

Highlights on all Sides

With tenacity, consistency and know-how, Accuphase has improved many aspects of its entry-level CD player. This makes listening trips with the DP-450 a real pleasure - whether by disc or file.

In the meanwhile rather sparsely populated field of high-quality thoroughbred disc players, you're lucky if there are any offers at all in the desired price range. Therefore one could easily do without the thrill of the new. Especially when it's a technically seemingly exhausted, virtually timeless player like the DP-430 from Accuphase, which STEREO also gave an impeccable test verdict in issue 11/17.

And yet the Japanese high-end manufacturer - known for its tenacious persistence in exploiting improvement potentials - replaced its entry-level player by standard rotation some time ago. For in the meantime, the busy development engineers had already come up with plenty of things which they could address for further optimization.

Optimized in many ways

And, of course, the revision did not stop at the tiny cosmetic changes such as a play button which is now a little bit larger in size, or the nameplate which is now printed in the center instead of the right side of the finely brushed front panel. First of all, there is the drive block, which has been redesigned in many places, significantly increased in depth and elaborately dampened both internally and on the outside (see box). With this measure, Accuphase claims to have once again considerably improved the disc scanning precision where, as compared to the proven predecessor, material modifications also play a part, as the manufacturer states.

In general, the chassis of the DP-450 is said to be more rigid by comparison and therefore less sensitive to resonances and vibrations. The reason for this is that it consists of fewer components and is therefore more solid.

A glance at the mainboard, which is still subdivided into functional groups, instantly reveals the new features: although the breakdown into D/A conversion with output stage, signal processing and management of the three digital inputs including a USB interface for PC/Mac (from left to right) is still the same - the transformer supplies the analog and digital circuits from separate windings -, the actual components have changed.

For instance, the Japanese switched from the AK4490EQ DAC chip made by Asahi Kasai Micro Electronics, which is been installed in the DP-430, to the eight-channel "32-bit Hyper Stream II DAC ES9026PRO" from ESS Technology. The latter offers an integrated solution for the "MDS+" converter topology (which Accuphase has always

preferred) with four parallel, phase-correct and 180-degree inverted signal paths per channel which, owing to their summation, minimize non-linearities in the form of distortions and noise. What works with fully balanced circuits in the analog world, also works in the digital domain.

And thanks to the low-pass “direct balanced filters” applied to both the RCA and XLR outputs, interference between them and unwanted interactions with the connected pre- or integrated amplifiers are supposed to be eliminated. In summary, the Japanese promise a 20 percent reduction of interferences and a 40 percent increase in dynamics which, however, in practical use remains of purely academic significance, as Accuphase players, like other devices from Yokohama, are not only far beyond good and evil in terms of metrology, but always show dream specs in the laboratory.

DSD only via USB

There have been no changes to the digital inputs. In addition to the CD drive, DP-450 owners have three of them at their disposal, allowing the player to be used as an upgrade for simpler bit suppliers or as a high-quality DAC for a streaming bridge. If this is connected via the coaxial input, the transmitted sampling rate can reach up to 192 kilohertz which should cover all types of high-bit streams.

Via the fiber optic connection, 96 kHz are still possible, whereby the digital word size can be 32 bits in both cases. Of course, the whole gamut is also available via USB. And on top of that, DSD compatibility up to a maximum of quadruple DSD with a bandwidth of 11.2 megahertz. That should more than do the trick. The respective parameters can be conveniently shown on the informative, multi-switchable display on the remote control. But those who want to route out the CD data stream will find a coaxial and also a fiber optic digital output.

A special feature of the Accuphase players is their level control which can also be controlled via the IR remote within a wide range of 60 decibels. It works digitally, but has no negative impact on the original resolution of the CD signal. It allows to conveniently match the level to other source devices or basically control the volume if the connected amp has no remote control.

In purely technical terms, the DP-450, which is programmable as to the track sequence, can even drive power amplifiers or active speakers directly that way, which also seems to be appropriate due to the rather low 80 ohms of internal resistance of its stable output stage. In practice, this leads to very acceptable results, but the Nippon player was actually not designed for this. Those who want to get the very last grain of sound quality out of it, should better run it on a level matched preamp or integrated amplifier, such as the Accuphase E-4000 reviewed in STEREO 7/23.

Precisely the latter was employed at the beginning of our listening excursions with the DP-450, whereby it didn't matter if it was wired up through its RCA or the balanced XLR connectors with identical cables. Soon it became apparent - no surprise? - that both follow the same audiophile premises. Immediately the delicately articulated, naturally three-dimensional as well as lean and homogeneous sound image emerged which the brand is famous for and which it has been shaping and cultivating step by step over the device generations as part of their technical advancements and capabilities.

With “LST” by the John Abercrombie Quartet the Japanese delivered a taste of its art. This piece is also a gossamer fabric in which the musicians lay themselves together like subtly woven threads and unite to form a fascinatingly dense, yet floatingly light

and always transparent fabric. At the same time, the performance has a foundation that prevents the listener from slipping away.

The recording comes from the Munich jazz label ECM which has released many albums in recent years with such a naturally nimble, universally well-nuanced and gently breathing sound that you'd be ready to bet these are high-bit files. Yet CDs are playing, which always reminds me how much potential there is hidden in our good old silver disk. And the DP-450 is exactly the right partner to discover and explore it.

More an esthete than a rocker

Particularly so in Jane Duboc's wonderfully vibrant, sublimely colored "Lady Jane" from the CD sampler "Best Audiophile Voices Vol. IV" that is abound with magnificent sound pearls. Breathing calmly from the depths of the room, the orchestra caresses the clearly contoured voice, cloaking it in a cloud, while the seamlessly played bass provides weight and subtle thrust. A coherent sound image made of velvet and silk, which the Accuphase understands and presents in exactly the same way.

Of course, you can also treat yourself to heavy metal with the DP-450. But even then, it looks for nuances and a hidden audiophile message in places where things are simply meant to be rough. In the style of its origins, it always encourages a "fine way of listening", being more of a fan of attentiveness than a rocker and probably feels more at home with a cultivated concert audience than with the mud-slingers from Wacken.

With the indeed "polished" high-bit files of our STEREO productions the Accuphase showed off its full grandezza. Monty Alexander's "Almost Like Being In Love" from the Listening Test Edition III, shimmering with details and rhythmically complex, came as relaxed, sure-footed and right to the point as Chesky Records had recorded it at 24 bit/192 kHz. Cristoph Bouet's groovy "Suzanne" from the first Phono Festival, taken from vinyl in the same format, had intensity and crept under your skin.

Are you convinced by the brilliant Accuphase DP-450? That's right! Then you just have to get hold of a unit. In the aftermath of the pandemic, component shortages and a high international demand, there are unfortunately still supply bottlenecks. Good things often take time here. But it's worth the wait! And isn't anticipation said to be half the pleasure ...?

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