



# Passion for music

Accuphase, gourmet high-end without equal. Stylish, extremely quality conscious and always maintaining a major restraint regarding the latest hype. This Japanese elite-brand has been evolutionary rather than revolutionary since it was founded in 1972, and fellow-brands that operate in the same consistent manner are few and far between. During the Japanese-inspired opening show of the new Alpha High-End store in Brasschaat (Belgium) I had the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to not only meet the complete management team of Accuphase, but also to have an interview with them. All in all, a unique 'behind the scenes' look at one of the more closed and conservative companies in hifi.



## ACCUPHASE MANAGEMENT

When you think of Accuphase, you probably think of a line-up of classy, gold-finished and extremely well-built hifi-components that are not only built using the best possible materials, but also count among the most reliable and trouble-free in the industry. Apart from this obvious quality, there's also a lot of inscrutable mystery to Accuphase.

On one hand, there's the clear logic of only releasing a follow-up to a device when there is an actual improvement to be made, but on the other hand you find a distinct lack of noticeable movement when it comes to changes in the company's direction when the market seems to demand it, in cases such as streaming audio. So now I had an excellent opportunity to find out more about the people behind this somewhat elusive brand, and scrutinize their way of thinking. With the date of the interview getting closer, I got a personal briefing from Accuphase distributor Paul Hattink about customary Japanese politeness. That was not just a sign of respect towards the guests, it really fired up my curiosity and excitement.

### Theme: Japan

On the Sunday of the interview, the very spacious and beautifully decorated new store had been prepared to accommodate the large flow of interested people that are expected. Upon entering the store it is clear that the Theme Of The Day is Japan. There's a male mannequin at the entrance, fully dressed in a traditional Samurai costume, and there are displays of typical Japanese refreshments, snacks and Sake throughout the store. Obviously, the sets for audio demonstration are made up

music from the Japanese-style percussion school Tataka Taiko from Belgium. Frankly, I can think of no better time and place to do the interview. After admiring the demo-setups that are made up of this beautiful high-end brand of electronics, I eventually run into Paul Hattink and my four guests for the day. Our greeting is respectful and friendly from the start, and the Japanese delegation is clearly delighted by the attention for their country, and the many Accuphase configurations that have been assembled for this show.

### Conservative Thinking

On this one-off visit, Chairman Of The Board Jim S. Saito is accompanied by the full management team of Accuphase, consisting of three men. Marketing Chief Tatsuki Tozuka is the international face of the company and every contact, from anywhere in the world, goes through him. Vice-President and chief-engineer Mark M. Suzuki has come along for technical explanation and substantiation, and Yasumasa Ishizuka is head of Accuphase's European distribution network. Despite the full schedule of festivities during this opening show, Alpha owner Sammy Feldman somehow made it possible for us to use part of his new shop for the interview, for which I am very grateful.

TATSUKI TOZUKA, MARK M. SUZUKI, JIM S. SAITO AND YASUMASA ISHIZUKA





My first question is not just for breaking the ice, but also to involve all four men in the interview from the start: "When I look at Accuphase as a brand, I can see some very distinct similarities, a common thread if you like. Is there a certain way of thinking behind this, or is it a logical outcome from a way of working?"

Even before the last words of this question pass my lips, the eyes of Mr. Saito briefly narrow in thought. Immediately after that, but not after exchanging a few words in Japanese with his colleagues, marketing manager Tozuka answers: "Contrary to what has become common practice in our business and therefore to what you may think, Accuphase products have never been created to satisfy marketing considerations. The highest possible degree of sophistication and purity and the very best sound quality are the only guides for everything we manufacture. The composition of our product range is determined mainly by what we believe is necessary to enjoy music on the highest level."

Werner: "I totally agree with you, but how do you deal with new developments such as Streaming Audio?"

Again, Tozuka answers after briefly consulting with Mr. Saito and technical manager Suzuki: "Accuphase keeps its eyes and ears open for every development that appears to be more than a fleeting trend. If such a development appears to be a durable and high-quality platform as well, our next step is to start a series of feasibility studies. What we want to avoid at all cost is that we start an expensive and time-consuming development process when such a new invention or unstable platform can still die before its time. Because we maintain this careful policy, Accuphase will never be at the forefront of trendy developments. It's not that we don't want to do this by definition, but we do find it necessary to research the feasibility and viability of such a platform. We owe our loyal customers this much. As far as Streaming Audio is concerned: we see the potential for growth, but we have also concluded that there are still a lot of bridges to pass.

