

# The Co-Partner

*It came as a companion and is leaving as a friend.*

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It came as a companion to the Accuphase E-270 integrated amplifier. It was always willing to serve and delivered just music, music, music without much ado. Perfectly did it play its role as a source device, leaving the whole stage, every bit of applause and all the laurels to the small integrated amp. The reward: a tiny mention in the report on the E-270 and two little pictures from the photo studio (see FIDELITY no. 34, issue 6/2017). Though the Accuphase DP-560 would really have had every reason to push itself to the fore, at least a little once in a while. But this is out of place at Accuphase's. Honor to whom honor is due – and the new small integrated amplifier sibling seized the lead role. Which the 270 did so well, by the way, that it was not only used at my colleague Stefan Gawlick's home, but also before and after by the editorial team on a permanent assignment.

However, in the meantime the amplifier's supportive companion, the DP-560, left such a pleasant impression so many times that I finally allowed myself to give it a somewhat closer examination. Can the smallest SACD player from Accuphase also shine as a soloist? Is there, behind that unspectacular servitude, maybe an equally unspectacular – and therefore all the more lovable, because "true" and absolutely long-term suitable – sound?

I used the DP-560 in different chains, at different places. And in doing so, I have not only come to appreciate the hunky weight of the player: you just can't lug around 20 kilograms [44 lbs.] quickly from A to B, it may well make your arms feel rather heavy. But when the 560 is set up and ready to play, it gives its owner instantly the good feeling to have something beautiful, valuable and above all good sounding. Normally the player is controlled by the included no-frills remote, which even so has a metal housing in the typical Accuphase color. However, on the occasion of an out-of-town appointment I had forgotten to bring along this conductor's baton, and this actually turned out to be pretty good that way. For if you use the DP-560 in the "classical" mode as a digital player, you will need to step up to the unit anyway for changing the disc. And this is a real pleasure for every button-pusher, hence also for me: all the keys on the device function absolutely flawlessly, without any rattling and with a definite pressure point; moreover they are clearly labeled ... Say again? You think that ought to be self-evident above a certain price range? Yes, it should be the case indeed. But this gorgeous "high-cost" feeling of luxury and suppleness, as the

good camera makers have it down pat, for example, still seems not to be targeted by all designers in the high-end audio scene. Sometimes it's plain embarrassing how cheap many a knob parade appears even in super expensive audio devices in practice. Not so with Accuphase. Here every unit is haptically checked as well during manufacture and prior to its release, precisely readjusted if need be and optimized until everything runs smoothly.

The same, of course, is also true of the player's tray which is made from extruded aluminum. It comes out with a soft purr and accompanies the desired disc inside with an utterly gentle "fffft-click". Beside the good old CD, an SACD is likewise welcome. In fact highly welcome. For Accuphase is one of the few brave manufacturers who stick to the notoriously underrated (and equally notoriously understated) Super Audio CD. Talking about sticks: the mentioned tray mechanism is indeed rod-guided and gives us the opportunity to take a closer look at the player's inner workings before we commit ourselves to the music extensively. Which is especially easy in view of the DP-560's performance, but I'm anticipating.

The interior of an Accuphase device – what will it probably look like? Neat, of course. Flawless. Essentially Prussian, if it weren't Japanese throughout. Four chambers subdivide the DP-560 between its two high-gloss alu side panels. Not only the transformer to the left is metal-clad, the center drive is also fully shielded by a mighty five-layer bridge construction. Therefore the rods can't be viewed either, for example. Or the heavy traverse mechanism which is anchored to the base plate and decoupled by four small viscose dampers. Which together is to further improve a smooth operation, but above all the tracking accuracy. Moreover, the engineers were also anxious to eliminate the system inherent wind and vibration noises due to the disc rotating while it's being read.

The exemplarily low-noise transport unit of the DP-560 fits perfectly into the picture with all the other highlights, which are effectively never visible at first sight. For instance, the typically Accuphase D/A converter architecture called MDS+, where several DACs – in our case a foursome of the ES9018S "Hyperstream chip" from ESS Technology – are driven in parallel, and their summed output signal shows considerably lesser errors than is otherwise common. Or the paradigmatically linear "Direct Balanced Filter" circuit, which reliably kills the aliasing interference components in the high-frequency range and – now let's go the whole hog – has been provided independently for both the balanced and unbalanced output stage.

Which takes us to the rear side. Here all connections of the machine are located. In addition to the analog XLR and RCA outputs, the DP-560 also establishes contact in the digital domain, first to enable it to use the integrated DAC for other source devices, and second for linking the drive to external DACs. Here our attention is drawn in particular to the home-designed "HS-Link" which can also transmit higher data rates, discretely split into data and clock signals. This I didn't check out for lack

of a suitable separate DAC, instead I was tickling the onboard DAC of the player with other sources.

