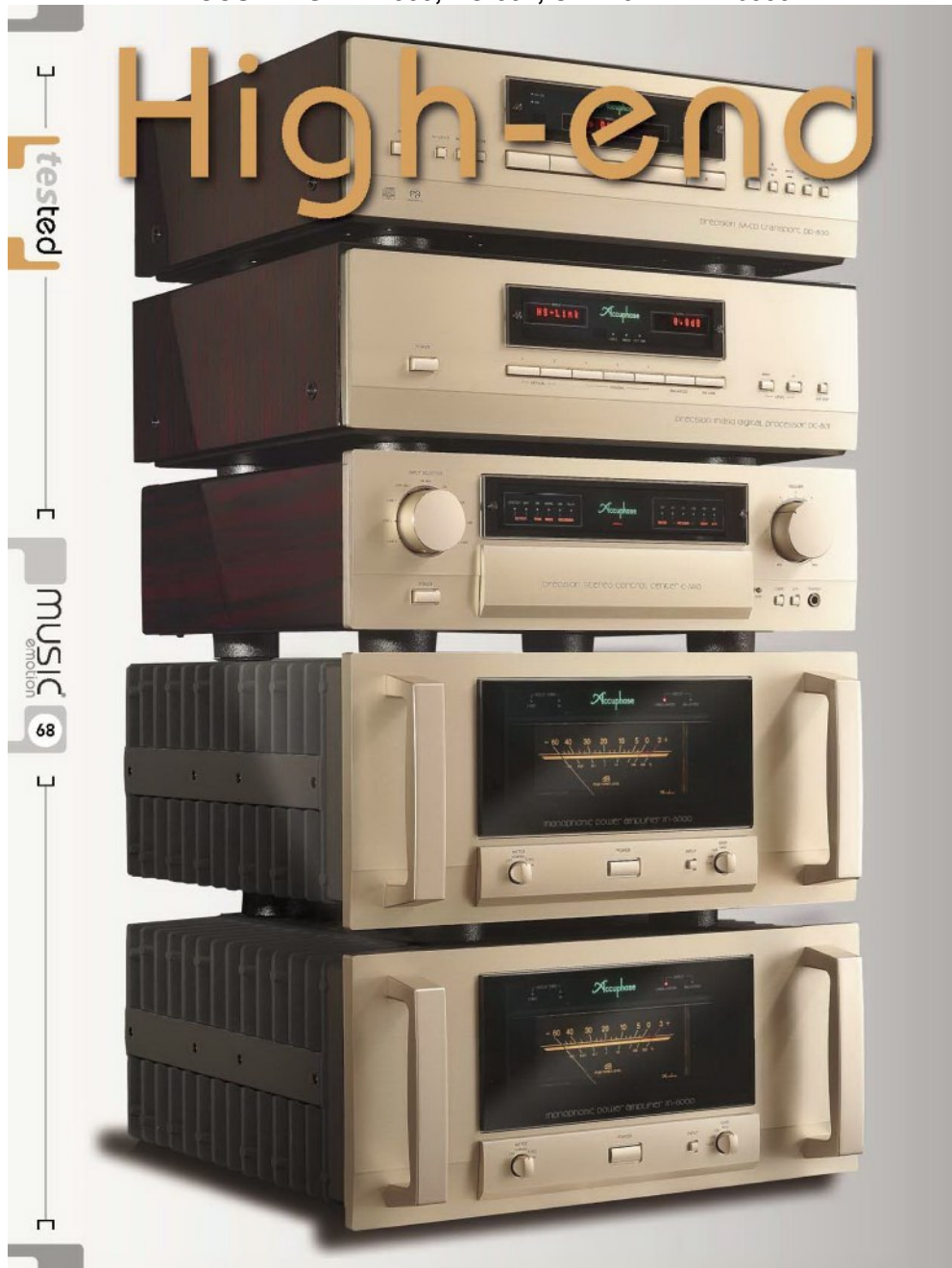


ACCUPHASE DP-800, DC-801, C-2410 AND M-6000



AS IT SHOULD BE....

It has cost me some trouble and effort, but with a lot of pride I want to inform you that for the first in a long time Music Emotion has been given the opportunity to discuss a number of products of the legendary make **Accuphase** in this one and only Dutch technical magazine. They all are, apart from the amplifier, only top models of which the M-6000 monoblocs are truly a 'first'. Over the years I have become accustomed to a lot of things, but the efforts which this Japanese manufacturer has made to put such a range of top products on the market is really magnificent

and asks for much respect. For the first time in my career I had in front of me a set which could not be criticized, constructively, mechanically or electronically. Perfection really exists!

