

EQUIPMENT REVIEW

Accuphase DP-570 CD/SACD Player

by Steve Dickinson

Turns out it's been a while since I last reviewed a CD player. A few years, in fact. And to be honest, given my long-term player of choice is the dCS Puccini that came in for issue 65 and never really left, any review units following that always had to go some to get my attention. But somewhat to my surprise, it's been ten years since I bought that dCS player. Probably the most obvious reason why I haven't reviewed a CD player in a while is that there are rather fewer on offer these days, streamers and DACs having elbowed them out of the limelight somewhat. But some manufacturers have kept the faith, and one, Accuphase, has also managed consistently to produce the sort of players which might conceivably have tempted me away from my beloved Puccini in the intervening years.

The DP-570 is very new; the first units only arrived on UK soil a month or two ago. It's the middle in Accuphase's lineup of one-box players, above the (CD only) DP-430, but below the rather luxuriant DP-750 which itself sits below the 2-box DC-/DP-950 units. It's the least expensive player to offer both CD and SACD playback (at £10,200 it felt wrong to call it the cheapest), and it replaces the DP-560 which came out 5 years ago (Accuphase product cycles are reassuringly long). You need to be a bit of an Accuphase geek to spot the physical differences between the outgoing and incoming models, maybe a slightly different button here, or slightly different display line there, and the finish on the top plate is more refined but Accuphase evidently hasn't felt the need to revisit the styling decisions it made decades ago. And to be fair, it's a handsome unit with a reassuringly solid build, and the sort of silkily silent loading mechanism that just makes you go 'Ooh!'

The build quality is part of the company philosophy, the in-house developed transport mech is carefully constructed and mounted so as to minimise the opportunities for vibration, motor noise and other extraneous energy affecting the reading of the disc. The ultimate objective being the pursuit of ultra low noise performance. Accuphase claims a signal to noise ratio of 120dB, which is 1dB (12%) better than the outgoing player's already excellent figures, giving an output noise voltage of just 2.5µV. The DAC chip in the DP-570 is the same ▶



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► ESS Technology 32bit ES9028PRO unit found in the DP-750, the DP-570 using half the chip’s 8 DACs in parallel for each channel (the DP-750 doubles up on the chip count, using all 8 DACs in parallel for each channel). This employs Accuphase’s ‘MDS+’ approach to multiple delta-sigma D/A conversion, for improved linearity and signal to noise performance across the entire frequency range. Accuphase claims almost double the noise, linearity and distortion performance of conventional delta-sigma D/A technology.

It’s no surprise to find the Accuphase ‘house’ sound firmly established in the DP-570’s presentation. I shouldn’t really refer to it as a ‘house’ sound, though, because that implies the equipment is voiced to give a certain presentation, whereas I think the way Accuphase sounds is just the way it comes out when you engineer products according to their philosophy. At its simplest, I’d sum it up as a very organic hint of subtle warmth, an underpinning sense of calm, and an unforced and entirely natural-feeling level of

detail. Oh, and an almost uncanny way with timing. The opening section of Alfred Brendel’s account of the Arietta from Beethoven’s *Piano Sonata no. 32 in C minor* [Philips] is a study in measured calmness, exquisitely metered out by the DP-570, making it all too easy to relax into the music, switch off your critical faculties and just enjoy the moment...

But enough of that sort of thing, this review isn’t going to write itself, unfortunately. There are generous input and format options, the player reads two-channel CD and SACD discs, including hybrid (two-layer) CD/SACD discs and CD-R/-RW, DVD-R/-RW/+R/+RW data discs, but not Blu-Ray. There are coaxial, optical and USB digital inputs; optical and coaxial digital outputs, and HS-Link input/output options. So you can use this as a transport, a DAC, or a one-box player for a wide range of physical formats. The USB input will accept sample rates of up to 384 kHz PCM and up to 11.2MHz DSD (ASIO), while the coaxial and optical inputs accept up to 192kHz and 96kHz PCM respectively.

