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## **Accuphase Pre-Amplifier C-2110 / Power Amplifier P-4100**

# **Phase Two**

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**Having been rather on the conservative side for many years, Accuphase is evidently on the way to wrest the last decibel from amplifier physics by employing new technologies. So, does the new combination of pre- and power amplifier sound better than ever before?**

Hardly any other high-end manufacturer knows it better than Accuphase: in the almost consistently researched territory of amplifiers it's getting more and more difficult to reach for really new stars.

We assume that, "more than ever" must have been the motto under which the Japanese engineers have launched their most recent developments. One of them is the new pre-amplifier C-2110 which comes along in a fully balanced layout of each channel and truly balanced inputs and outputs, whereby this pre-amp is also considered to redefine the new basis, so to speak.

The novelty: that mediaeval component called "volume potentiometer", in which wipers are to judder along resistive pathways and some day is going to emit scratchy noises, had to be banned from the signal path, after all. Resorting to the notorious alternative instead, namely a run-of-the-mill IC which controls the volume in half a decibel steps, was out of the question for Accuphase. Nevertheless, a potentiometer from ALPS remained, yet only to tell a CPU to do this or that, depending on the potentiometer's position.

Eventually this means to have influence on an electronic bottleneck, which, per channel and half the balanced circuitry, consists of 16 differently continuous converter amplifiers which are controlled by current switches arranged in parallel configuration. Starting wide open they are handing over half of the full volume level and are gradually becoming ever so narrow until just a minute signal can get through still. Whilst the processor is providing many thousands different combinations of smaller or larger transitions, it yields a gradation that can no longer be perceived as such. Thus, the listener gets the feeling of controlling the volume up or down in the conventional analogue way.

In spite of this complexity Accuphase, by no means, has thought of saving cost somewhere else. Two balanced and five RCA inputs plus tape loop: a pack of hopefully high-quality sources may find connection at the rear panel. In addition, the C-2110 would also accept, at fixed amplification, the left and right front channel of a surround-preamp.

Located at the rear panel, two slots are prepared to give home to dedicated option boards from Accuphase, namely the Digital Input Board DAC-20 which features MDS++ D/A converters and the Analog Disc Input Board AD-20 for MM and MC pickup cartridges. We trust that both will make you feel like being in paradise.

It's therefore not surprising that this beauty also provides a highly sensitive tone control with various crossover frequencies. Or it lets you switch the phase by

180°, if necessary with certain recordings. Or you can select your favourite output mode by means of a rotary switch at the front panel behind the flap.

Another finesse: with a selector set to 12, 18 or 24 dB this pre-amplifier offers you to alter the basic gain. Likewise, a selector switch for input sensitivity of minus 3, 6 or 12 dB can be found on the power amplifier P-4100. When combined, these features would provide many possibilities as to finding out the optimum setting in a given audio chain.

No matter how the optimum setting would be like, it can well be assumed that even the craziest musical dynamics will not get the P-4100, which is graced by two output power meters, into any difficulty. For the quiet, low-level parts there is the low-distortion, fully balanced circuitry with dual voltage amplification taking care of this. For loud passages the 1-kW toroidal transformer plus 2 x 47,000 µF electrolytic capacitors, which can store massive energy, and altogether 6 high-power transistors in parallel push-pull configuration - per channel, that is - are to deliver the punch.

### **The Accuphase combination can yield abundant dynamics**

The P-4100 never left any doubt that there are gigantic reserves on stand-by inside the power supply. With all three speaker systems we currently employ for testing, i.e. our new darling Isophon Vescova, the outstanding reference speaker Magico V 3 and the brilliant Sonus Faber Minima Anniversary tested for this issue, the P-4100 is building a large soundstage with lots of depth. The Densen B 350 mono blocks we used for comparison could display a stronger focus though, yet the power plants from Accuphase impressed us with even more grandeur and opulence.

The Densen-duo had the skin of the odd kettledrum in the beginning of "Barrio" (*Stereoplay*-SACD "Ultimate Tunes") swiftly and precisely dying away. While the Accuphase sounded similar dry in the upper bass registers, it excelled way down with an extra dose of bass. All this made the P-4100 sound by far more sovereign and at the same time pushed the sonic space way deeper. The additional warmth from deep down was indeed very remarkable when listening to voices. To wit: through the Accuphase, the gnarly voice of "Barrio" singer Juan Carlos Cáceres was rendered more guttural, more thrilling and definitely more impressive than via the mono blocks from Densen.

The P-4100's performance eventually became so convincing that the testing panel called for another standard of comparison: would the newcomer even be outplaying its bigger brother Accuphase A-45?

Yes and no. Yes, because owing to its immense power the P-4100 mastered kettledrum beats and organ works much better. No, because as far as silky rendition and naturalness in sound is concerned, the A-45 is playing in a different league....

As usual with Accuphase components, handling and operation is perfect and the craftsmanship a dream. Still, the C-2110 had some difficulties when our champs came into play. In particular when we played the stirring tearjerker "Worrisome Heart" (likewise from "Ultimate Tunes") the McIntosh C 2300 as well as Octave's HP 300 II (both scored 54 points) portrayed the voice of Melody Gardot somewhat more profound and expressive. On the other hand, the Accuphase demonstrated to them how the sound of struck high-hats in a drum set has to die away. John Lennon's

"Imagine" in the version of Rachel Z (Chesky Records' "Ultimate Demonstration Disc Vol. 2) is a splendid touchstone of this. The bottom line is that the C-2110 also achieved 54 points.

**The two Accuphase components together are playing in perfection**

This is not bad at all, yet our expectations were a bit higher. However before we could turn away in disappointment, the C-2110 managed to put a smile on our faces, namely when it played in combination with the P-4100. We therefore have to pay the engineers at Accuphase a big compliment: connected to each other, pre- and power amplifier are playing music beyond reproach. There again was this certain expression in the voices, refinement and sheen in the highs and this oh so sovereign bass - simply marvellous! And this is why there can be only one recommendation from our side: do yourself a big favour and go for both.