After this extremely positive introduction one would expect to read an article full of superlatives in which everything will be praised sky-high, and where I as reviewer at the end of the testing period am hardly able to stop drooling over this equipment. To be fair, as a professional critic, one needs to stand firm in one's shoes and be sober when viewing so much perfection, which enormously increases the acoustic expectation. I am under great pressure, for Accuphase is a legendary brand, and sells very well in high-class circles in spite of the recession. It has a solid worldwide reputation. Hence – completely faultless – or not???

The starting point

Before I started this review I thought very deeply about how to handle these products and the answer is in fact very simple, i.e. just the same as I treat any other product. I only realized what it was that I had taken on when the importer, music lover and musician to the core, Paul Hattink, dropped off the products to be tested at my home on a beautiful summer's day!

Paul uses a heavy-duty stationwagon of a well-known French make and that car was full of boxes which contained only one stereo/audio set! When offloading we made use of a heavy-duty trolley, and the large cartons were transported one by one to the back of my house. By the way, the four internal, detachable and reusable man-made fibre handles on each box of the M-6000 mono end amplifiers are truly ingenious. It is impossible to lose the top of the box when tilting it, which makes carrying it a lot safer and more pleasant. It would have been good if more manufacturers had come up with this idea! It was literally a feast to unpack the product – i.e. the beautifully polished, glossy solid wood upper panels of the DP-800 transport and DC-801 converter, the clear lay-out and excellent quality of the connectors of the C-2410 front amplifier and the almost intimidating perfection, solidity and mass of the M-6000 mono power amplifiers. The total set, which weighed nearly 200 kgs, then needed to be moved to my subterranean audio studio, which became, due to the high temperature outside, quite a sweaty operation, and both of us were soon completely soaked!

Well, one needs to make sacrifices in order to be allowed to work with weighty high-end products! My very reliable Finite Elemente Pagode Master Reference HD-12 had to be completely removed and of the six platforms only one remained free. Just enough space to place the matching Accuphase tuner? After all the heavy labour the less stressful part could begin, namely the joining of the connections. The manmade fibre protectors (which keep the connectors dustfree when not in use) were removed and what appeared was of very sound quality. Heavy duty parts, spaciouly arranged, network plugs never crossing with signal cables, all of it grouped neatly and orderly. The imposing loudspeaker connections of the M-6000 monoblocs especially deserve to be mentioned. These are without exaggerating of such dimensions that even a thick tube of the central heating could go in easily! The spades of my Nirvana SX loudspeaker cables seemed all of a sudden miniature parts from Madurodam. The enormous grip of these large buttons was truly fantastic, cannot get loose and are a pleasure to use.



C-2410 pre-amplifier

The adjustment centre for each installation and one of the most important sound-defining parts in a set is the front amplifier. The C-2410 is large and robust (20 kgs) but also of a smart appearance because of the well-chosen dimensions. The front looks nice, simple and neat with very solid turning knobs on the left and right for respectively choice of source and volume adjustment. The last one has been fitted with an AAVA volume adjustment (Accuphase Analog Vari-gain Amplifier), an advanced circuit which works without resistance and phase movements. There is also an on/off switch, loudness (!), mute and a full head telephone exit. A number of less used knobs and dials are hidden behind a wide and neat moveable cover at the front, i.e. tone regulator, exit choice regulator, phase regulator, installation of the phonotrap, exit amplifier, balance, mono, etc. The top cover has a matt grey finish, whilst the sides are of beautifully polished wood. The top-of-the-line front amplifier C-2810 has only polished wood top and sides. At the back the lay-out is beautifully clear with high quality connections whereof a good number are balanced. When opening the inside, one seems to be looking under the bonnet of a very expensive car. All building groups have been strikingly neatly hidden, all is built up in a very orderly way with very short signalroutes and the whole inside is arranged to the same perfection as on the outside. The separate trafo's for the left- and right channels are visible, as well as a completely modular construction inclusive of a very nice (optional) phonotrap. It goes without saying that the whole system can be operated by remote control.



