

Accuphase DP-720

TOP SCORER

You love your CDs? And your SACDs? Looking for a suitable player beyond all discussions about sound and durability? Well, we've got a tip then.

There is this barely noticeable tremble which reveals the inner tension rather than excitement or even fear when taking a breath. Soprano singer Carolyn Sampson is, after all, a professional, esteemed worldwide as an opera, concert and song performer for many years. But this passage of Mozart's Mass in C Minor, more exactly: in the introductory "Kyrie", even more precisely: in its middle part "Christe eleison", is definitely tricky. From the deepest abyss ever reachable for her vocal range up to angelic heights, the soprano singer is begging for Christ's mercy. Conductor Masaaki Suzuki literally carries her on his hands, yet demands the most subtle dynamic nuances, supple easiness with intense textual expression and also forbids tricks like the notorious "portamento". Miss Sampson does this quite wonderfully, taking the listener's soul to soar with her. Moments later the choir sets in again, immensely multi-faceted in its acoustic evolution, the first violins play a delicate accompaniment with minimally varied rhythm figures. No doubt, a worthy classic CD of the month (see music section).

It's a Super Audio CD whose stereo track the author is now enjoying. He doesn't care much about the Catholic Church and its masses, yet all the more about Mozart. And the equipment that brought this godlike composer close to him once more. Really close. Straight to his soul. The source: the Accuphase DP-720 CD/SACD player. Every inch an aristocrat from the Accuphase lineage with the famous champagne front, the noble wooden enclosure, the massive weight. The player doesn't blare out its extreme level of sophistication, it's confidently engraved in fine type on its face: "Precision MDSD SA-CD Player".

Accuphase carries the accuracy already in their name, amalgamated with phase. The accurate harmonizing of any electro-acoustic phase in the musical happenings was the inspiration for the name-giving back in the early 1970s. From the very beginning the immense technical and musical aspiration has remained valid.

And so the Accuphase DP-720 combines once more leading-edge technology with a quality of workmanship for eternity. But this is what its precursor DP-700 already did nine years ago. And also its predecessor, pre-predecessor etc. Accuphase fans hoard, keep and utilize their treasures quite often for 20, 30 or 40 years, guarded by the peerless service quality imposed on their dealers by the importing/distributing company P.I.A. An Accuphase is only available at handpicked specialist retailers. And an Accuphase will not go out to a review just like that, either. The DP-720 was ceded to the author only with an "escort": the subtly action PS-1220 mains conditioner, probably the ultimate solid-state preamp C-3850, and the P-7300 power amp. Exquisite equipment, wired with P.I.A.'s blessing via Kimber's Ultimate Set (AUDIO 9/16) – everything just good enough for the DP-720. Because advancements in sound are probably the only

reason to supersede an Accuphase by the next one. And nothing of it should get lost within the chain.

EVER MORE PERFECT

Accuphase puts nearly every generated yen back into the firm as well as into research and development. A new Accuphase never becomes outdated, but is constantly developed further towards perfection. Linguists should actually not form the comparative of the adjective "perfect" – except with Accuphase. For instance when taking a look at the DP-720's drive. Some may call it a hybris, others simply crazy to design and produce such a component still in-house. Yet Accuphase builds the transport, suitable for CDs and SACDs, themselves and also the periphery that goes with it and has made it even more resistant to mechanical rigors from outside (resonances) and inside (disc flutter), as compared to its predecessor.

Apropos: following good traditions Accuphase also builds a two-piece drive-converter combo above the DP-720 called DP-950/DC-950. This is, however, a different and again way more expensive story. But from these almost untouchable components the integrated DP-720 player inherited its digital HS-Link interfaces. Normally the data stored on SACDs cannot leave a device on the digital domain. Owing to the proprietary high-speed couplings, the integrated Accuphase DP-720 player lets them go in and out. Here the home-grown DG-58 Digital Voicing Equalizer could be slaved in. But this is again a different story.

The newbie still has one ace up its sleeve: its drive can read DSD data discs. Yes, music lovers can burn their DSD-64 downloads in DSF format onto data DVDs and play them back on the DP-720. Provided they strictly adhere to the procedure described in the excellent user manual. It even plays backup copies, which many data pros love to burn on a custom-tuned Sony Playstation 3 after saving them onto DVD. Seen from this angle, one will soon get over it that precisely this player opens its converter via USB to high-res PCM, but not to DSD. The fact that some meta data get lost in the process of burning DSD files onto DVD, is yet again a different story.

In this one here the DSD and PCM data, read out from regular SACDs and CDs, flow into a converter universe which has no equal, challenged at best by the similarly sophisticated, but differently designed Katalyst (AUDIO 11/16). MDS stands for Multiple Double Speed DSD. Accuphase employs eight (!) 32-bit capable ESS 9018 "Hyperstream Digital Analogue Converter Chips" per channel (in the DP-700 it was the AD 1955 from Analog Devices). They make sure that in a highly complex "MDS++" architecture the noise turns out extremely low and the converter precision extremely high. No surprise that our lab could state new benchmarks on the verge of measurability.

So there are already enough technical reasons why to pick the new DP-720. But there are even more important ones. Who has ever listened to the mentioned recording of Mozart's Mass in C Minor over this player will never want to hear this wonderful opus in any other way. Never again less wonderful.

The author came to the same conclusion with numerous other classic SACDs as well and things didn't change, either, with rock classics on SACD (see music section). High-end snobs may screw up their noses as to why a soul gem like Otis Redding's "Otis Blue" (1966) appears on SACD in that slightly distorted sound, mixed down in hard ping-pong stereo with vocals/drums/guitar on the right side and bass/brass on the left.

Music fans, however, will be amazed at first and then become ecstatic over this absolutely tight rhythm, the mind-boggling dynamics and this soulful, elemental voice which the Accuphase player conjures up. Unbelievable how the guitar solo on "Rock Me Baby" cuts in like a razor, how the brass players are blaring with verve. Here musicians are playing together, here their music is literally played back. Finally it was the turn of another true hi-fi classic on SACD: the "Trinity Sessions" by the Cowboy Junkies. Everything, really everything was audible, from the gentle flaring up of cymbals, caressed by brushes, to the faintest dashes of electric guitar. And Margo Timmins was singing to melt away. Oops ... the author almost forgot to hint to the fascinating playback of quite ordinary CDs.

If you love your silver discs and especially the music on them, if you don't want to transfer them onto a computer without further ado, but play them back optimally in stereo, you should definitely lend your ear to the DP-720. Only then you will know how good CD and SACD can sound.

BOTTOM LINE

The Accuphase DP-720 is a playback device for CDs and SACDs, a digital stereo source. Nothing more. Nothing more? Fiddlesticks! It does not only turn silver discs, but coaxes the music out of the bit structures with virtually all its secrets, conveying music as a deeply touching experience. I'd never have thought it possible to what audible and perceivable extent a manufacturer can advance the reproduction level of CDs and SACDs, yet Accuphase has accomplished this feat: the DP-720 is the best integrated player I've ever heard. The top scorer. The AUDIO reference.

Lothar Brandt