So the tech side seems to be thoroughly sorted. Internal layout is neat, with the key functional blocks of componentry (power, digital, analogue and control circuitry) carefully separated and isolated from each other, and from the transport mechanism. Accuphase talks about the handbuilt, small production volume values of its manufacturing, and I’m going with ‘team of skilled technicians in immaculately kitted out workshop’ rather than ‘bunch of blokes in shed with solder-scorched workbenches, and screwdrivers and pliers on a pegboard’ which once formed the backbone of the British audio industry. Switches, buttons and mechanisms are a haptic delight – silky, positive and very nicely weighted. This sort of thing matters when you’re dropping a five-digit sum of ►

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► money, but I’ve encountered more expensive kit that doesn’t have this level of tactility.

The display is configurable, and can show sampling frequency and quantization bit depth when using as a DAC, and count-up or count-down timer for each track, or the complete disc. Output level can be adjusted from full, to -80dB of digital attenuation and you can programme the order of play for a disc. Or, you can just press ‘load’, bung in a disc and press ‘play’...

Back to that Beethoven *Arietta*, and after the quiet, almost meditative opening, there’s a busy, syncopated variation on the theme that has never quite gelled for me. It used to sound a little like the accompaniment to a silent movie, and the contrast with the opening section felt a tiny bit crass, slightly inappropriate and brash. I’m not saying I’ve been turned around entirely now, but the Accuphase has shown me another side to Brendel’s interpretation, his phrasing is less overtly bombastic, and the music is now teasingly fugue-like in places. There’s still plenty of musical contrast, but now it belongs together better. An altogether more cohesive and satisfying experience.

And that’s the particularly interesting thing about this player – it has a remarkable ability to give me new insights into music I thought I knew well. It’s not about mere detail, I’m not talking about those ‘oh, never heard that before’ moments, it’s more the sheer number of ‘oh, now I get it’ moments. Graham Fitkin is a modern, British composer of often fiendishly rhythmically complex music. Usually, it’s piano-based, but he’s done an album of electronica, *Kaplan* [Black Box]. ‘K1’ the first track on the album, is over 15 minutes long. I’ve tended to think of it as 13 minutes building up to a great 2 minute payoff, and the 13 minutes is just what you

get through to enjoy the payoff. I believe I may have been mistaken. The opening couple of minutes was always good, a slow-burn build to something, but I always felt a bit short-changed by what the something turned out to be. This time, however, I was captivated, and what often seems like a long-ish 10 minutes was over in what felt more like three. There’s variety, tension, and that slow burn comes back, redoubles itself, and urges you forward.

I admit, I was surprised, because my dCS player is better than pretty much anything I’ve heard at unravelling complex music. So what’s going on? Well, 10 years has passed and current DAC chip technology is clearly as good as dCS’ discrete tech of that era. But I’m putting my money on the way Accuphase handles the signal once its out of the DAC. The obsession with low noise technology, preservation of the phase relationships, and their undoubted skill with analogue stages just takes everything up a notch.

Timing is exquisite. I try not to over-use superlatives, but it feels like the right word here. The various parts of the music integrate so precisely, yet effortlessly, you can’t help but be drawn into the experience. It’s like your conscious brain is bypassed and this plugs directly in to the bits that respond to music. Instrumental and vocal timbre also goes up a level. The way the DP-570 resolves textures off regular CDs reminds me of what I value from SACD. There’s more three-dimensionality and solidity to performers and instruments. I’m not talking about the old hi-fi tropes of imaging and soundstage, though these are also effortlessly rendered. It’s more that it’s easier to conjure up a solid person, playing a solid instrument in a real place, rather than the more usual holographic but ultimately two-dimensional construct within that soundstage. And again, your brain does this without apparent effort. It’s as though the player has found an extra bit or two of resolution from the disc. An old favourite, any track, but let’s go with the title from Laura Jurd’s, *Landing Ground* [Chaos Collective]. The string quartet backing veers from woody, stringy, string-quartetty stuff, to choppy, urgent, stabby stuff, all the better for Jurd’s trumpet to float over, or cut through, and all compellingly enriched by bass, piano and drums. Here and now, I’ve never heard the percussion exude such physicality, and the trumpet’s phrasing is loose and liquid; this is a living, breathing ensemble creating a vibrant and compelling musical event.