DP-800 (sa)cd-transport and DC-801 converter

Keeping in mind that the C-2410 pre-amplifier ranks just below the top model C-2810, it is immediately obvious that the DP-800 transport as well as the DC-801 converter are truly 'state-of-the-art'. In short, this is the most solid and impressive digital combo I have seen until now. Let's first have some basic information: The very solid home-made transport weighs just under 30(!) kgs. The loose converter weighs 22 kgs. It takes cd's as well as sacd's and a special feature is that, like my own North Star Design combination, the Accuphase optimal digital connection also runs via a Hi-speed link based on the well-known standard RJ-45 (network computer connector cable). The highest sampling frequency of 24 bit / 192 KHz is only available when using this Hi-Speed connection. Optic, balanced and coaxial it goes as far as 24 bit / 96 KHz. No expense or trouble have been spared to achieve the best result possible and many new techniques have been integrated. The DC-801 converter makes use of no less than eight(!) parallel Delta Sigma D/A-inverters to obtain ultimate accuracy. Like in so many top products, much trouble has been taken to get the lowest possible jitter values; analogue and digital circuits have as much as possible been kept separate in the solid housing, whilst the most sensitive signal parts have been put on Teflon printplates and apart from all used technique, much attention was given to mechanical behaviour, resulting in the suppression of interfering vibrations.



M-6000 mono end amplifier

The appearance of the M-6000 monoblocs are ultimately taking the visual cake of the whole set! These enormous mastodons have been very successfully shaped and are executed with a beautiful proportion between compactness and mass. When lifting the monoblocs (38 kgs each) it is very pleasant to find out that the massive and handsomely hidden ringcore trafo of 900 V/A is in its entirety centrally placed in its housing, which results in a beautiful distribution of weight should it have to be moved. Also the well-shaped grips on the front and back allow for a swift and precise placement on platform or audio rack. Immediately clearly recognizable are the gigantic adjustable analogue exit meters, which can, incidentally, also be switched off. This immediately emanates the so familiar Accuphase solidity. The housing and cooler ribs have been nicely sprayed, next to the well-known 'champagne gold' front, with a sort of black Nextel varnish. This is a slightly rougher type varnish, which produces a very becoming and chic result of these products and even the thickly rounded cooler ribs have been given a layer of Nextel. Impressive for someone with an eye for detail is that even the vertical cooler ribs have been fitted with an extra horizontal metal profile. This is not only useful to get rid of the last remnants of resonance, but particularly handy to lift the apparatus or to manipulate it accurately into the audio rack. In one M-6000 monobloc 16 push-pull MOS-FET's power switches will allow for an outlet capacity of 150 Watt to 8 ohm, 300 Watt to 4 ohm, 600 Watt to 2 ohm and an impressive 1200(!) Watt (music signal) to 1 ohm. This provides unconditional stability and gives the capability for adjusting and fine-tuning of just about any available loudspeaker. Should you be of the opinion that this is not yet sufficient, then it is possible to join these mono end amplifiers in tandem, to double the value!

All printplates have been manufactured from Teflon to give a constant dielectric and minimal loss, and the amplifiers are just like the above-mentioned products built up in a completely balanced way.

Use and listen

According to importer Paul Hattink, who lent an important hand in mounting the equipment, a long warming-up period was not necessary and playing at the highest level should be possible soon after switching on. Before I start to discuss the proper use, first some information about the cables. During almost the whole period of testing the set was connected in a balanced way with Nirvana SL cables, which energy-technically match very well. Only towards the end non-balanced Siltech Signature Forbes Lake generation 5 cables were used as a comparison between the DAC and front amplifier. Netcables are Nirvana PC and Essential Audiotoools specimen and loudspeakers cables Nirvana SX.

We used the excellent Master Contemporary C loudspeakers. After a warming-up period of only 5 minutes, even Paul, who is very well acquainted with his equipment, was literally dumbfounded by the impressive quality of the sound. After a long first listening session which we had enjoyed together the previous day, it was now time for me to give my own impressions. The first observable thing is the easy use of the Accuphase components. All switches, knobs, and connections are doing their work independently and are flexible to such an extent that I am positive they will still be doing their thankful work in 20 years' time. No buzz or noise is heard and this situation continued throughout the whole of the review period. However, the most important issue was the ultimate sound reproduction and judging from the reactions of a few acquaintances who are familiar with the Accuphase 'sound', this is the hallmark of Accuphase equipment.

First of all – what it is not. It does not resemble the reproduction of my own single ended Unison Research amplifier, i.e. air, 3D stage, transparency, timing, speed emotion, etc. but those are qualities which I have seldom heard from any transistor design. So – what does it do? A large part of the above-mentioned properties and complemented by a gigantic authority and ease, which are a hallmark for the very relaxed reproduction. No piece of music is too complex, no dynamic skip too big. Each time again a beneficent, completely convincing eloquence. It gives one the feeling to be driving in a Rolls Royce. Life is being enjoyed in civilized and easy luxury. Another aspect which is commendable is stability and reproduction. Everything is in its place and no changes are noticeable, no matter the volume. A point of interest is that although the power of the M-6000 monoblocs is noticeable when checking the strength and control of the sound, they are not like so many American designs, overpowering.



