

Accuphase C-2450 and A-47

Golden Times

Whether you have the sum to spare or would need to save it up little by little: you can hardly make a more high-end oriented investment than in the new Accuphase C-2450 preamp and the A-47 power amp – a whopping sound yield is included.

For prospective Accuphase owners that much is true: once it hurts, but then golden times will be dawning, namely years of joy in perfect workmanship, luxurious comfort and exhilarating sound time and again. The painful moment is at the dealer's cash desk. I know what I'm talking about since I forked out exactly 2998 Deutschmarks for the E-303 integrated amplifier back in 1981. Certainly the amp was also so dear – and precious – to me in the sequel because it involved an enormous, most painstakingly saved up sum for me, a 19-year old draftee. But as soon as the Accuphase was driving my Celestion speakers to undreamt heights, all the pains and doubts were completely gone and replaced by sheer euphoria.

Those memories came back to my mind when the new C-2450 preamp from the Yokohama based prestige maker, joined by the A-47 class-A power amp, were delivering a superb performance in the listening room at a hefty package price of 22,700 euros. Well, everybody should know for themselves on what to spend their more or less hard-earned money. But considering the fact that in Germany the average price for a new car is currently about 30,000 euros, the Japanese team suddenly doesn't appear to be so horrifically priced, the more so as in 15 years' time the tin box will stand rusting on the junkyard, whereas the Accuphase duo, as experience teaches, should probably be almost as fresh as today by then.

Anyway: with such an investment it's all about happiness in the here and now, of course, including the readiness to treat yourself to something good. The financial cut will probably not be as huge as it was for me back then. However, the enthusiasm will be. For with the Japanese amps you can feel the lavish opulence in effort and sound just as much as the commitment to an almost philistine accuracy.

AAVA, the extremely sophisticated "Accuphase analog vari-gain" volume control which is to ensure ultimate, long-term constant precision with finest increments, may serve as an example of this. Where other manufacturers make do with utilizing a very precise classic potentiometer or else a level control via resistor banks, the Accuphase designers – who, by the way, keep rotating within the product groups to give new ideas a chance – were hitting the limits both ways. So they devised this fully analog technology, individually implemented for each channel, to convert the signal into 16 differently weighted currents, their combinations being able to create more than 65,500 intermediate values which allows steps of one-tenth of a decibel over a wide range. Not that anyone would need this mega resolution. But it's definitely cool to watch the display digits run up and down after the decimal point.

Opulence – precision – sound

Of all that the listener will not notice a thing because the level control, hence the volume knob, which is suspended floating on isolators in a solid aluminum block, turns so softly and smoothly as if its axle were moving a top-level sliding contact potentiometer instead of a sensor mechanism for angle detection.

Not only the AAVA works in a channel-discrete manner. Likewise the strong power supply of the preamp not only features separate banks with smoothing caps, but has even two transformers. That way a mutual interference between the two channels, which might do harm to the spatial imaging, can largely be ruled out.

Soundwise, as was almost to be expected, the C-2450 also meets the highest demands, for instance by combining utmost differentiation with homogeneous suppleness. So despite an exemplary obsession for details and joy in meticulously unraveling complex structures, it therefore doesn't sound a bit analytical or ostensible. It rather builds up its dynamically refined, vibrantly breathing soundstage consistently from the room depth, embezzling neither the most subtle proportions of reverberation nor articulation noises which have actually died away already in the moment of their formation. The listener's ear quasi lies on the voices and instruments, but at the same time gets the panorama view of an, where necessary, exceedingly far spanned, perfectly organized stage.

But watch out: behind the flap of the preamp, which is fully equipped in the typical Accuphase way, lurks a little sonic trap in the shape of the "gain" switch used to set the basic gain. Only in the lowest "12 dB" setting you'll get the highest possible easiness and airiness. At six decibels more the performance appears to be slightly more consolidated, but not quite as casual as before; and 24 dB of gain is only recommended for very soft sources, as the super pre will then produce slightly glassy mids and a marginal narrowness. Check it out!

As a matching game partner for the C-2450, which can optionally be upgraded with the widely adaptable ultra-quality AD-2850 phono module for 3885 euros, we chose the class-A A-47 power amp. This is certainly an amazing amplifier already because of the fact that, for design reasons, it would be limited to the 45 watts of continuous output power into eight ohms per channel, as specified by the Japanese. Strictly speaking, class-A implies that the power transistors, which are permanently fully open to avoid crossover distortions at the change from the signal's positive to the negative half cycle, always give off fifty per cent of their maximum power as heat into the heatsinks. And in idle mode the A-47 takes up about 180 watts from the grid. So it fits!

Massive power despite class-A

However, we measured more than twice the output power into eight ohms at our distortion limit of one per cent (see measurements), which proves that above the indicated value the A-47 leaves the class-A mode and its total of 24 MOS-FET semiconductors changes over into switching mode. Up to 2 x 228 watts could then be measured with bursts into four ohms. Yet one shouldn't accuse the manufacturer of any fraudulent intent, for the promise of the pure class-A mode is indeed kept up to the apparently moderate "guaranteed power". And with 45 watts into eight or 90 watts into four ohms respectively it's of course so loud already that you will probably hardly ever exceed the class-A limit with music listening, even with speakers of only average sensitivity.

Apart from the avoided switching distortions, the A-47's entire technical concept is laid out for ultimate attention to detail, as is shown by the extremely low distortion or intermodulation figures. Just like the high S/N ratios, these are presumably due to the sophisticated, fully balanced input stage of measuring device grade and also to the current feedback which, according to Accuphase, works without phase errors, i. e. shifts in the time domain.

In their efforts to eliminate even the smallest of losses, the designers used metal bolts to connect the generously sized, firmly gripping speaker terminals directly to the circuit board which contains e. g. the smart protection circuit. In former times this was linked to the connection panel via cables.

The amplifier which is powered from a fat power supply and may also be switched to mono bridge or bi-amping mode – in the latter case both channels are fed the signal of the same input – displays its output on lavishly sized, sensitively twitching and optionally defeatable level meters. No "guess gauges", as our measurement engineer noted, but precision instruments. In spite of the relatively high dissipation the A-47, which is loaded with two broad heatsinks, only gets lukewarm even in continuous operation and will therefore not sit silently glowing in a breeding heat like other class-A power amps.

In terms of sound the A-47 is a true class-A Accuphase. What this means? That its delicately woven, utterly transparent performance, which sometimes appears to be playfully dabbled in its finesses, creates an almost floating lightness. Down to the deepest registers the reproduction was fanned out airily, with great love for detail and an elegant attitude. Of course, the bass was clear and contoured. However, it never seemed to be chiseled from stone, but came along equally graceful, nimble-footed and agile like the entire sound image.

With vocals the A-47 indulged the senses with an almost intimate nearness and sensitivity, thereby definitely promoting its immediacy and emotional impact. In Radka Toneff's excitingly intense song "The Moon is a Harsh Mistress" the amp was worth a mint, because it sent us audiophile chills up and down our spines. True, the A-47 didn't shy away from harder stuff – it has enough power anyway –, but even with earthy rock and blues things don't get really "dirty". It's the tip for esthetes, the power amp praliné, perfectly seasoned down to the nuances. In this capacity the amp stands for the whole Accuphase set: certainly not cheap, but an exquisite enjoyment!

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