As you’d expect, SACD replay takes this to another level. ‘What a Shame’ from Patricia Barber’s ‘unmastered’ SACD pressing of *Café Blue* [Premonition] had almost uncanny levels of realism – real raising the hairs on the back of your neck and arms stuff – and while I already knew these were consummate musicians, the way this quartet works together, playing off each other, creating textures, complex rhythmic interplay, and rich and interesting timbres, is just a constant source of delight. On ‘Mourning Grace’, piano, bass and percussion have never sounded so tangible, connected and coherent, and Barber’s vocals were startlingly ‘present’.



▶ A few years ago, I heard a remarkable jazz harpist, Edmar Casteneda, perform live at a festival. Imagine if Stanley Clarke played the harp instead of the bass, and you'll have some idea. He's recently done an album of duets *Live in Montreal* [Telarc], with Hiromi, the tiny-but-awesome Japanese jazz pianist. What becomes apparent, after a short while, is the similarity between the piano and the harp. Both hugely dynamic, somewhat percussive, full-range stringed instruments. And this lack of variety could be a problem, except that the Accuphase brings out layers of extra colour and tonal shading that keep you interested beyond the musical fireworks that this duo conjure up. It's not an album I listen to often, being used more as a crash-test for lesser equipment, but the Accuphase has shown me that, actually, there's more to it than just crazy levels of energy and dynamics and yes, I can quite easily sit through this for the sheer pleasure of it.

When you attend live performances (assuming we ever get to do that again) there is always a tiny moment at the start of every classical concert, when the conductor raises the baton but before the performance starts. Total silence. And that feeling of living, breathing, expectant souls in the room, about to share in something remarkable. The way the Accuphase goes about its business reminds me of that moment. It's in the way the music is brought forth from a place of untroubled calmness. I think there's something special in their low noise approach. The noise floor on most digital audio is, of course, well below accepted thresholds of audibility, and it's certainly never intrusive in an audible sense. But I reckon noise is parasitic in nature. Even inaudible noise robs music of vitality and colour, at a subliminal level, and at its most intrusive, it can add an unwelcome edginess to a performance. We're all used to it,

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

Type: One box CD/SACD player

Disc types: CD; SACD; CD-R/-RW; DVD-R/-RW/+R/+RW

Digital inputs: HS-Link (proprietary standard); USB; Toslink Optical; Coaxial S/PDIF

Digital outputs: HS-Link; Toslink Optical; Coaxial S/PDIF

Analogue outputs: Line level; Balanced (with switchable phase selector)

D/A converter: 4 per channel, parallel, MDS+ (delta-sigma)

Frequency response: 0.5Hz–50kHz (+0, -3.0dB)

THD + noise: 0.0006% (20-20,000Hz)

Signal to noise ratio: 120dB

Dynamic range: 117dB

Output level control: 0dB to -80dB (1dB steps, digital)

Size: 465 × 151 × 393mm (W×H×D)

Weight: 19Kg

Price: £10,200

Manufacturer: Accuphase Laboratory Inc.

URL: accuphase.com

UK Distributor: MusicWorks (UK) Ltd

URL: musicworks-hifi.com

Tel: +44 (0)161 491 2932

we accept it, and it's only when a remarkable performer comes along that we realise there might be another way. The Accuphase seems to take the precision and exactitude we should expect from top-flight players, and overlays that with still deeper layers of colour and texture, coherence and timing. Beautiful music is simply more beautiful; not airbrushed or soft-focus, rather it's that what makes it beautiful is shown more clearly. We get a layer of flesh and blood, a sense of humanity that, at its heart, is what gives music its compelling interest and character. +