There are simply not enough parameters that have been laid down in applicable standards. As far as we are concerned, the development of Streaming Audio still leaves too much to be desired to meet our standards, so we will not start such a costly process yet. Besides that, there is still a lot of legitimacy for existing physical media, both in Asia and other parts of the world, so we unabatedly continue to improve those. Even today, these media have not yet reached the peak of their performance and we believe that they still sound better than what we have heard from Streaming-Audio solutions."

### **New Media**

Werner: "But when I look at the new generation of Accuphase sacd-players, I see USB-support and a DAC that is also capable of playing High Resolution Streaming Audio and even DSD!" Chief-designer Suzuki chuckles, and with a serious smile he answers: "The fact that we do not build a Streaming Audio device of our own does not mean that we want to boycott a



development that is already in use, even expanding. On the contrary. Beneath the surface, our players have worked with a high-resolution internal data-signal for many years now, so at first it looked like a relatively small step to implement external data as well. But this turned out to be much harder to do than I expected. For internal data, we can use our own transports that generate a very accurate data stream. But when you use external data sources, that are usually much less precise, you run into a mountain of trouble. For some time it even looked like we would be unable to clean up the external data enough to get real Accuphase quality at the end of the process. That would have been a legitimate reason not to provide this service, but fortunately we pulled it off just in time. So there you have it: a small glance into the possible future of Accuphase Streaming Audio. Because everyone who has heard digital music files through our new DP-550 sacs-player has been stunned by the quality that turns out to be hidden in these files after all.





ALPHA BRASSCHAAT - LARGE LISTENING ROOM / CONCERT HALL

But for now, there are still too many bumps in the road, mainly concerning standardization and support. So for us, the signal to release our own Streaming Audio products is still on Red."

Werner: "Besides Streaming Audio, there is this other novelty called Class D amplification, that is gaining a lot of popularity. Has Accuphase looked into this technology yet, and what are your findings? Is it possible that we will see Accuphase products with this technology in the near future, and if not, why?"

This question causes some mild excitement among the otherwise relaxed-looking delegation. This time it is chairman Saito himself who answers, in impeccable English. "Class D is not strange to us. In fact, in the past we have built the

6-channel PX-650 amp that used this technology, but we stopped using Class-D technology shortly after that. The main problem of Class-D, even today, is the relatively high noise-floor caused by the relatively low carrier-frequency. That carrier-frequency is inherent to this technology and it always gives you more distortion and a certain unrest in your playback, compared to a well-designed conventional circuit. Everyone who is given the opportunity to compare to a Class D circuit and a conventional circuit in a well-prepared and conscientiously preformed listening test will hear the differences immediately. Especially with our newest generation of conventionally-designed components, we have taken

another big step on the path towards truly realistic playback. Because we have been able to lower the noise-floor with every new generation, the music gets a truly breathtaking sense of softness and realism."

### The Future

Werner: "Being known as a relatively conservative company, how does Accuphase see their future in the ever changing world of hifi?" Saito: "I understand what you mean, but I would like to explain a little bit about that reputation of conservatism before I answer your question. At Accuphase we do a lot of research during the early stages of every new technology or platform that we deem relevant. But where most companies



materials that are available worldwide, where absolutely nothing is left to chance. In daily practice, this philosophy enables us to make products that will work flawlessly - and to their original specifications - for fifteen, twenty or even more years!"

### **Accuphase Old And New**

And he continues: "By saying that, I have also taken an advance on our future. We look upon it with the utmost confidence. Even if we are not completely able to evade a certain worldwide market-development, we are aware that our target group really appreciates the stability and quality of our products. I am absolutely convinced that there will always be a market for real quality. Beyond that, Accuphase is one of the oldest and most stable hifi companies in the world, and our name and reputation are legendary. It is no coincidence that a lot of first-generation Accuphase products are still used every day, without problems. Of course we

will always keep an eye out for what the market wants, but the actual implementation of new products will only take place if we can produce a product that is worthy of the name Accuphase. It's in our genes and therefore in our motto: 'Enrich life through technology.'

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would approve them too quickly for commercial reasons, we usually give things a lot more consideration. We really don't like making ad hoc decisions that are of no use to our consumers, who are extremely sensitive to quality. And yes, that may give our company a reputation of being conservative, but you get a very different perspective when you consider the extreme effort we make to improve products that we are actively working on. Quality is our highest goal, we are not interested in quantity. Those who choose Accuphase give us their unconditional trust, and that is something we want to handle with the utmost respect. Our customers must feel confident that they have acquired a product that is built to the highest standards of quality and reliability, by using the very best

ACCUPHASE OLD AND NEW

