

Timelessly hip

Already as a disc player for CDs and SACDs the new Accuphase DP-560 is phantastic. But it also opens its converter section to the new formats. Which now more than ever makes it a future-proof digital machine.

How does that fit together? While music listeners slowlybut surely are saying good-bye to the CD, new disc players keep flooding the market and traders have come to notice a growing interest for quite some time, particularly in the segment of high-end players. The explanation: not every hi-fi fan wants to rip their CD collection onto some central cloud-based memory in the future and play it back to the sound system via home network. Some do sit in front of a computer all day long anyway and don't want to continue using PC, tablet and apps for their hobby after work. Moreover, the fear is spreading that soon, due to a waning demand, there might be no more players at all.

For this reason quite some listeners are looking for the ultimate device, for which they will gladly dish out a pretty penny then. In that sense the Japanese luxury brand Accuphase couldn't have chosen a better moment actually to launch the new DP-560 already last year. This one can also play SACDs in two-channel mode, which never took a lead role in the general perception, but have a steady followership among audiophiles and high-enders and are highly esteemed, especially in Japan. New titles are constantly added to the rich selection – even the STEREO Phono Festival offers a hybrid SACD with additional CD layer –, so that we cannot foresee the end of the "Super Audio CD", although its existence has been put on the back burner.

And so Accuphase is now presenting their DP-560. With a bold price tag of 10,450 euros it's the smallest SACD player in the product range of the maker from Yokohama. If you don't look at the name plate, you will maybe not even recognize it, for it's the spitting image of its predecessor, the DP-550 reviewed in STEREO 10/2013. From the finely brushed front panel in shimmering champagne to the typical arrangement of the controls, which have been reduced to the essential anyway, to the high-class overall appearance with a flat gray lid and solid side cheeks everything on it has the usual look. As so often with Accuphase one has to search for the differences in the details. And here indeed, a lot of things have been improved and optimized. For instance, there is a new laser pickup for the drive, which was developed in-house because the old one from Sony wasn't available any more. At the same time the rugged scanning unit, suspended on viscose dampers to protect it from external trouble spots, was crowned with an even sturdier and wider metal bridge to make the drive unsusceptible against vibrations from the drive and other mechanical shocks. In addition the current drive is extremely quiet and shines with much shorter reading times. The metal tray, which also slides out and in almost silently, underscores the impression of precision and a quality of workmanship that seems to last forever.

A full-featured DAC on top

Regarding the D/A conversion, the Japanese stick to their proven "MDS+" principle with the "M" as a short form for "multiple". Because instead of one "Delta Sigma" DAC, no less than four independent converter lines per channel are working in the DP-560 in a symmetrical parallel operation, thereby causing potential errors to eliminate each other during signal addition. This is made possible by the Sabre ES9018 chip from specialist ESS Technology. It contains eight converter lines that can be switched in the above mentioned way and processes PCM digital formats up to 32 bits at 384 kilohertz or DSD256 respectively, which equals a bandwidth of a good 11.2 megahertz. Such formats can be fed into the Accuphase through its digital inputs – preferably via the USB interface for PC/Mac. Moreover, the player has a fiber-optic connector, a coaxial input and "HS-Link", a proprietary LAN based data channel between Accuphase components. Through this connection, for example, you can feed the external DC-37 D/A converter with SACD data which normally you don't have access to. The Japanese manufacturer, who until this day offers no streamer, certainly knows that modern listeners often have a wealth of digital sources in very different qualities for playing music at hand and neither want to use the excellent D/A converter or the high-class output stage of their high-end player for them. For this reason not a few listeners would rather want to use the DP-560 as a top-notch DAC for their PCM and/or DSD files and not as a classic player. I don't object, for when David Crosby's melancholic "Holding On To Nothing" was flowing from the MacBook to the DP-560, whose display by showing "96.0" and "24" correctly confirmed both the sampling rate and bit width of that file by Doug Sax coming straight from the console, the spacious, three-dimensional spectrum, seemingly plucked into position by delicate fingers, was precisely unfurling just as the elegiac-reflexive mood which the mastering genius, who recently passed away, had in mind. What had struck me already earlier was now exemplarily attested by this track, namely the Accuphase's talent of spreading a precise, sculpturally molded deep relief in front of the listener, while giving the singer pinpointed contours to make him stand out palpably before an equally precisely graduated background. The result was an enhanced clarity and lucidity with big orchestral works and a distinct naturalness and "presence" of the musicians with smaller ensembles.

The fact that the reproduction turned out to be tonally perfectly balanced was another bonus. So for instance, the Japanese showcased an extremely spacious recording from Kostas Metaxas' portfolio with expanse and vibrating verve. In terms of fine details and agility the DP-560 proved to be a genuine Accuphase. After all, this is what the Nippon brand stands for in particular. And this is also true of the CD or SACD performance. The extremely solid, floating drive achieves virtually the same definition and authenticity as the performances from the Mac's SSD memory. Jacques Ibert's "Escapes", played back from the SACD version of the famous "Tutti!" sampler by Reference Recordings, came delicately dabbed and marvelously nuanced in the restrained passages, yet buoyantly sweeping, massive and urging in the extrovert ones, however always arranged by a sure hand. And the wind theme, on which Stravinsky's "Firebird" slowly raises its head from the ashes only to straighten up then in new splendor to the sound of the soaring strings: the Japanese sort of lets it waft over from afar, combining grace with energy, thereby making the miracle of rejuvenation almost tangible. That's the spirit of high-end! At the same time the Accuphase teaches us low-level listening, because even way down into the structure of the notes everything's just there. No more reason to pump up the volume in order to presumedly hear more details.

Quality is always "hip"

By the way: owing to its finely graduated level control, the player may also be wired straight to a power amplifier. This is possible because of its 50 ohms output stage – not an ultimately low value, but nevertheless suitable for such an operation mode. In practical use, however, the result turns out to be more colorful, compelling and expressive over an adequate preamp that matches the quality of the DP-560. Also with CDs the listener can expect to get them presented like on a silver platter: with crystal-clear transparency and no loss regarding the charm and atmosphere which this medium has to offer, contrary to some different phrased rumors. After a long, but entertaining day with the DP-560, on which very many discs and music files of all kinds passed through and over the Japanese, we can only confirm that it plays proven just as new media on a very high level and definitely suits our time. Because components of such an appeal will never become outdated.

Matthias Böde