

Everything Is Good

Watch out to not fall into the trap. For decades legions of reviewers have described, evaluated and praised the qualities of the »small« integrated amplifiers from Accuphase. The journalistic fraternity is struggling with a problem: today's authors have nothing really new to tell. Or do they? Why the new E-270 emerged as a total surprise.

All highend lovers who take their hobby seriously and have sufficient financial resources, parted with it at some point in time: the integrated amplifier. The command center of a hi-fi system, which joined a preamp and a power section under the same hood in order to adopt and delegate tasks, had to give way to discrete components. Those who took this step and said good-bye to the integrated concept would not dream of merging severed items ever again.

The simpler, the more convincing in terms of sound? And thereby contradict – intentionally or not – hi-fi paradigms which they would otherwise preach: short signal paths are better than long ones. Or else: the more sophisticated a cable is, the less it will affect the sound ... In that sense the very best cable would be one which doesn't exist at all.

You're guessing what the author is up to: labeling an integrated amplifier like the E-270 from Accuphase as a milestone on the way »still further upward«, is just as crackbrained as classifying it under »compromise«. The truth is bitter and should leave a bad taste in the mouths of quite a few audiophiles: many, very many of those pre and power amp combinations are neither electrically nor acoustically a perfect match. These are the truly compromise-laden components, not an integrated amplifier of the caliber of this brilliant E-270. For those who pair up a great component A with a no less well-reputed device B may ultimately get stuck in an acoustic dead end – because A and B are simply not made for each other. And, to make matters worse, those who pick the wrong cable will lose a second time. Such a chain will put you under stress, forbid joyful leaps and lastly prevent musical pleasure.

In the end it's the truth that matters Oh dear, those who may feel concerned now, because the existing chain in the domestic living room always conjured up some kind of »nagging uncertainty«, should resort to a simple, highly efficient tool and get themselves exactly this Accuphase E-270 and decommission their own gear for a while. But beware – this can hurt pretty badly. That is, when the presumably »small« Accuphase drives the speakers in a dramatically more homogeneous, passionate, truthful, authentic and dynamic way, with more vibrant tone colors than the existing tandem so far. The phenomenal calmness alone, the – from a technical point of view – tremendous signal-to-noise ratio, produces a breathtaking transparency, especially in soft passages, even at low volume levels way below the reviled bedroom level.

The price doesn't rule, but quality does With the right speaker on the audiophile leash – the »HiFi & Musik Journal« checked the Japanese dream both over the compact (and cost-adequate) 805 D3 from Bowers & Wilkins and their 800 D3 flagship – this amp sounds big, mighty and stately. At this point it's worthwhile to combine the chain forged using the E-270 with another member from the same good family: this easiness and naturalness in the reproduction that mesmerizes the listener in a most astounding way, was indeed perceived as extremely compelling by the jury whenever the DP 430 CD player was serving the E-270. They especially liked that the 430 also features digital input interfaces which allows e. g. to link various streamers which challenged the 430 with different formats. Sure enough, for the time being the Accuphase doesn't understand »MQA«, but when a corresponding signal was on hand via Tidal, the built-in converter offered 24 bits of maximum resolution at a sampling rate of 48 kHz. Awesome. With this noble top player as the front-end signal source it is unquestionably an easy decision which upgrade option should be chosen for the E-270. There are slide-in modules for a digital-to-analog converter as well as for processing MM and MC pickup signals. Watch out: with the Accuphase E-270 equipped that way you may be in danger of hardly recognizing your turntable: whereas formerly the musical enjoyment used to be clouded by a certain hiss and also a slight hum, these terms will now become loanwords, owing to the phono module in the 270.

Integrated amplifier in a comprehensive sense It doesn't come as a surprise that both Accuphases offer a superb haptic quality. Not just in a superficial, but also in a deeper sense. This divine volume control alone, which adjusts the levels ever so precisely, knows no channel imbalances for design reasons and has been laid out in an utterly practice-oriented way, represents beyond that a complex technical masterpiece as it can only be found in this stringency in the high-end Olympus.

Last, but not least the E-270 offers a service that has been eliminated for years by many amplifiers and which suddenly has become essential again: a tape monitor circuit complete with the corresponding sockets on the rear to enable a true recording playback control with open reel tape machines, which recently came back into style, and high-class triple-head cassette decks. Thus nothing self-evident, and the author could therefore operate reborn legends like a Revox A 77 or a Tandberg TD 20A (see article in this issue) without (bad) compromises.

The current examination teaches us the following lessons:

1. An excellent integrated amplifier can definitely sound better than a combination of not perfectly matched, also way more expensive pre and power amps.
2. Accuphase does not rely on sound effects or even a particular sound, but also makes sure that e. g. signal-to-noise ratios are no longer an issue at all.
3. In terms of sound quality the Japanese define the measure of things.
4. It doesn't seem to matter in the least if a »small« component is on trial or a »big« one. Here the rule of thumb applies that.
5. the even more sophisticated, but also even more costly devices from Accuphase offer further, smaller steps towards the »ideal«. But what is a small step for one user, can mean a »new world« to others. This is a matter of opinion. The technological superiority isn't, though.

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