

Hush... The Secret

Amplifiers from Accuphase have a character trait which makes them unique. Friends of the Japanese brand are pleased to hear this, while others try to turn this quality into something negative. We're talking about »tranquility«. And about signal-to-noise ratios which the competition can achieve at best with their amps turned off.

No exaggerating: I own a number of CDs with a dynamic range that's not of this – at present rather data-castrated – world: audio carriers that were once recorded by the Berlin Radio Symphony Orchestra and of which expert sound engineers produced an uncut version with natural, uncompressed dynamics. Alternative versions of typical bulk CDs, so to speak, on which every little cough, every creaking of chairs was meticulously erased digitally and where the »loud« dynamic peaks were removed and the »soft« valleys filled up only to make them also car-compatible. Pure music with no limitations: up to 60 dBs of dynamic range are on my agenda or, very concretely, waiting in the throat of a CD player. Users who – and this I take for granted in the reader of these lines – put money into hi-fi and high-end, because music with all its facets is holy to them – will appreciate these dynamic gems.

There's always room for improvement

They will already be happy to leave their amp's volume control untouched in very quiet musical moments just like in brutally loud passages: let the music flow, leave it their way it was originally meant to be. For each turn of the level control destroys the illusion of authenticity. But what takes us away from the impression of attending a real live concert? It's the little, supposedly inevitable »sounds« of the reproducing electronics: a more or less »shorn« noise floor which always propagates in pianissimo scenes, in the worst case even accompanied by audible hum. You know that, right? Keeping both troublemakers under control, curbing and taming them more and better from one development stage to the next, would in fact be one of the driving forces of high fidelity. But what if they actually vanished completely? Then the music would indeed come out of »nothing«, and especially the dynamic valleys would sound as convincingly natural in the living-room as in the concert hall. The perfect illusion. This is precisely what constitutes an Accuphase amp. Here it shines. Amazing when starting your relationship with it, later it will become a matter of course. That's what Accuphase carries to extremes, at least I don't know of any other (present) manufacturer who can do similar things all along the »amp line«. But let's not be taken in by misunderstandings: the superb S/N ratios, which greatly promote the musical enjoyment, are nowhere near sufficient to honor an amplifier with a reference status.

Music is motion

Music will only capture me if it doesn't simply »take me along«, but »carries me away«. It's got to thrill me with its drama, its grief, its spontaneous esprit, hence its capability to arouse true, unfiltered emotions and, ideally, »fuel« them. So may I

introduce – the Accuphase E-650 integrated amplifier which largely works in class-A mode, a little less expensive than its predecessor E-600, but again heavier than the old one by 21 oz. A component which delivered what others are promising with empurpled words: big, life-like cinema, the transformation of the canned music into reality. There's more to it than dull marketing, and the E-650 is not a product by gifted musicians either, but by very demanding engineers who know a lot about music and who above all do not shy away from one thing: costs. When it has a positive effect on the reproduction. Just take a look at the volume control, which is visually identical to older models. However, behind it sits an incredibly sophisticated level sensor mounted in a highly rigid, solid one-piece frame made of extruded aluminum. In terms of opulence, precision and construction effort, the volume adjustment controlled with it – called Balanced AAVA – is currently not topped by any amplifier of which I know (see also next double page, above left). When viewing this in wonder, one will no longer be amazed at the one-off signal-to-noise ratios of the E-650. A campaign of material which extends over the entire construct: please hold your ear above this behemoth of a toroidal transformer (with the enclosure closed!). Can you hear something? Nope, not even the faintest idea of an ultra soft hum is audible.

It's a kind of magic

Lift the 650 with the strength of your arms: this fine amp puts over 55 lbs on the scales, and not a single ounce of it is for show, everything serves the sound, nothing but the sound. At times I used to describe older Accuphase amplifiers as having a sound comparable to a placid lake where you could look down to its ground, but the water's flow fell by the wayside a little. At this point we recognize progress: in the past few years I didn't come across any other integrated amplifier which could present the spectrum between absolute silence and explosive power development in such a persuasive manner. By the way, it never seemed to be strained while doing so, and even with rather fierce attacks, where you'd rather fear for the lives of certain drivers, the E-650 kept its supremacy. Sure, by then it had left its class-A mode behind and was working in the AB mode, yet I couldn't discern any sound losses during the entire test period. It's a good thing that even Accuphase amps from the past millenium are gladly accepted as payment. So if you own one, you should now toying with the idea of replacing it – after the first operating hour you'll know why. To all others I can only recommend to shortlist Accuphase.

Joachim Pfeiffer