

- Better sound for 100 euros:
RCA plug sensation from WBT

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Money well spent



Many roads lead to Rome, and there are almost as many ways to boost the sound quality from your hifi or surround system. One method that is not particularly well known but extremely effective is to replace the standard RCA plugs. HiFi TEST put the WBT nextgen 0110 plugs on trial to see what can be achieved for a price of around 100 euros.

It was developed more than 60 years ago by the RCA company and has become the standard connection for analogue and digital signals – the RCA plug. In electrical and mechanical terms, it generally performs its function as the connector between a suitable cable and a matching RCA socket without any problems. As always, however, the devil is in the detail, and WBT in Essen has been focusing on the finer points of RCA plugs for several decades now. The team led by company founder Wolfgang Thörner has perfected the art of plug connectors and screw-in terminals. Many producers of amplifiers, DVD

players and loudspeakers value the dependable and superb contact properties of WBT plugs and use them in their own products.

Characteristic impedance

The term "characteristic impedance" comes from the field of high-frequency technology and is used to describe the (extremely complex) phenomenon of the correct matching of signal source, signal cable and signal receiver. If these components are not correctly matched – in other words, if there is no uniform characteristic impedance – signal losses and



The inner design of a nextgen 0110: apart from the actual contacts made of metal, the plug is made of special heat-resistant plastic material

distortions are more or less bound to occur. For reasons relating to its design, a conventional RCA plug does not meet the ideal requirement of 75 ohms. The resulting effects in the audiofrequency range may not be as pronounced as in other ranges, but Thörner is a perfectionist. He took a closer look at this problem – and solved it by developing the "WBT nextgen 0110".

Nextgen

The name "nextgen" stands for a totally new design concept for RCA plugs. The "nextgen" (the "next



WBT Managing Director Wolfgang Thörner attaches major important to reliable craftsmanship. In Essen, every individual plug is assembled and quality-tested by specialists.

one set still with the "as standard" fitted plugs to allow comparison with the upgraded cables. From the high-end segment, we chose an HMS Grand Finale (around 850 euros) and a high-grade top-flight cable in the form of an Oehlbach XXL Series 2 (around 130 euros); we also converted a "free" standard included cable.

Listening test

We started off with a comparison between the thin, black standard cable with fitted low-cost plugs and the improved WBT version. Apart from a slightly "brighter" overall sound reproduction, we were not able to ascertain any major improvements. This came as no surprise, as the properties of the cable evidently nipped any attempt to upgrade the plugs in the bud. So we quickly moved on to the Oehlbach XXL, whose



Clear as day: instead of the standard ring-shaped external contact, earth connection is via a single pin.

generation") doesn't have an external ring as earth contact like other plugs but is fitted with a single contact pin. In addition to offering the accustomed WBT quality – i.e. contact reliability – and mechanical stability of WBT connectors, the "WBT nextgen 0110" meets the full range of requirements for an ideal RCA plug with a characteristic impedance of 75 ohms. These plugs are available for the upgrading of existing cables either separately or in a pack of four (around 100 euros), and an even better version with silver (instead of cooper) contacts costs around 160 euros for a set of four.

Abstract theory or true improvement in sound quality? To remove any doubt, we conducted in-depth listening trials to find out the truth. To this end, we cut the fitted plugs off three representative sets of stereo RCA cables, carefully reinsulated them and soldered four nextgen 0110s to each cable set. This is fairly easy to do, but anyone who doesn't feel confident enough to do the cutting and soldering themselves can leave the job to a specialist dealer. The subsequent listening test featured six cable sets, with

cable material is of far superior design and turns in an excellent performance even in the standard supplied version. And voilà! Norah Jones sounded even smoother, was far more buoyant, and the music had a substantially higher "goosepimple" factor. Any kind of music we played sounded more "grown-up" overall. The effect produced by the HMS Grand Finale was more subtle but no less pleasing. The superb sound supplied by the OEM version of the HMS Grand Finale was even more relaxed and laid back after the WBT plugs were fitted, and the spatial effect had even more depth and precision. Even the bass was deeper and more dynamic.

Conclusion

What could you buy for 100 euros that improves the sound of your hifi or AV system anywhere near as much as changing the original RCA plugs for WBT's nextgen 0110? We know of no comparable product and unreservedly recommend the upgrading of your RCA cables. This presupposes, of course, that you already use quality cables, which you can buy for as little as 50 euros as a stereo set from various suppliers. And you do already use brand name cables, don't you?

Michael Voigt

WBT nextgen 0110

Price	around 100 euros (stereo set)
Sales	WBT, Essen
Hotline	+49 20 54 / 87 55 20
Internet	www.wbt.de

Bewertung

- + Major improvement in sound quality
- + Extremely well made



WBT nextgen 0110

Peak performance

Price/Performance ratio:
Very good

nextgen™

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