

**FOLLOW-UP REVIEW**

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## Audio Art Cable IC-3SE Interconnects

by Sid Vootla

My communication with Robert Fritz of Audio Art Cable about his IC-3SE interconnects began late last summer, when he hinted at the development of a higher-grade and more expensive version of the IC-3, which [I reviewed in early 2006](#). My review of the IC-3 concluded that it was an excellent value for money at the introductory price of \$85 USD per meter pair (currently at \$114.99). Well, by this standard, the IC-3SE, at \$239 a meter pair, can almost be considered a "cost no object" design, though by audiophile standards it's an entry-level offering. But then, that is the very premise on which Robert operates his business: offering products that return value multiple times over their asking prices, especially in comparison to the competition.

The IC-3SE consists of the same core wire as the IC-3, which features silver-coated copper conductors in a twisted-pair geometry. The conductors have an aluminum-mylar shield for noise rejection. Enhancements over the stock cables include Xhadow precision RCA or XLR connectors along with Cardas's Quad Eutectic silver solder for the joints. Furthermore, the aesthetic appearance of the cable is greatly improved by the use of a black tech-flex jacket and branded Audio Art Cable heat shrink. The overall construction and the look of these cables are top-notch.



The body of the Xhadow RCA connector is machined from pure aluminum rod stock and is substantial to see and touch. Yet this very robustness can be a cause for concern if the RCA connectors of partnering equipment are not adequately spaced -- a fact I discovered to my dismay when I tried using the cables with my Rega Apollo CD player. Potential buyers should make sure that these cables will work with their equipment. Audio Art's 30-day satisfaction guarantee will definitely help here.

Audio Art's recommendation for the cables is to allow for 100-150 hours of burn-in for optimum performance. I used them for approximately 120 hours before I began any critical listening. Since I have been using the IC-3s for the past two years, I am quite familiar with the Audio Art sound and was expecting the "SE" interconnects to sound better. However, I was mystified by the tremendous improvement I heard. There was unmitigated frequency extension at both ends of the spectrum. Specifically, the low bass seemed notched down by an octave. "Temple Caves" from Mickey Hart's *Planet Drum* CD (Rykodisc RCD 10206) has a low-frequency drum beat (presumably the Earth drum) playing deep in the soundstage that really startled me. I have heard this track

previously, but it has never had the impact and tactile response that the presentation with the IC-3SE displayed.

The strength of any audio system lies in its ability to portray the immediacy and palpability of female vocals, and I am always conscious of any component or accessory in a system that detracts from this. With the IC-3SEs in my system, Diana Krall's husky inflection from her *The Girl in the Other Room* CD (Verve 02498-61533) was presented in a most convincing and pleasurable manner. Another characteristic that I value is a system's ability to reproduce a credible facsimile of the recording's space. On Patricia Barber's *Companion* SACD (Mobile Fidelity MFSL UDSACD 2023) the Audio Art cables conveyed the acoustic space of the Green Mill Jazz club in Chicago, where this live performance was recorded, with fervent attention to detail. With my eyes shut, I felt transported to the venue and one amongst the audience.

The IC-3SEs demonstrated dynamic prowess in abundance, and they also acquitted themselves very nicely in terms of the scale of the soundstage they portrayed, pushing the soundstage well out into three-dimensional space. "Two Step" from Dave Matthews' Band *Crash* CD (RCA 7863-66904-2) features a dense mix of instruments that can sound raucous if the system's resolution is sub-par. The IC-3SE helped define each instrument in space and convey clarity and detail to the mix.

While exhibiting all of these desirable attributes, the interconnects continued to maintain impressive neutrality by stepping politely aside, allowing the music to flow. This, in my opinion, is any cable's most important function and why I was attracted to the IC-3 initially. If I were to pick nits, I would caution using these cables in an already bright-sounding system, lest they accentuate that tendency even more. For this reason, it is very important to let the cables burn in adequately, as they can sound sharp and brittle before they settle down. To address this issue, you can consider taking advantage of the special burn-in service provided by Audio Art, which costs \$12.50.

When compared to Audio Art's own IC-3, the IC-3SE preserved the essence of the less expensive cable's sonic signature, but the performance of the IC-3SE was in an entirely different league, offering greater frequency extension, superior dynamic ability, and more expansive soundstaging. When compared to the similarly priced Kimber Kable Hero interconnects (\$155 per meter pair), the IC-3SE held its own and more. There was definitely greater bass extension and tautness with the IC-3SE, though the Hero seemed more capable in terms of large-scale volume shifts. I preferred the midrange presentation of the IC-3SE, which was richer, while the Hero sounded more laid-back in the treble than the IC-3SE. Detail retrieval with both cables was almost equal, with the IC-3SE presenting a slightly more expansive soundstage. Both cables were fundamentally neutral. The choice of either one of these cables will depend on the system in which they will be used. Within the context of my system, I preferred the IC-3SE.

The Audio Art Cable IC-3SE is a first-rate interconnect that will not be out of place in systems costing several thousands of dollars. Its impressive bass extension as well as its detail retrieval along with its ability to flesh out a commanding soundstage while remaining neutral and transparent vault it near the top of the ranks in its price class. In these tough economic times, the IC-3SE's reasonable price and stellar performance make it very easy to recommend.

...Sid Vootla

[sidv@soundstage.com](mailto:sidv@soundstage.com)

**Audio Art Cable IC-3SE Interconnects**

**Price:** \$239 USD per meter pair.

**Warranty:** One year parts and labor.

Audio Art Cable  
4665 Altadena Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92115  
Phone: (619) 255-6451

E-mail: [robfriz@cox.net](mailto:robfriz@cox.net)

Website: [www.audioartcable.com](http://www.audioartcable.com)