

CD/SACD Player Accuphase DP-700

Sky High

by Joachim Pfeiffer

The CD player Accuphase DP-700 is reaching for the stars - and wins more sonic points in the AUDIO test than any other integrated CD player ever before.

Audio components from Japan's noble manufacturer Accuphase are usually not coming out of the blue. In other words, the German importer P.I.A. is always going to announce them many months ahead. This time things were different, though. P.I.A.'s boss Yasumasa Ishizuka and his sales manager "Winni" Andres agreed not to breathe a single word about the new CD player DP-700 until the upcoming spring season. Then all of a sudden there was a complete reversal of events when AUDIO was searching some worthy components to be reviewed especially for the 30th anniversary issue which you are holding in your hands now.

The focus was to look for products which in the past 30 years were closely tied up with AUDIO - just like the ones from Accuphase. In view of this project it can well be assumed that the gentlemen from P.I.A. had an insight and, more or less overnight, took the wraps off their secret named DP-700. However the claims they've put onto this new integrated player would even make a seasoned audio reviewer to become filled with doubts: Accuphase, so they said, has seriously aimed at the same sonic fingerprint of the brilliant transport/DAC combination DP-800/DC-801 we tested in issue 03/2007.

Private Transport

That's gutsy, indeed! Even on the premise that the Japanese would, after all, have access to their own transport developed for this dream combination, rather than to acquire it off the shelf from OEM suppliers. Because only two months after the triumphant appearance of the two-part digital reference Accuphase presented the DP-500, an integrated player featuring the genes of the combination, like for instance a stripped-down version of the proprietary transport. No question, the "little one" is sonically on top, although it could not quite get to the 125 sonic points of the DP-75 (tested 09/2006) of which the modified transport was originally from Sony still. Albeit in view of the substantial price difference in favour of the DP-500 it's all forgiven.

Now from claims to reality: there is no denying the fact that the dream score of 140 sonic points for Accuphase's super-reference DP-800/CD-801, actually deemed impossible, has in the first place been achieved by the transport. And this can be easily proved by simply docking a variety of D/A converters to the DP-800. Then just listen and be amazed.....

Music is Flowing

As soon as the Accuphase transport was calling the tune, the subordinate external DACs could really shine and show what they are made of. With the DP-800 as source the flow of the music was simply more beguiling. In all fairness, though, we must say that the symbiosis of perfect timing and the tonally correct, breathing - and thus breathtaking - rendition could be completely experienced only in combination with the DC-801!

The same transport is at work in the DP-700. Some bits and pieces not stripped down or axed? No way! A further glance at the circuitry design and components used for making this player is leading us to a clear conclusion: it deems that the engineers at Accuphase have principally taken all ingredients of the big combination and put them into one pretty cabinet.

Aficionados of SACD will be enjoyed to read that DSD-signals also are optimally processed in the DP-700. They are first routed through an upsampler which is then going to pass them on to eight D/A converters per channel, with a minute time delay each. This exceedingly sophisticated circuitry is simulating a digital low-pass filter, which, by the way, is an obligatory component in every SACD player. However no other manufacturer is building that filter as elaborate as Accuphase.

No Compromises

It's true that PCM-signals from CD are processed by the DP-700 without that luxurious detour, but nevertheless with the same consequence. The sum of all components is eventually determining the quality: just have a look at those accurate circuit boards holding the D/A converters. They are equipped with the finest parts and made of Teflon in order to ensure the lowest possible dielectric constant. The good performance can also be owed to the robust mechanism of the components, which have been tuned to the most efficient low-resonance behaviour from head to toes. Well, the latter are made of cast iron with a high content of carbon - a material which is said to provide excellent damping properties.

It is usually a rather time-consuming business to audition and evaluate CD players in the AUDIO listening room. In particular when candidates from the upper class (also price-wise) are to compete with each other. The triumphal procession of the DP-700 however came all of a sudden and rather surprisingly.

The listening panel was gathering there for a completely different reason, because the evaluation of the Klipsch Palladium (see review page 170) had more or less divided the jury into two camps. Some colleagues regarded this speaker to be sonically at the same level as the magnificent KEF 207/2 while others considered it not quite on par. The testing continued by listening to the entire stock of *Pure-Music* CDs (Nr. 1 to 5) in order to get to a final verdict. At this time the DP-78 was still used for playing back these disks. Lothar Brandt and yours truly could not agree with Bernhard Rietschel to have the Klipsch scoring 103 sonic points, while Malte Ruhnke was torn between KEF and Klipsch. For the time being, we just didn't come to a friendly agreement.

Perhaps changing the source component could lead to more clarity, said one of my colleagues and switched from DP-78 to DP-700. Exactly this happened although in a different way than we expected. Klipsch and KEF were still in a neck-and-neck race, yet sonically the DP-700 left the DP-78 behind with an almost shameless sovereignty. It goes without saying that the sonic differences between

speakers are in any case bigger than between two digital sources. But KEF and Klipsch were all of a sudden playing at the same sonic level (this is why Messrs. Brandt and Pfeiffer eventually gave up their objections against 103 sonic points for the Klipsch Palladium). In the meantime the DP-700 has pushed the benchmark for integrated CD players to a much higher level.

What has become evident through the initial checks was further emphasised in the following in-depth listening session: with the DP-700 each CD sounded different from what we've heard to this date. Sonic windows were opened and which allowed a much deeper insight into the genesis of the sound carrier. You'll hear the recording venue in a more authentic way. You'll learn and understand with ease how differently mixing consoles and microphones can sound. And you'll simply get to know much better those people who make music and those who record it.

SUMMING UP

There is currently no way around Accuphase if one is demanding the best possible rendition of CD. Yes, the top components of the Japanese are mastering SACD as well, but in view of the absolutely outstanding performance with CD this could only be considered a nice additional benefit. It may sound paradox but owing to the latest developments of Accuphase it's actually no longer necessary...