My colleague Hans von Draminski can certainly tell you one or two funny things about it: simply hook up the MacBook Pro quickly to the USB input with a quality USB cable from CAD or AudioQuest – and in a jiffy the author’s kinky playlists shine at their magnificent best over the respective sound system. This colleague can comment on acoustic surprises since then, which were by no means unanimously welcomed by both listeners. (At times, gloomy movie soundtracks by Benjamin Wallfisch, Jóhann Jóhannsson, Ulrich Reuter or Hans Zimmer can be real strong stuff.)

Although it was the worried Hans von Draminski who kindly supplied me with a sizeable number of SACDs from his impressive stock. Because when I have a genuine SACD player on hand for once, I do want to exploit the full potential of the allegedly superior format (irrespective of how good the performance of an excellently produced CD may be). Well, look, listen and be amazed: even the “smallest“ SACD player from Accuphase was easily able to work out the marked differences between the Super Audio CD versus the CD. Though we can hardly speak of “work“ in this context. For the DP-560 is plowing so nimbly and lively even through the most complex music material that it isn’t a problem for me to consistently stay on the ball. And when it’s about an SACD: so much the better. Because then the unexpected seduction sounds quite a bit more accurate, finer and – yes – more analog.

But also with ordinary CDs the Accuphase is twisting me repeatedly around its little finger before I really know it. What an accurate, cultivated, emphatic digital brat! Long-term suitability is the crucial key word here. This I had observed already with favor when I had forgotten the remote control: the tendency for skipping tracks is vanishingly low with the Accuphase. A very good sign, because it tells me that the player presents the heard music excitingly enough to make me delve deep into it. This happens right away even with mediocre recordings, which the Accuphase serves surprisingly colorfully and free from allures, i. e. honestly. But on the other hand balanced out in such a precise and credible way that not the tiniest bit of energy of the stored music seems to get lost through the player.

Of course, this remarkable talent for a cohesive resolution, or a high-resolution coherence respectively, shows to advantage a fortiori with first-class productions. So I simply get around to listening through all the tracks on all three SACD samplers called *Special Sound Selection*, released by Accuphase themselves in the years 2007, 2011 and 2014 – and enjoy them without exception, although this is in no way “my music“ from A to Z, which can be experienced on these in outstanding quality. And with all three samplers the same thing is happening to me each time at the final track: I almost jump out of my skin because suddenly an American calls from the left into the room: “Left channel, left channel!” Faced with so much good music and even

better recordings I have completely forgotten that the last track is kind of a quick user guide for wiring the speakers correctly. Well, Brockmann, don't let yourself get carried away too far – this helps. As a matter of principle, acoustical music is the stuff SACD dreams are made of. A dream is also the performance which the smallest SACD player in the Accuphase portfolio is providing here. The intermediate universal player (the smaller DP-430 is not designed for SACDs, the larger DP-720 is even more sophisticated, even heavier and accordingly more expensive) makes me write down almost casually that its performance is “buoyant and fleet-footed, has excellent screening qualities while drawing vast rooms, honest, perfectly balanced, rather analytical than euphonic“. Such handwritten notes, which, due to multiple mentioning, are also decipherable, can be read after the listening session on my notepad, which usually lies beside me in the dark on the couch. Briefly: the DP-560 is not a buzz seeker, but a sincere and on top ideally motivated fellow. It delivers an amazingly fluent performance which, above all with SACD diet, but also with high-bit files via DAC, comes ever so close to top-notch analog, also musically. That's how die-hard analog fans would probably put it.

Personally, I should indeed start thinking seriously about an SACD player of my own now. Does Accuphase finally have to come along to make this format highly tempting for me? After all these years? It almost seems so.

For instance, even Bob Dylan, who's mostly scorned by me, can absolutely thrill me with his 2001 album *Love And Theft* on SACD (UDSACD 2164, through Sieveking Sound). Or is it indeed the player, after all? The powerful, no doubt heavily processed sound of the album? The Accuphase seems to reveal effortlessly whatever fascinates me about this album: the master's cruel “singing“, the band, which has been trimmed to a rumbling sound, but plays wonderfully tight, the relaxed strumming guitar work, the desperate mastering just before a nervous breakdown – yeah, this is how rock 'n' roll is supposed to sound by all means, ladies and gents of the high culture! Oh yes, the gentleman's Nobel Prize in Literature, we all have forgotten it already, it doesn't matter any more in this context. But what I personally take amiss, Mr Zimmerman, are the steady fade-outs on almost all tracks. Fading out songs has always been, is and will remain uncool. Period. Don't worry, dear readers – when I start talking to virtually present artists, everything's perfect. Then a hi-fi component has achieved what only the best can do: to draw me fully into the music and make me forget about all technology. Thank you, Accuphase, for the DP-560. A dream of a machine.

*Cai Brockmann*