

Accuphase DP-560

Silence is golden

Why it definitely makes sense these days to spend your money on an excellent CD player. And why it should come from Accuphase, provided your budget allows you to do so. With their brand-new DP-560 the Japanese top their artistry of optimally reading out CDs: true strength lies in calmness.

Today every butcher and baker swears by the »unmatched« sound quality of vinyl, every candlemaker claims that streamed music sounds at least as good as from CD, and so-called HiRes files keep the good old compact disc at arm's length anyway. The CD is treated like some kind of dinosaur which is actually not needed any more beside the turntable and the streaming client. What sort of, to put it mildly, outlandish nonsense is this!

What truly matters Despite all the euphoria about the renaissance of the record and the certainly wonderful possibilities of various streaming and HiRes download services: by far the greatest and thus also most valuable collection of music is found on countless CDs. And if we look at who's coming out of the closet as vinyl junkie now, we are but surrounded by believers who just seem to have no clue of the analog religion: most of these new vinyl worshippers find the record so »hip« because their friends do so, too. With all the missionary endeavors in the trade journals, all our »confessional letters« for the once endangered black disc, the latest fashion doesn't care two figs about them in reality. Perhaps flared trousers will soon be »in« again. Or are they already?

And streaming, has it marginalized the CD completely? Personally, I plead by all means in favor of a peaceful coexistence of all media, but am afraid that streaming might seriously jeopardize the CD. And this for a simple reason: both media are based on digital technology and therefore use an identical terminology. A digital word size of 16 bits – as it is used as standard by the CD – is not an issue in the modern streaming world, where 24 would also be much appreciated. And the sampling rate of 44.1 kHz, carved in stone for the CD, is easily surpassed many times over by the new digital media.

New skins for old wine Those who will now confine themselves, for instance, to the two core data of »bit and sampling rate« and ennoble them by declaring them to be the only saving quality criterion, might overlook or, more precisely, overhear some crucial points. It is, of course, beyond debate that the resolution of a recording has a particular importance; on the other hand it would be just as naive to determine the quality of a wine based on its acidity alone.

Accuphase, the bulwark, the fortress, the new DP-560. At a first and superficial glance, it looks confusingly similar to its predecessor. But leaving the – in the best Accuphase tradition – neat and tidy front panel untouched except for some extra features on the display, is typical of the manufacture from Yokohama. They'd rather convince with tangible technical advancements and not just cosmetic gimmicks.

Although the listing of certain fat, expensive and frequently employed parts will hardly reveal anything about the acoustic yield, we're now going to unscrew the massive cover lid of the 560 and look inside the machine. What has actually changed compared to the predecessor, can we spot any significant, relevant modifications at all? You bet. Not only has the DP-560 been equipped with an entirely new drive, the power supply and also the input and output sections were largely modified. Yet the structures, one could almost say: the genes of the CD players from Accuphase have remained the same. Thus no less than four converter circuits fed in parallel take care of the digital signal, aiming to keep distortions on the lowest level and eliminate any artefacts. Personally, I can't remember looking at the published measured values of CD players. In general, they don't reveal anything or at best only very little. The DP-560 is different, the gathered data are amazing and show how precisely, how painstakingly the designers implement their components. At 119 and 116 dB the signal-to-noise ratio and dynamic range achieve outstanding values. In both disciplines Accuphase has raised the bar by one dB. Which is great, but a gain of a staggering 9 dB with the crosstalk damping – where the record climbed to an awesome 117 dB – commands our respect. But seriously, between ourselves: is this really audible? Can we actually sense the huge efforts made by the engineers in faraway Nippon? Of course, and it's even easy to do.

A pleading for the CD. So let's not hinge the reproduction of a CD on the utilized format alone, but evaluate the performance as a whole: then it will suddenly make a difference again if the digital data stream is transferred under exactly specified conditions or exposed more or less unprotected to any potential troublemakers. How clean is the home WLAN, how susceptible the job of digital and analog modules which translate a streaming signal into music? Streaming, this is also always a game with quite a few unknowns.

Those who want to be rather safe than sorry and hear the latest perfection from a digital medium, will not really get around a CD player like the Accuphase which was custom-built for this purpose. After all it's got a drive rotating inside that works in perfect harmony even with slightly warped discs (totally flat is the exception anyway) and efficiently avoids the wind noises that come naturally with high rotational speeds. Since all sound relevant factors were taken into consideration, these are the details which together lead to an extraordinary listening pleasure. Hey, this is high end after my fancy.

Most CDs were carving out a sad existence at the Pfeiffers' home, piled up in some sort of cubbyhole; every now and then I took one out, but due to such convenient services like Tidal, those trips into the real sound archive became increasingly rare. However, with the arrival of the DP-560 this has changed. Silver discs which had been slumbering unplayed in the batches for umpteen years now experienced their second springtide, many of them even their acoustical breakthrough, their »raison d'être«. I'm now listening to many CDs from A to Z, the habitual play check of tracks has remained the exception henceforth. This is how people must feel after retrieving a treasure.

The fact that the DP-560 can also play back Super Audio CDs is a »nice-to-have«, but not a »must«. In my stock I've also accumulated many SACDs over time, yet I avoid listening to formats for formats sake, I favor music instead. And there is such an awful lot of it to be found on the good, not at all old CD that I'm downright thankful for Accuphase creating this miracle machine. It's not even the most expensive offer from the Japanese: another integrated player and a discrete drive/converter combo rank above it. These, too, will surpass their predecessors with the latest and best ever generation of Accuphase players. Personally I've found my luck now with the DP-560. Probably forever.

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