

# The WBT-0110 Cu nextgen Phono-Plug

by Roy Gregory

Phono-plugs, indeed, connectors of almost all types, are amongst the most misunderstood things in audio. Massive, gold-plated creations of ever increasing weight and mechanical complexity seem to be de rigueur if you want to sell today's ever more expensive cables. Not because the manufacturers believe they sound better but because the public demand and expect it. Yet, by and large, these gilt encrusted artefacts simply undermine the performance the end user is paying so much to achieve.

DNM started by making amps out of plastic. It wasn't long before that low-mass, non-metallic philosophy had extended to embrace the plugs on their solid-core inter-connects. The benefits were clearly audible in comparison to more ornate alternatives and customers were happy to extend an alternative philosophy that had already embraced solid-core conductors. But then, the leads themselves only cost around £30. Increase that by a factor of 100 and purchasers might not be so willing to contemplate tacky little plastic mouldings and bits of bent metal. They hardly extend the image of precision engineering after all.

The first design to make a stab at re-engineering the lowly phono-plug into something sonically a little more serious was the by now legendary Eichmann Bullet Plug. Reviewed back in Issue 12 the simplicity itself Bullet



Plug sonically destroyed the competition and did so at an extremely affordable price. It was however, not without its problems – mainly mechanical in nature. The reliance on plastic injection mouldings made the plug vulnerable to excessive heat when soldering as well as clumsy handling. I've never broken one but I know plenty of people who've never had one that hasn't broken. Heavy handed they might be, but it's enough to deter other manufacturers from fitting them as standard, despite their acknowledged sonic benefits. The other issue surrounds the single size of barrel on offer, a situation which impairs both strain relief and cable compatibility. Nevertheless, many DIY customers have fitted these plugs to a whole range of leads and are ecstatically happy with the results.

Clearly, something had to give - and it has, in the shape of WBT's 0110 nextgen plug. It's really not too strong to say that WBT looked at the Bullet Plug, recognised the lesson it was teaching them and re-engineered it to higher standards of mechanical integrity, adding a few wrinkles of their own along the way, as well as a matching socket. The end-result is a surprisingly solid, plastic construction.

In order to examine the performance of the WBT plug I had a manufacturer fit them to a set of high-quality leads. At the same time I had an identical set made with Silver Bullet plugs and another with Neutriks. They were then run-in both with the cable toaster and music, producing a test sample of three identical leads in all respects save the plugs on the end of them. (The manufacturer in question asked to remain anonymous in order to ward off a host of enquiries for plugs and re-termination. Don't expect your cable company to re-terminate existing leads, or even brand new ones, to individual order!)

The end results were extremely interesting. It was immediately apparent that both the Silver Bullets and the WBTs sounded significantly better than the Neutriks, which offered no benefits at all, other than their mechanical integrity (and even that is suspect, the sprung earth connections being a weak spot, sonically and physically). ►

**hi-fi+**

www.hifiplus.com  
Reprinted from Issue 37

► However, the precise differences between the two plastic bodied designs were fascinating and far more subtle.

Let's start with the Silver Bullet. Compared with the Neutrik it offers a far more natural and convincing presentation. There's much greater transparency, focus and detail, crisper micro dynamics and tremendous intimacy from the subtle textures, accents and inflexions they effortlessly reveal. Music is also far more fluid with a natural pace and breath to proceedings. Hesitations in tempo are much more apparent and carry far more musical relevance, while the inner harmonic complexity of



instruments is laid bare.

Simple recordings take on an almost crystalline clarity and breathtaking immediacy. The piano and vocal, straight to two-track recording of 'Some People's Live's' (Janice Ian, *Breaking Silence*) is a perfect illustration. There is a delicacy and poise to the piano notes, an effortless flow to the phrases, embracing and underlining the hesitant tempo that gives the instrumental lines their fragile beauty. The complexity of the instrument adds power to the sparingly used left hand, while the texture and breathy vibrance of Ian's vocal is wrenchingly intimate.

Turning to the WBTs we find a different but ultimately even more impressive performance. Whilst they lack the immediately obvious detail and transparency of the Silver Bullets, the 0110s deliver a more integrated, grounded, weighty and

coherent picture. The piano phrases on the Janis Ian track have more weight and shape and careful listening to other material reveals greater low-frequency clarity and definition, tone and texture. Indeed, the tonal balance of the WBT plugs is more natural, along with more dimensional

images and greater musical presence and body.

Listening to the upper register piano notes you realise that the shape of the notes, their percussive quality and decay is far more apparent and realistic. The vocal line is also more naturally weighted, and if it lacks the breathy immediacy that's so impressive with the Silver Bullets, it makes up for it by being integrated and scaled into a



single coherent whole along with the piano.

It's this contrast that really separates these two terminations; on one hand the holistic, on the other the particular. Whereas the WBTs create a single acoustic space, peopled with solid images and instruments, the Silver Bullets concentrate on the minutiae of individual elements, producing a sharply lit and highlighted presentation, redolent with micro-dynamic detail and texture. In contrast the 0110s deliver a more complete and tellingly, a more expressive performance. Whilst both plugs bring tremendous dynamic tracking and fluidity to the music, it's the WBT that makes the most sense out of the information, the most easily read message from the music.

Those of you who actually bothered to read the title of this piece in its entirety might well have noticed the Cu suffix appended to the WBT product. Yes, it refers to the copper conductive elements and yes, as you have by now surmised, there's also a Ag (or silver, to the chemically challenged amongst you) model on offer. That has to represent the next step in this particular investigation. In the meantime, whilst the WBT-0110 undoubtedly isn't the final word in phono-plug design, it genuinely does represent the first example of the Next Generation. Expect to see a lot of them; cost effective, mechanically adept and sonically supreme, at least for the present, there really is no excuse not to use them. Now, if we could only persuade hardware manufacturers to fit the sockets we could be onto something really good...



Web: [www.wbt.de](http://www.wbt.de)  
Tel: + 49 (0) 2054 875520  
Email: [info@wbt.de](mailto:info@wbt.de)