

KLEI gZero20 ICs by Steve Reeve (Fine Art)

Yes, this is yet another review of the most recent "Top Of The Line" (TOTL) Interconnect from KL (Keith Louis Eichmann) of [KLEInnovations \(KLEI\)](#).

You might recall the KLEI gZero6 ICs reviewed here last June and then the KLEI gZero10 ICs also reviewed here in October.

- Both reviews stated these interconnects were, at the time of the review, their "Top Of The Line!"
- So I guess you can't accuse Mr. Eichmann of sitting on his laurels.

KL was kind enough to send for review a 1 meter pair of KLEI gZero20 ICs that had already undergone the requisite 300+ hours of burn-in. But even with that laborious task taken care of, it would still take three days for them to settle in.

Unlike KL's previous interconnect cables, where each successive model has a higher performing Harmony RCA plug, the KLEI gZero20 ICs utilizes the same RCA plugs as the KLEI gZero10 IC. Therefore, any improvements attained are a direct result of refinements in the in the gZero Architecture.



Settling-in time aside, it took just 20 minutes after their initial installation for the KLEI gZero20 ICs to reveal the distinguishing features of these cables.

- Their initial presentation of clarity, control, dexterity, dynamics, spatial image, upper frequency extension and bass extension of these interconnects was exemplary and they sounded just a little better than the well used KLEI gZero10 ICs they had just replaced.

However, during that settling in period I did observe a little upper frequency harshness and slight distortion on a couple of 24 bit/192 kHz violin tracks and on VIVALDI's *Recitative and Aria from Cantata RV 679*, there were a couple of times when *Tone Wik's* superb soprano vocal was very shrill. But at the beginning of the third day both of these anomalies had abated and the KLEI gZero20 ICs were now sounding very nice indeed. Since I did not perform a complete burn-in I am unable to comment on what sonic transformations are likely to take place.

- However, If I recall correctly, during the burn-in period of the KLEI gZero10 IC's I was initially a little "underwhelmed" and wondered if they would ever "live up to their TOTL billing". But that was rectified by about the 220 hour mark.
- So I would caution purchasers to expect a similar experience while burning in the KLEI gZero20 ICs.

With the KLEI gZero20 ICs settled in nicely it was time to put them through their paces. Assessing how much better the KLEI gZero10 IC is, when compared to the KLEI gZero6 IC was a relatively easy task.

- Since, for each of the various metrics, such as *dynamic response, clarity, image, bass performance, etc* the improvements were clearly audible and could be observed on most, if not all of the audition tracks.

But assessing the comparative differences between the KLEI gZero10 ICs and the KLEI gZero20 ICs was not quite so clear cut. This is a common occurrence among most audio components, in that, as you approach the upper echelon in the model range, the sonic improvements from one model to the next becomes more subtle for a larger capital outlay. A point that some, myself included, categorize as *Diminishing Returns*.

In the case of these two cables, their tonal presentation, spatial imaging and dynamic response was indicative of their lineage, with the KLEI gZero20 ICs having a slightly *warmer* presentation, with a little more *body* across the board and a spatial image that resulted in a more *believable* ambience. And thus, we enter the world of *Ethereal Awareness*, ie those qualities we attribute to audio equipment that are related more to *feelings*, as opposed to some form of *metric quantification*.

In reality, those *feelings* are simply a product of the cable's metric performance, but since humans cannot always put their finger on exactly what is different in a performance, we have a tendency to express those improvements in a

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more abstract manner. However, with a cable the calibre of the KLEI gZero20 ICs, its performance is so articulate that it really does sound as though it is conveying – *Reality!*

How does one assess *Reality*? I find there are few tracks recorded in the studio that I can use to assess realism, since some studios can be *acoustically challenged*, in which case it is then in the realm of the sound engineer to work their magic. To gauge reality I mostly turn to classical music, mainly because...

- the tracks I tend to use for audition purposes are recorded in some type of concert hall, which provides an abundance of the all important “venue acoustics” and...
- they are often recorded by what some consider to be the most pure form of recording – two solitary microphones – and a smattering of anal sound engineers.

It was while listening to some of these classical tracks that I became aware of just how good the KLEI gZero20 ICs really are. Basically, every well recorded classical track exhibited a level of ambience that was simply not present with the KLEI gZero10 ICs. You also get to experience significantly more space that surrounds the performers on those tracks recorded by much smaller ensembles.

- However on some such recordings, you also get to enjoy the more unpleasant realities of live venue recordings
- eg. the trucks passing by the venue in the background were now far more apparent and very detailed

The price one pays for *Reality*.

Three new CD's I had recently purchased from MA Recordings, which, due to their meticulous attention to detail in sound engineering and exquisite matching of venue to musical temperament, highlighted the very best ambient and spacious qualities that the KLEI gZero20 ICs are capable of conveying. These albums contain some exquisite and varied musical performances – give them a listen, you won't be disappointed:

- Window Mirror, by Miroslav Tadic – classical guitar with a new flavour
- Tonos Y Tonados, by Ensemble La Chimera – a very different ensemble presentation
- Buenos Aires Madrigal, by La Chimera-Furio Zanasi-Ximena Biondo – Tango inspired delights

How did they perform with Analogue components? Since I have always believed the analogue side of my system possesses a slightly higher level of resolution I was expecting a level of improvement commensurate with what I had observed in previous reviews of interconnects in the KLEI gZero product line.