The music I played was from centipede Paul Hattink, because I particularly enjoy listening to it. The sound of his Album Stonehenge 5 – Hatfield's End (2005-001) and Concierto de Stonehenge

(STS611187) in its new outfit sounded majestically, very exciting and intensive. The many dynamic skips, capacities and particularly beautiful tunes are reproduced in such a way that the music is experienced in a completely different manner. The sub-layer is truly profound, powerful and beautifully elaborate and the most subtle effects are not subjugated. On the contrary, because even the sounds of the analogue Juno synthesizer of Roland which was used, as well as the effect instruments of other makes, may be faultlessly analysed. Maybe the most interesting part of this set is the DP800 / DC0801 (sa)cd-combination. Truly extremely stable and beautifully built. I have a lot of respect for engineers who possess so much eye for detail and perfection. There is the valve which runs almost silently and can only just be heard in a completely quiet room. The player is also fast and without sound, although even Accuphase has not yet been successful in 'reading' a sadc as fast as for example a Philips CDM2-Pro player is able to manage this with a cd. Would this in fact be a technical possibility? However, it is still sufficiently fast. The only real disadvantage is the small text display. Sitting in my listening chair at a distance of 4 meters, I am not able or just not able to read the track number. But when the sound begins, the pleasure starts and Accuphase engages with gusto in the battle with the Esoteric P-03 and D-03 combination, which is exactly of the same price. Also as far as weight is concerned there is not much difference. For maximum objectivity I first removed both players from the complete Accuphase set hierarchy and connected them to my high-resolution and simultaneously running Unison Research amplifier. As far as tone is concerned, both players are of the same direction, i.e. a lot of pressure, authority and design in the sublayer, layer and the often problematic low-medium reach. The middle territory has an organic high-resolution capacity and a textural high. There is a marked difference between the cd and sadc. Where on the Esoteric the sadc gives a clearly better achievement than the cd, with the Accuphase the sound is about the same! It is difficult to indicate which is better, as I am unable to recollect how it should be. It is of course wonderful that theoretically sadc sounds better on the Esoteric than the cd layer, but on the other hand it is great that the Accuphase is able to get so much from the cd that the sadc does not add much. And the goodness is that I still have more cd's than sadc's! Besides – the differences in sound between the two are more in the outline of the whole. Where years ago I felt that the older generation Esoteric players were inclined towards the rather clinical and analytical, it is felt that the P-03 and D-03 combination is more organic, rich and qua timbre almost tuned to a soft and relaxed direction. The Accuphase combi has a tighter outline qua contour and follows, I feel, a more neutral direction as far as pitch is concerned. The choice for one or the other depends as always on the combination of acoustics and the rest of the chain. Both are absolutely top performers. In total it has taken weeks of intensive listening to music played on the complete Accuphase set. It is remarkable that I have listened much to the music and interpretation and have paid less attention than usual to the technical aspects. The appliances were visually very much present, but because it functions all so beautifully, one feels pride in owning this set which is absolutely 100% without problems qua handling and functioning. To be very honest, I must confess that it is one of the few high-end combinations which have appeared over the past years which have done their work so completely without difficulty during the test period. No cd has been refused, no relay got stuck, no crackling, tapping or humming was heard, and even with the volume turned up high, no switch tripped. In short, all its functions were fulfilled with charisma! Of course that is extremely positive for the Accuphase make; however, it should be considered by the whole of the audio industry, as I am of the opinion that equipment in this price range should be without fault, which unfortunately is not often the case.

Conclusion

Only three words have settled in my head during the test period and these are "perfection without problems". Because that is just why Accuphase stands out above the competition. This Japanese company has worked for many years with dedication and without any exaggeration or marketing hypes on products which are rather an evolution than a revolution. Each new series of products is only marketed if the sound is indeed better than the previous one, whilst sticking to its own identity and sound properties. According to Accuphase, they do not look at or listen to other makes and continue to sail a stable direction. With complete honesty I can say that in this case

I will make an exception and will give this very precious and costly set an excellent price/quality ratio. Why? Because I cannot find any fault and the sound reproduction is absolutely first class.

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