we use a cable loom based on the same cohesive build (conductors, geometry, insulation, terminations) that everything adds up in a single direction. Only that will make the greatest possible difference. It's just rare that for cable reviews, makers provide a

complete front-to-back loom especially when in our sector, pricing quickly escalates. Add non-standard lengths which a reviewer might require. Those could be a tough sell afterwards; or require cutting up into shorter lengths. It's easy to see why not more cable reviews go the full hog. With Vovox having gone through the trouble of doing just that, it's fair to applaud them for it. They provided me with a unique opportunity which proved most educational. So thank you, Mr. Jürg Vogt & team. Much appreciated.

**Having properly set expectations for a profound dead-obvious impact**, here's the result: exceptionally easeful, soft and deeply *relaxed*, with no loss of timing or concomitant speed but slightly reduced resolution and drive. Another set of solid-core wires through some years back had been auteur Franck Tchang's Parisian LiveLines. Their different metalurgy—short 2mm splices of silver or platinum at the ends of pure copper and in often dissimilar sequence for the hot and return legs—had made for a very fast, exciting adrenaline-type effect. Sharing with them the articulate precise timing, the Swiss vocalis then were of a very different temperament. The closest to their very laid-back effect had been FirstWatt's F4 amplifier. It has zero voltage gain to solely act as current buffer. The Vovox version of a mellow summer's climate had a billowing aspect related to what the Feliks Audio Euforia's OTL triodes injected in preamp mode. But because there was no concomitant blurring in time, the cables didn't add the echoic fill I described in the Euforia review. Rather than minor fuzziness from deliberate soft focus, relaxation Vovox style married adroit articulation to textural pliability. The soft part was reminiscent of tubes, the speed more typical of wide bandwidth DC-coupled amps whose reach avoids phase shift in the frequency extremes.



A different pointer at the same grouping of qualities would invoke the edge articulation of silver without its lit-up treble, lean bass and overall damping. Key to the easeful vocalis style was a certain textural no-feedback looseness. This, *nomen est omen*, pointed right back at the *textura* moniker of the dearer models which also applies to the budget range. It made for a big non-agitated mellow sound which lingered rather than projected. That downplayed elements like incisiveness, aggression and grip. Those contributed to what one paragraph above I named slightly reduced resolution and drive. It's why vocalis easefulness didn't result in the gush factor of Samuel Furon's Ocellia solid-core silver wires in their kautschuk sleeves of crushed crystal filler. Gushing implies extrovert energy or pressurization. Here

the Swiss played it more limpid or introvert. I expect that growing raw conductor mass in the solid-core power cords (with CE mark!) to that of our usual Titan Audio Eros single-crystal copper jobs might increase the perception of drive; and that moving up in the Vovox catalogue to pricier textura models will increase resolution.

Here it's important to remember the attractive tags of Vovox's Swiss-made entry range; and how with it, one can mock up parts of an energetic milieu which many pursue with valve gear. With vocalis, one needs not a single glowing bottle yet simultaneously secures bandwidth and speed which, from valves, tend to be a far costlier enterprise than budget Sino imports. I found it most enlightening how pronounced and instant this sonic effect was after I'd swapped whole cable looms. I also found it very interesting how now three solid-core cables of my acquaintance (ASI, Ocellia & Vovox) share elements which I would trace back to proper timing as a lack of phase shift. In that context, using 1MHz amplifiers and speakers which don't confuse the time domain pays dividends. Novel for me were Vovox's non-metallic XLR connectors which seemingly weighed nothing compared to their usual full-metal-jacket brethren; and that solid-core power cords could get a CE cert.

**In conclusion**, a streamlined front-to-back loom like Vovox vocalis can influence the feel or gestalt of musical playback in ways which many believe are exclusive to 'proper' hardware like big amps and expensive speakers. Because most systems are built over time to involve plenty of trade-in or sell'n'buy fixes, their cable looms tend to likewise be patchwork. And that haphazard approach to our system's blood supply is how and where we miss out or at best, dilute our results. Where changing just one cable should mostly have a rather small impact, redoing the entire loom can be *imposing* in its effectiveness and set the course direction we hoped for without touching any of our electronics or speakers. Whether a set of Vovox vocalis has your name on it depends solely on whether the above descriptions of their sonics are where you want to... well, C.A.M.P\*. out. If yes, I can guarantee a most effective relocation service; and far easier and cheaper than moving house. Fascinating!

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*\* Those who only read a review's concluding paragraphs will be at a proper loss here. Fear not, reading the review in its entirety explains all.*

*Srajan Ebaen*