However, it seems my analogue rig decided differently. It appeared as though the KLEI gZero20 ICs had pulled out all the stops and really rose to the occasion.

- With digital playback, I had only been able to discern small improvements between the various metrics of the two interconnects, but with the analogue playback the improvements in dynamics, clarity, high-end extension and imaging were significantly better.
- But the bass extension and bass control displayed only a marginal level of improvement over that which I had observed on the digital side

I found this observation to be surprising, since up to this point, the difference in resolution capabilities between the DAC and the phono stage with each of the prior KLEI gZero interconnect cable auditions had been pretty consistent, ie. the phono stage was always just a little better than my DAC. Suggesting that the performance ceiling of my components had not been reached. On applying some additional thought to this observation, I can only conclude...

- the performance level of the DAC had finally hit its ceiling
- whereas the phono stage was clearly quite capable of so much more

This begs the question.

What is the performance ceiling of the KLEI gZero20 ICs?

Prior to the evaluation I had purchased a new phono cartridge, but unfortunately, it had been delayed by Canada Customs, so it didn't arrive until after I had started the analogue review process. The new cartridge had all the promise of performing significantly better than my older cartridge...

- sporting a “Nude mounted”, Contact Line – “Optimized Contour” diamond stylus on a single crystal Ruby Cantilever
- as opposed to my older cartridge which has a basic spherical diamond mounted onto an aluminum cantilever
- this should result in improvements in high-end detailing, clarity and faster dynamic response

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Now you would be forgiven for thinking tonal differences between two cartridges might “colour” my assessment of certain qualities of the KLEI gZero20 ICs, however...

- both cartridges are the venerable Denon DL 103 moving coil cartridge,
- the newer cartridge having a modified cantilever installed by Soundsmith, a leader in the art of “cartridge modifications”

So, what I was hoping for, on installing the new cartridge, was an extension of those details conveyed with the older cartridge, with few, if any changes in tonal qualities. Well, the new cartridge did not disappoint. But more importantly, the KLEI gZero20 ICs effortlessly conveyed the remarkable details the new cartridge was able to extract from my vinyl. The one outstanding quality of the KLEI gZero20 ICs that was now far more noticeable, was their incredible – *SPEED!*

- By that, I am referring to the ability of a cable to convey a more complete waveform, which translates to realism.
- it’s not only their ability to convey those instantaneous peaks of percussion instruments, which I tend to refer to as dynamic response.
- it’s their ability to convey a warmer more, full bodied presentation.
- particularly of those instruments who’s voice lies in the upper frequencies of the musical spectrum, which can often sound quite thin, shrill or harsh, i.e. with a less competent interconnect.
- but with the KLEI gZero20 ICs, those instruments took on more pleasing quality having more body that more faithfully represents the actual instruments being played – right there in YOUR listening room.

After a couple of weeks of full-time duty on the phono stage, these interconnects just seemed to get even better. Perhaps the improvements were due to an extended settling in period, or perhaps they require a little more burn-in than suggested on the KLE Innovations web site.

Factoring in the 300 hours burn-in already undertaken by KL and the additional time on my system, I think I would probably recommend a burn-in period between 350-400 hours in order for them to reach their full potential. There were a couple of “standout albums” where I felt the KLEI gZero20 Interconnect Cables meticulously conveyed “the soul” of the performance...

- Nostalgia, by Annie Lennox – For me, this is Annie at her finest and her best album ever. A friend listening very casually simply commented *this is soul*. Her delicate vocal inflections are superbly conveyed – with *feeling*.
- Yes, by Jason Mraz – I liked this album from the very first play and it is now one of favourites. It’s production is simple, its sound engineering is clean and detailed and its content is most engaging, but the bonus? – Jason’s soul shines through on every track – even when playing the CD version which came with the vinyl.

I think the word *Beguiling* sums up the performance of the KLEI gZero20 ICs.

Seducing you track by track...

Oblivious of the time...

What better way to spend a cold winter evening!

What is the price one pays for Reality? The KLEI gZero20 ICs are priced at AUD\$1999 for a 1 meter pair. Not chump change by any stretch of the imagination, but more affordable than many interconnects that can only aspire to attain this level of performance.

CONCLUSION

I had mentioned the term *Diminishing Returns* above, since early on in the review process (i.e. on my digital rig), it seemed as though this might be the case i.e. the KLEI gZero20 ICs only appeared *marginally better* than the KLEI gZero10 ICs, for a significantly larger investment. However, auditioning the cables on my analogue rig has changed my opinion, I guess you could say...

My concerns of *Diminishing Returns* have now... Diminished!

I believe the KLEI gZero20 ICs are capable of conveying extremely high levels of resolution and should be considered by all. Why?

