

# The Standard Measure

*By the time you are reading these lines, the Accuphase C-2300 will have already left the FIDELITY premises again. And if you sense a certain wistfulness in these lines, you are absolutely right: like every component from the Japanese manufacturer, this preamplifier demonstrates why Accuphase is regarded by many audiophiles not just as one, but as the high-end manufacturer.*

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The presence of an Accuphase component is inimitable. Anyone who has been involved with hi-fi for more than a day knows exactly what I mean. The classic appearance in the famous champagne look certainly plays a part, but the distinctive exterior is only scratching the proverbial surface. The superbly crafted front panel carries a reputation that is probably unique to Accuphase; a promise of quality which, as every connoisseur knows, is not only fulfilled in every conceivable way, but exceeded across the board. We have now had the opportunity to use the preamp in our listening room for quite a while. You will maybe remember that back in issue 3/2024 we were already blown away by the P-7500 power amplifier, which was delivered to us by the German distributor P.I.A. together with the corresponding ecosystem of the DP-570 CD/SACD player and the matching preamplifier.

The power amplifier delivered such a compelling performance that – admittedly also at the suggestion of the distributor – we sent it to our external measurement technician. To no one's surprise, it turned out that the powerhouse not only met its impressive factory specifications, but significantly exceeded them in many respects. Likewise, as was to be expected, history repeats itself with the C-2300 now: its outstanding performance in the listening room has long since convinced us, and the measurement reports we recently received from the laboratory once again prove that the ambitious factory specs are indeed still conservative. When dealing with Accuphase, the question always arises as to how the Japanese manage to stand out so consistently from the

crowd in the world of high-end audio, where there is certainly no shortage of outstanding components. I can see two main reasons for this. The first must be the remarkable addiction to detail with which the devices are developed and designed. Attention to detail may be a somewhat overused term, but anyone who has the chance to get close to one of the components from Yokohama, quickly realizes that this is a completely different level than many others – outstanding workmanship is standard in these circles, but even seasoned testers are often prompted to utter admiring amazement in view of the tactile quality of Accuphase devices. It starts with the well-defined and precise pressure points of the numerous buttons and the authoritative action of the rotary switches, continues with the wonderfully velvety level control and extends to the interior that many owners will never get to see; already the screen grille, which comes to light as soon as you remove the housing lid, is an absolute delight to the touch. Not one little screw has been designed purely for cosmetic reasons; e. g. the device feet are made of cast iron, which may seem unspectacular at first glance, but the alloy with its defined carbon content was chosen to yield the best possible vibration damping.

The fact that the designers use such an effective, but not exactly headline-prone material here illustrates the second reason for me which could be paraphrased as 'unemotional progress\*. Just like the exterior, which has been refined to perfection over decades, every detail of the technical design reflects more than half a century of carefully curated evolution. The C-2300 is definitely not a device that aims to reinvent the wheel high and low only to be claim superficial novelties for itself. Nevertheless, from generation to generation new approaches find their way into the circuit diagrams, almost unnoticed. Behind the volume control, for instance, there is no resistor network, as one might expect. The level control is perhaps the most sound-critical aspect of preamplifier design, which is why Accuphase has taken an approach here with their proprietary AAVA circuit which can well be regarded as sophisticated and indeed innovative: instead of first amplifying the input signal and then sending it through a variable resistor, which inevitably would degrade the sound, AAVA generates a whole series of identical signals of different amplitudes and, according to the control position, recombines them to the desired output level and thereby circumvents the alleged need for signal throttling. This concept is not new, but for the C-2300 it has been further developed to a balanced variant that reduces the already sensationally low distortion levels of its predecessor by another ten percent. By the way, the level control is not to be seen as some electronic part simply put before the actual amplifier topology; in fact,

it rather has direct access to it for an immediate gain control. To make this possible, the signal amplification is distributed across no less than five separate circuit boards per channel. To ensure that both channels can operate fully independently of each other, they feature a strictly separate layout design, of course – right down to the power supply, which has its own encapsulated toroidal transformer and two 10,000 microfarad filter capacitors per channel.

