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Preamplifier / Power Amplifier Accuphase C-2400 / P-7000

Champagne Revolution

by Holger Barske

The brand-new amps from Accuphase are visually presenting themselves once more in the well-known champagne-coloured finish. From a technical point of view however it's the preamplifier conquering new grounds. And from a sonic point of view there is definitely a palace coup on the way.

There are actually two ways to discover the fascination inherent in the new Accuphase combination of preamplifier C-2400 and power amplifier P-7000. The first and least complicated way is to simply switch them on and enjoy the music.

The second and somewhat stony approach was inevitably leading to the question: "What the hell did the Japanese do here?" The answer thereupon is quite spectacular: Accuphase have reinvented the preamplifier, although not intentionally, I suppose. Most likely chased by the problem that the market can no longer supply any true high-precision potentiometer (e.g. the renowned Penny & Giles pots are already history) a homemade solution has become indispensable. What came out of this however can only be dubbed "radical": the C-2400 is actually a volume control which, in passing by so to speak, is amplifying also.

The principles: right after the input selection a dedicated circuitry converts the input signal voltage via 16 V-I converters into 16 "weighted" currents and then the single currents are added again, or, in other words, clamped together. Each single current source can be activated separately and hence the amount of the overall output current is depending on which of the single currents had been switched on, thus determining the output level of this stage. Eventually the current is converted into voltage again and, well, that's all that makes this preamplifier.

All clear? Never mind as there is more detailed information available under www.stereo.holgerbarske.com and Accuphase's own well-made brochure on the C-2400 also provides a wealth of information in English about the AAVA principles.

In practise however the conversion of these -per se- simple thoughts and considerations require quite some efforts and hence you'll find six boards tightly packed with components populating the central "board-cage" inside the preamp. As usual, everything is neatly separated from the power supply and shows a meticulous dual monaural layout nevertheless.

Like in fact all preamps from Accuphase, the C-2400 also comes with an abundance of features. To name but a few of those behind the sub panel: the comprehensive tone control functions, which of course can be switched off, are accompanied by selector switches for the new, optional phono equalizer module AD-2800. After all, one can now set the desired input

impedance and gain directly from the front panel and does no longer need to detach the module for this purpose.

The new power amplifier P-7000 is the successor to the P-1000 and although they look and feel very similar, the P-7000 comes a little less expensive - very nice indeed. Like with all other amplifiers of this maker the built-in power meter has ever since been a kind of trademark and therefore this amp's front panel is also graced by two gigantic analogue meters. Those who don't like the "fidgeting" of the meter needles and illumination can simply switch them off.

There is something else quite gigantic on the rear panel also, namely the speaker terminals. They do not only seem to break the world record by their size, they also allow high manual torque to ensure excellent contact for nearly any speaker cable.

Something new can be reported too as far as the amp's circuitry is concerned. It employs the so-called "MCS" architecture. MCS stands for Accuphase's original "Multiple Circuit Summing-up" design and means that the input voltage amplifier is tripled in parallel configuration, thus minimizing noise and distortions. Achieving a better noise reduction with single transistors is an old hat and we therefore consider the way Accuphase have gone a definitely new approach.

The unit has been built with bi-polar solid-state devices throughout and the massive amplifier sections with twenty-four transistors in parallel configuration per channel can supposedly handle lots of current. After all Accuphase guarantee its stability into one Ohm, whereby the amp is delivering 1,000 Watt. No reason to doubt this in particular in view of the gigantic transformer and capacitance.

The issue "technical details" being over now we can blurt it out right away: this combination is a sonic revelation! Yet it was really not easy to fully comprehend the combination's character and eventually make it "countable". Because all that happened was greatly subject to the sources respectively the programme material we played. Upon auditioning certain CDs we tended to say "well, rather slender in the basses" but a minute later we had to completely revise our impressions when playing other CDs. Save to say that it really does matter what's spinning at the source.

The same can be said of the combination's capability of rendering a soundstage. When we auditioned a live recording of the singer/songwriter Towns van Zandt we enjoyed the wonderfully compact and fervent singing of the artist being concentrated in a virtually razor-sharp centre of the performance around him. The next track on this disk was evidently recorded at a different concert venue as we could hear the reverberant location. The "cosy" atmosphere before had all of a sudden been transported onto the stage in a huge hall. This really spectacular variability of rendering a soundstage can always be observed from being very wide and flat as a board via a razor-sharp centre to music literally jumping out of the speakers. All is possible.

And ever so gradually, after an extended consumption of music through these wonderful amps, the tonal and dynamic sonic picture is perceived totally intuitive, i.e. one does not need to listen consciously. On one side there is an abundance of power, impact and control whereby on the other side there is the conscious renouncement of the last bit of "thrust". Astonishingly, basses do not sound like being "carved from granite", they are well disciplined and rather keep a low profile with respect to "brutality". The reason for this behaviour may in fact be

found further up in the frequency spectrum and should be called "unobtrusiveness". Don't get me wrong however because the high-frequency resolution of this Accuphase-combination is about the best money can buy. Yet there is that certain "velvety touch" which is capable of withdrawing any annoying high-tech flavour from the sound picture. Listening to music for hours and hours without stress? You bet, these amps can do it!

As already announced in STEREO 12/03, we had some adequate competitors ready for comparison, namely the big Marantz-combination SC-7S1 and MA-9S1. The duel of preamps did reveal slight differences in their sonic character: the brilliant smoothness and solidarity of the C-2400 as opposed to the sparkling rendition of the beauty from Marantz. Although the SC-7S1 was able to display the performance similar to the C-2400 it was not quite on par with respect to pinpoint focussing and order in the sound picture.

When comparing the two mono-blocks from Marantz with the P-7000 it became clearly audible that the MA-9S1 has a powerful, round and emphatically emotional character. The amp from Accuphase however played a tad more reserved if not laid back, yet tonally more straightforward and always perfectly in tune. With respect to absolute power and drive both amps seemed to be on par and capable of dominating almost any speaker system on this planet. Well, it's not very likely that someone is going to combine the preamplifier of one maker with the power amp of the other - and that's all right. It was clearly audible that each amp played at its best when combined with the partner from the own stable.

Soundstage at limits:

the C-2400 is capable of illuminating the musical event with incredible precision. Our verdict: absolute world-class if not State-of-the-Art.

After this elaborate evaluation we do not hesitate to make the following statement: the Accuphase C-2400 is definitely the preamp discovery of the season. Eventually it cannot be topped by any other preamplifier known to us. In combination with the powerful P-7000 it will enable you to "take off and fly away" when listening to music, something one can experience not very often. Perfect harmony from the house of Accuphase. We drink to this achievement and congratulate for the champagne revolution - Cheers!