

Entry and Exit

With the E-270 Accuphase is presenting the latest generation of what the Japanese call "entry-level model". Some more terms have occurred to us.

One may justifiably say that the small integrated amplifier has always played a very important role in the Accuphase model policy. Of no other device category so many copies were sold as of the "two-somethings". Used classics of this series, for instance an E-204 from the early 1980s, still fetch really decent prices on the second-hand market – no wonder, even after 35 years many of these amps are still running smoothly without major issues.

The new one answers to the type designation E-270 and follows after the E-260. The E-270 costs 4,950 euros, which is certainly sporty for the baby device within a category, but: it's a genuine Accuphase, which puts things into perspective.

Revolutions happen only rarely at Accuphase. Their product development subsists on the evolution, the relentless fine-tuning of details, the obsessive search for imperfections which might still be eradicated. I've long ceased to search for such things in the champagne-colored valuables; I'm just amazed every time when the engineers in Yokohama have found yet another little screw to turn. And yes, the E-260 obviously still had some of these, too, which is why its successor is at the ready now. At first glance the E-270 is, of course, identifiable as an integrated amplifier from Accuphase, the visual differences to the predecessor are small, but they do exist.

The crucial point is that everything's right where it belongs. In other words: on the left side we have the big rotary knob for selecting one of the seven inputs, on the right side the volume level is adjusted. Needless to say that the rotary switch gives a confidence inspiring click with each actuation, and the volume control runs like a spoon in the honey pot – Accuphase has perfectly exercised this craft already since long ago. There are also six small rotary knobs and eight pushbuttons. In both cases this is one more than in the older model, and their placement on the front panel has also changed a little. This is because the optional D/A converter module, which can be plugged into the rear slot, is now operable from the front for the first time. That won't interest us any further at this point, we will put in the excellent AD-30 MM/MC

phono module (ca. 1,000 euros) anyway. Likewise the mode of operation can be selected on the front. And needle instruments, for sure. The magnificent retro level meters simply belong to an Accuphase integrated amplifier face. So does meanwhile the centrally arranged digital display for the set level (or also the sampling rate of the digital signal, which is present at the D/A module, but as said before, not for us); even traditionalists should have no objections against the 7-segment LED displays glowing in mild red.

The feature package is once again chock-full: two switchable speaker outputs, defeatable tone controls, phase reversal, mono switch, muting, loudness, a “real” headphone output, meaning it has a proprietary gain stage – everything’s there. Thus the average E-260 owner may ask himself: ‘Will I have to get me a new amp now?’ Probably not. At least two more switches won’t justify the investment. This is, of course, not all what sets the E-270 and E-260 apart; first of all the technical evolution took place internally, soft-footedly in the truest sense of the word. Because a further reduction of the already extremely low noise level was one aspect which stood on the wish list of the Accuphase engineers for the rework. For that purpose, among other things, they took a good look at their masterpiece in the form of the home-grown electronic “AAVA“ level control. Let’s recall: this layout converts the input voltage into a large number of weighted currents. Depending on how loud you want to hear, the corresponding current portions are selected and added up, before they are converted back into a voltage. This works great, but is pretty sophisticated. And now even more: the two highest weighted current sources now consist of two units switched in parallel, and the final current/voltage converter has a slightly reduced impedance – which results in a little less noise.

What else? The two large electrolytic caps in the power supply section received a capacitance boost by almost one third, the power amp module also underwent a redesign for less noise, which on top is supposed to result in a considerably higher damping factor and a little more output power. Which we can confirm metrologically so far, the E-270 lies roughly as far above the manufacturer specifications as the E-260.

Regarding the feedback, they’ve come up with a small, yet quite interesting detail. The signal, which is fed back to the input, is now tapped directly at the speaker terminals to allow a correction of even the tiniest bit of imponderability – so why not? The active elements of the protection circuit were borrowed from the E-600: the signal is no longer switched by relays, but via permanently loss-free MosFets, which is definitely a good idea. Finally we have the glammed-up remote control, making the bunch of novelties complete. Once again noteworthy: the price is not above that of the E-260, which is a very laudable exception these days.

For an inventory control, let's just take a quick glance at the abundantly equipped rear panel: the five unbalanced line inputs are joined by a balanced one in the XLR format, a full-featured tape loop, a preamp output, a power amp input, the plug-in location for the D/A converter or phono board, two pairs of excellent speaker terminals – who could actually ask for more. And probably I won't have to tell you either that below the lid one can see an incomparably clean, painstakingly aligned and extremely well conceived layout – that's simply Accuphase.

Slaving in a device from Yokohama into the sound system of our listening room has now sort of become the return of an old friend. I, for one, don't expect huge surprises, but very pleasant hours of stimulating entertainment. And this is exactly what the E-270 does. It embodies perfectly the sound ideal Accuphase has been propagating for years: the cool and analytical attitude of the early years has totally vanished and given way to a super fine, three-dimensional, fast and friendly sound. This is a soundscape where even the unexperienced listener will notice in a very intuitive manner after considerable time that he's feeling good at music listening. I began with difficult stuff right from the start: on their classic album "Crystal Silence" from 1972, recently reissued by ECM, Chick Corea and Gary Burton were riding utterly mean dynamic attacks on piano and vibraphone against the playback device, which doesn't knock the Accuphase out of its stride at all. Quite the contrary: it lends the vibraphone that dash of very gentle warmth, which happens only if the technological side is up to par. The somewhat nastier electronic beats on The-XX's last album are served by the E-270 with a dust-dry, abyssal performance, very nicely discriminable and in fact not really improvable any more. The impression runs through, and I wonder what else is yet to come. Perhaps one day I'll have another encounter with an E-600, maybe I'll find some answers to this question then. But until that day I'll stick to the conviction that in most cases the Accuphase entry is the end of the road.

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