- The KLEI gZero20 ICs are extremely good at what they do
- by far, the best in the current KLEI gZero Product Line!
- They will continue to excel with your subsequent component upgrades

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Yes, their price puts them into a different *snack bracket* for many readers, so it begs the question... Are they worth it? If you had asked me that question a few years ago, I would have said... Are you crazy? – it's just a piece of wire!

However, my subsequent *acquisition of knowledge* and exposure to the KLEI product line has changed my mind in so many ways...

- Cables ARE components! ie. ALL CABLES!
- With similar research and development approaches – it's taken KL over 30 years to get to this point
- As complicated in design and manufacture as components in many cases
- With the ability to affect the performance of your entire system.

For some, deciding between the KLEI gZero20 ICs or the KLEI gZero10 ICs will be a no-brainer, one way or the other. For others, cables make no difference, it's all mumbo-jumbo sprinkled with fairy dust. But there are those readers for whom, it becomes a bit like deciding which car to choose?

- a \$240,000 Ferrari, or a \$140,000 Porsche... both are insanely quick, both have impeccable performance metrics, but only one will give them that extra ...

Sense of Exhilaration!

Your Choice!, but I do urge you to try at least one of the KLEI gZero Product Line

gZero™ Architecture Addendum

There is growing chatter on the web pertaining to KL's *gZero™ architecture*. However, not all the chatter was positive...

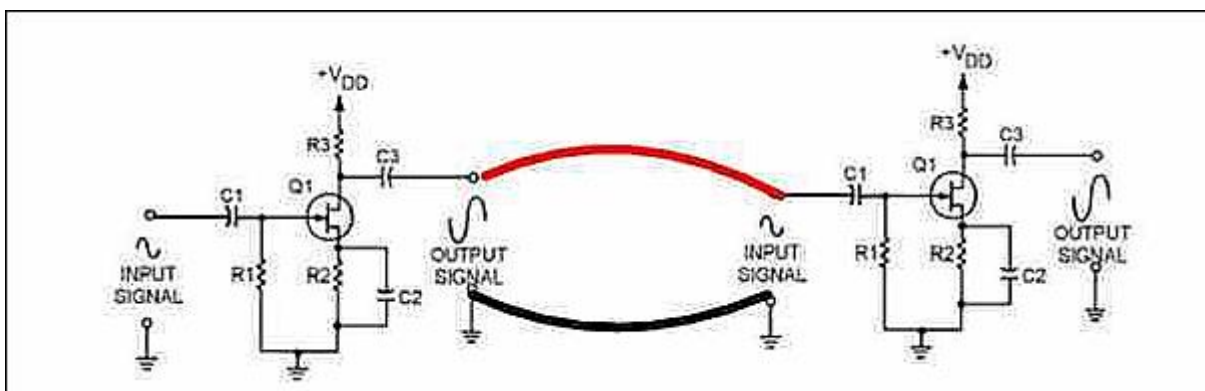
- There were several posts that denounced KL's description of his *gZero™ architecture* on the KLEI Innovations website as just more marketing mumbo-jumbo liberally sprinkled with Fairy Dust.
- Some were of the opinion the description was contrived, to the point of being incomprehensible.
- And one poster was clearly of the opinion that *Mr Eichmann* knows NOT of what he writes.

I, on the other hand, tend to give the benefit of the doubt to a person with over 30 years' experience in the audio industry and who has been responsible for some pretty innovative products, before I go casting aspersions!

So, with my curiosity in tow, I began to investigate what was written. But what unfolded was something quite alien to my own understanding of electronics principles, even with my background in electrical engineering and my years of hobby electronics under my belt.

The Epiphany

The diagram below helped me comprehend exactly what gZero is all about...



As I studied this diagram it became quite apparent that the job of the interconnect is to provide an electrical connection in two separate and very distinct ways:

- Only the signal conductor (RED), conveys the musical signal
- Whereas the neutral conductor (BLACK) simply links the neutral (or ground side) of the two circuits

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The neutral therefore, is NOT the return path for the Signal as many folk believe, but in stark contrast to the signal conductor, should always carry the same potential value as the neutral (or ground side) of the two connected circuits...

Which would be? You Got It... ZERO VOLTS.
or to coin KL's vernacular... gZero, Voila!

Now, for the sake of brevity, I am not going to delve into the issues pertaining to EMI and RFI in cables in this review , but I would encourage you to read [The Significance of Cable Architectures](#), that attempts to provide some insights, i.e. in layman's terms, of some of the more common issues that may be encountered.

My System

- Custom turntable with Denon DL103(modified) phono cartridge on and Audiomods Arm with one piece silver litz cable + KLEI Absolute®Harmony RCA plugs
- Simaudio MOON LP5.3 RS phono stage
- Schiit Bifrost USB DAC with UBER analogue upgrade and Version 2 USB interface Upgrade
- NAIM 5i integrated amp (with passive pre-section)
- Gerchman Acoustics Sonogram speakers
- KLEI gZero6 SCs



A highly recommended product

[Steve Reeve \(Fine Art\)](#)