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Neil Gader

## Joe Perfito, President, Clarus Cable

### What ignited your interest in the high end? Did it come from the music side or the electronics side?

Originally, it came from the electronics side. In 1959, my brother opened The Stereo Shop in Hartford, CT. While I was there, he demonstrated a McIntosh/KLH/Thorens system. I'd never heard music reproduced like that. It blew me away. In 1966, while serving in the U.S. Air Force, I acquired a Mac 1500 receiver and a pair of KLH 6 speakers. From 1968–1975, I worked at The Stereo Shop where I developed a love of music and high-end equipment.

### How do you explain the distinction between high-end audio and conventional hi-fi to someone unfamiliar with the hobby?

Conventional hi-fi is about listening to music. High-end audio is about becoming emotionally involved with the music—the tonal balance, the size and depth of the soundstage, the imaging of the instruments and the vocalist. Conventional hi-fi provides music; high-end audio provides a musical experience.

### What led you to cables and not some other audio segment?

In 1963, I graduated from NYU with a degree in Electrical Engineering. From 1975 until 1990, I worked for McIntosh Laboratory as a Regional Sales Manager and then National Sales Manager. In the 1970s and 80s, the wire and cable companies were proposing theories of how audio signals moved through interconnect cables. The difficulty I had with these “theories” is that they were merely opinions being stated as fact with no supporting documentation other than listening experience. While I don't disagree with listening experience, I do disagree with opinion purported to be fact. When I left McIntosh in December of 1990, I decided to start a wire and cable company [Tributaries] that would make high-quality interconnect cables based on scientific principles. Many retailers welcomed this “fresh” approach.

### Cables could easily be called the most misunderstood component in audio. Do you think that's fair?

Cables are the Rodney Dangerfield of audio components. Quite a number of magazines list cables as “accessories.” That's what is not fair. An accessory is something that is added to an existing product to make it more efficient or easier to use.



An audio system won't function without cables (wireless, of course, is the exception). Cables are just as important as the power amp, processor, or speakers. The right choice of cables can make all the difference in the overall performance of a high-end audio system.

### What percentage of a system budget would you allot to cables?

That depends on the system: for conventional hi-fi systems, 10% to 15% of the cost of the components; for high-end audio systems, 20% to 25%.

### Do you think that very high priced cabling creates a perception that high-end priorities are out of whack?

I guess that would depend on whose perception. From the perspective of a conventional hi-fi system owner, the pricing of some high-end cables is unbelievable, meant only for people who have more money than brains. As always, education is the answer. When a prospective Clarus customer is thinking about upgrading cables, it is important that he be given a presentation about the company, its design philosophy, the specific cable design, the fit-and-finish of the final product. I suggest he/she then take the cables home and substitute them for his/her current cables, type for type. First the speaker cables, listen, then the audio cables, listen, and finally the power cables. If the customer has had his system for at least three months and has done extensive listening, changes in performance will be obvious.

### Best “how-to” advice to a person about to assemble his first high-end system?

Do your homework! Go to high-end retailers that have brands recognized in magazines like TAS. Research the reviews and then talk with the salespeople at the retailer's store. When you think you have made a choice, ask the dealer to set the system up in your home for you to audition. Don't be afraid to experiment and substitute. When it's right, you'll know it.

### Analog or digital—do you have a preference?

Analog. Vinyl has the warmth and richness.

### Going forward, what are the greatest challenges confronting the high end?

Getting young people involved in listening to music from a properly designed two-channel system. **tas**