By the way, Accuphase does not officially refer to the C-2300 as a preamplifier, but rather as a 'precision stereo control center' – a reference to the ample range of setting options which hide behind the hinged front panel of this analog control center. A loudness function and a balance control, which directly accesses the AAVA circuit, are equally on board as a triple-stage gain preset to facilitate an operation within the optimum control range, a mono switch and finally a phase switch which can be set individually for each input – a feature that makes you wonder why not every preamp has it. Last but not least, a four-band equalizer is integrated into the control center which allows to select between two cutoff frequencies both for the bass and treble bands. This detail in particular underlines once again the brand's design philosophy: while tone controls once used to be a matter of course, they were temporarily demonized and disappeared from the range of functions offered by most components, only to see a minor renaissance in recent years. Sure, the Japanese never did without them: they were never chasing trends, but permanently driven by the uncompromising pursuit of technical and acoustic perfection – and, in the opinion of the developers, this also includes the option of tonal adjustment. Accuphase does not seek the wave – sooner or later, the wave inevitably finds its way back to Accuphase. When we play music and try to get to the bottom of the C-2300's sound qualities, it becomes clear from the very first bars that the products from Yokohama defy the trivial classification into a particular 'sound characteristic'. When the reviewer asks himself whether the component is more on the neutral and analytical side or musical and thrilling, the Accuphase reveals the stupidity of that question with a benevolent smile: the latter is, of course, the logical consequence of the former.

In keeping with the provenance, I first select 'Akita-nikata-bushi' from the debut album *Hello World* by Chie Hanawa, one of the country's most famous Tsugaru-shamisen players. Only this one instrument can be heard on the recording, and the Accuphase – no, Chie Hanawa and her shamisen – fill the room with music: the brawny, sharp plucking of the strings is answered by the body with its distinctive, woody voice which

spreads totally freely throughout the room. Apart from the instrument, there is absolutely nothing in the room; between the notes, the preamplifier creates a complete silence from which the musical event emerges all the more sharply and vividly. The plucking of the strings with the fan-shaped bachi, the rhythmical beating on the leather surface, the gliding of the fingers on the neck – all this comes into being on its own and immediately merges in a completely natural way to form a coherent entity. The C-2300 literally 'understands' the performance and celebrates the complexity in simplicity that is so typical of this country. The Japanese control unit is equally adept at complex Western fare: whether Holst's Planets, Night on the Bare Mountain or Wagner's Parsifal: the mellifluous sound of a solo violin unfolds brilliantly from the same nothingness that, even in the densest orchestral tutti, spans the space between the performers and allows the individual timbres to breathe and intertwine without any disturbing grayness.

On 'Curious Ruminant', the first single release from and title track of the pre-announced Jethro Tull album, the Accuphase physically places the introductory piano in the room, conveying the attack of the keystrokes in a totally effortless manner and yet without any hint of restraint. The raw energy of the oncoming heavy guitar riffs and drum accompaniment hits me right in the gut only to be fondled seconds later by the soft warmth of the flute and get carried away by the pensive voice of a matured Ian Anderson into his bizarre, dreamy mental worlds.

Let's take a look at the amplifier section again: the segmentation is due to the complex function of the balanced AAVA level control. Instead of amplifying and then attenuating, AAVA generates a number of duplicates of the input signal with different amplitudes and then combines them selectively to achieve the desired volume.

Music doesn't just play through the Accuphase C-2300 – the preamp lets it flow with an utterly effortless naturalness. How did they achieve this? Through decades of consistently cultivated technical perfection. Measurement values beyond any doubt, with virtually no distortion or noise components, will not even beg the question as to banalities like 'tuning' or 'sound philosophy'. Instead, unconditional transparency gives the emotionality of the music free rein to unfold.

*Sebastian Polcyn*