

Succession Regulated

Anyone who knows how to calculate may have been prepared for it: Accuphase is very reliable concerning the release dates of technical upgrades. However, with the new phono preamp this designation almost borders on lese majesty.

I'm deeply ashamed to admit it: I can't remember the name of the Accuphase phono preamp before the C-27. I don't want to exclude, either, that it was in those dark days when the compromise despisers from Yokohama didn't have a dedicated component for this purpose in their portfolio. Instead there were phono modules which could be retrofitted into all sorts of pre and integrated amplifiers – something which the Japanese offer to this day with their own typical perseverance. Anyway, the C-27 was probably introduced in around 2008 and was superseded after six years by the C-37, which in turn has to make way now after six years for the C-47. Looks somehow predictable and unspectacular, but it isn't.

In a certain way the Accuphase engineers are victims of their own perfectionism, and this has consequences. In many cases new device generations differ only marginally from their precursors. True, there is a clearly understandable technical progress each time; however, one needs to have the ability to feel hilarious joy about yet another 2.5 decibels of S/N ratio improvement. The update from the C-37 to C-47 represents no such fine-tuning. Even without having a C-37 at hand for direct comparison, I would dare to claim: the C-47, currently priced at 9,980 euros, is a landslide. It's not a subtle advancement of the C-37, but rather opens up a new chapter for Accuphase in terms of phono amplification, and I don't have a clue how they want to top this noticeably again in six years' time with the C-57.

The big thing about the C-47 is its balanced layout. Not just a little symmetry as with other devices in this issue, but all the way. Fully balanced from front end to back end. With an input stage that first takes unbalanced signals into the auspicious realm of dual phase-inverted signal routing. And an output stage which also creates the unbalanced output signals from the balanced components by means of a clean differential generation. That's balanced circuitry design taken to the limit.

The special feature about this review is: it's already the second time for me to dive into the depths of this machine. The first time was in early June, right after the device had been announced. Because of the ample information material on the device I felt ready and able to publish a highly technical review about it on the web. In case you might be interested – it can be found at holgerbarske.com/diverses/accuphase-C-47/. This is where you can read the real nerdy stuff – you may look forward to that, so as far as this matter is concerned, I'm going to exercise a little restraint now.

Already at first sight the C-47 is identifiable as a classical Accuphase product and differs from its precursors only in cosmetic details. A seven-segment display has been newly added which now shows the selected pickup terminating impedance in plain text and no longer merely with an illuminated dot above the respective lettering. Visually it fits perfectly to the current bigger pre and integrated amplifier models all of which have seven-segment displays, too. Moreover, there have been minor changes as to the selectable impedance values – that’s alright, but not of vital importance. The essential facts appear on the back of the device in the form of a fourth pair of input sockets in XLR format. And that’s the reason for the complete redesign of the device. Accuphase grants the balanced connection only to MC cartridges. Which, according to the manufacturer, is due to a frequent quirk of MM pickups: very often one shield is connected to the minus signal line of one channel. This can be a gorgeous antenna for interferences which would find their way into the amplifier circuit in a relatively unimpeded manner. Since those interferences will only have an impact on one half signal, the interference rejection of the balanced design would have no effect. Accordingly MM pickups should therefore be connected to one of the three unbalanced inputs.

The C-47 is one of the few phono preamps with separate signal input stages for MM and MC pickups. So its topology is rather similar to that of the C-27. As is common practice, the C-37 is equipped with a “pre-preamp gain stage” for MC operation which is then connected upstream before the only MM-capable amplifier. As can be expected, the C-47 is an unbeatable piece of perfection regarding meticulousness and tidiness which you will hardly want to run with the case lid installed.

The inside of the housing is subdivided into four chambers. The left one accommodates two potted supply transformers, back right we see the two stacked amplifier boards for each channel, front right sits the power supply board, and right behind the front is the control system. The circuit architecture is largely discrete. Signals are switched via relays, the component selection is state-of-the-art and very interesting. This is engineering as it can only be found at Accuphase in this consistency.

Since I got balanced phono cables at hand, nothing could hamper my unrestricted music listening enjoyment over the C-47. The first tones came from a band called “My Dying Bride” – more incidentally. Well then, doom metal is not exactly what normal Accuphase owners entrust to their champagne-colored valuables. But very soon the gents from West Yorkshire made it clear to me that other phono preamps are unbelievably good only as long as they don’t need to compete against this one. At least with regard to a whole series of “countable” qualities. The ultimate tad of coutour sharpness which I still would have wanted for in the bass of the Wilsons – now it’s there. Whereby the mercilessness, which the entire system is now able to produce, can only be topped in the bass by my large JBLs with their double 15" woofer equipping. Heroic words, I know, but carefully considered.

The special quality of the balanced MC operation with the C-47 is that it creates an atmosphere of almost sacred opulence. Everthing seems to be extremely delicate and concentrated down to the nuclear level of materiality. It builds huge sound structures and opens up the music particularly in the upward direction in a most astonishing dimension. Roughness, graininess – such things are totally strange to it, provided the pickup can deliver. Sure I had to check this out with the Lyra Atlas which I have saved

recently for special occasions. In terms of character the two of them are an ideal match. Both know how to conjure up the synthesis of technical perfection and complete effortlessnes. Also for the Atlas this one holds true: balanced is better. It simply sounds a little more colorful, bigger and more spirited, unbalanced feels just a bit “grayer“.

The C-47 is one of those ultra low-noise phono preamps where you first need to turn up the level control way high without a signal to notice that it’s on after all. And this little hiss is a very subdued one, with only a small proportion of “nasty“ frequencies.

I can’t remember Chet Baker ever having involved me so intimately in his trumpet play. Or the famous Tacet bolero from 2012 which has to be played from the inside out: this excellent recording demands a certain runtime before the œuvre unfolds in its entirety. When listening over the C-47 in balanced mode, this happens already after the first notes. In terms of phono amplification, the C-47 is currently the undisputed measure of all things to me.

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