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## Accuphase A-60 Stereo Amplifier

The A-60 is the newest solid-state amplifier from Accuphase, the ultra-high-end Japanese manufacturer. Accuphase's CD players have been popular in North America, their power amps less so. Solid-state amplification is a large arena, and the competition is fierce -- for \$17,600 USD, an amplifier must be a gladiator par excellence.



### Description

The A-60 measures 19.32"W x 9.38"H x 21.44"D, weighs 99.4 pounds, and operates in class-A. The overall build quality appears to be exemplary. The A-60's MOSFET output stage comprises ten pairs of devices per channel, and its 60Wpc output reportedly doubles into 4 ohms, and again into 2 ohms. Inside are a 1kVA toroidal transformer and 82,000 $\mu$ F of filter capacitance.

On the front panel are a power meter (switchable from digital readout to bar graph) and a battery of dials with which you can adjust the gain to match your loudspeakers' output. If you have sensitive speakers or need to reduce the volume, the amp can be set to put out less gain and correspondingly lower noise. On the rear panel are settings for Normal, Bridged, or Dual Mono operation, which I discovered by accident when my hand switched the A-60 from Normal to Dual Mono operation while I was moving the amp. I soon discovered my mistake, but for 20 minutes I was tearing my hair out, wondering who'd pulled the plug.

### System

I hooked up the A-60 to my system: Arcam FMJ 23 and JVC XL Z-1050TN CD players, Sony DVP-9000ES SACD player, and First Sound Presence Deluxe Mk.II preamplifier. Loudspeakers were the Genesis 6.1s, and everything was connected with Nordost and Transparent Audio cables and power cords.

### Sound

When first turned on, the Accuphase A-60 sounded quite good. Over time it relaxed a bit more, but the improvements were subtle, unlike many components that have left me worrying that I'd made a mistake. The A-60 didn't give me that feeling of dark clouds on the horizon -- it sounded golden from the start.

The overall golden glow and transparency of the A-60's sound let me hear individual instruments clearly, quite far into the soundstage. On several tracks of Nancy Wilson's *Lush Life* [CD, Blue Note 8 32745 2] a piano plays at rear stage left. Through the A-60 I could clearly hear the piano sound flowing smoothly, the notes linked in one solid, smooth, continuous line -- not the connect-the-dots sort of presentation that tells you you're listening to *reproduced* sound. The A-60 was convincingly musical and involving enough that while I never mistook its presentation for reality, I simply didn't focus on the sound.

At the same time, there was not that ultimate sense of air around notes. In contrast, the Antique Sound Lab Hurricane DT monoblock amplifiers (\$4995/pr.) make it sound as if there is more empty space around the notes. To be fair, the Accuphase sounded more realistic in the sense of a good

concert hall's "golden" sound; the Hurricanes don't quite resemble any concert hall I've been in (although they could be said to resemble sound in a jazz club, where the lights are lower, metaphorically speaking).

A "golden" sound has a corollary effect on an amplifier's soundstaging abilities, and the A-60's soundstaging was very wide and fairly deep. Listening to the SACD edition of Fritz Reiner and the Chicago Symphony's recording of Strauss's *Also sprach Zarathustra* [RCA Living Stereo 61389-2], I could hear the sweep of sound coming from the rear of the Orchestra Hall stage. What was less apparent was that rare sense of the layering of the rows of players. I clearly heard that some sounds were farther away than others, but it seemed as if the rows themselves were compressed from front to back -- as if the players were sitting much closer to each other. This didn't detract from the sense of superior musicality that the A-60 has in great abundance, but *no* amp is perfect, and it was here that the Accuphase departed from what I hear in, say, Carnegie Hall, the hall with which I'm most familiar.

Imaging, a subset of soundstaging, was very good. Nancy Wilson's voice was clearly located in space. On Jascha Heifetz's recording of the Violin Concertos of Glazunov, Prokofiev, and Sibelius [CD, RCA Living Stereo 66372-2], the precision of imaging is extremely specific, this perhaps due, as I've read elsewhere, to Heifetz's having insisted on being recorded separately from the orchestra, with his own microphone. However it was done, the effect is definite: the solo violin practically jumps out at you. This is something you'd clearly hear in concert with the violinist this close, and the Accuphase A-60 allowed nuances to come through with conviction.

In fact, the A-60's focus had considerable élan in the reproduction of closely miked voices and instruments. While the Accuphase had very defined and clean midbass, it had less of the sense of weight that I'm accustomed to. In this area, the Hurricane amps are exceedingly good at providing a sense of power, weight, and dynamics, which I found lacking in the Accuphase. No matter what system I used, I found myself longing for more midbass kick and solidity. On Ray Brown, John Clayton, and Christian McBride's *Super Bass* [CD, Telarc CD-83393], the three double basses were very well defined in space but seemed just a bit ethereal. I've heard this recording on several other systems, and the dimensionality seemed linked to how powerful the midbass region of the other components was. In this region the A-60 reminded me of the Goldmund Mimesis 9, which, while very clear, lacks the authority of a certain weightiness of sound sometimes attributed to tube electronics but that many solid-state components also display. My old Rowland Model 5, for example, while wiped out by the A-60 in clarity and definition, has more power and weight.

In any case, the A-60's clarity and definition offset the reservations mentioned above. While this is partially equivocation on my part, it is not a dodge. While I did not have them at the time, another recent experience -- this with the new WBT Nextgen RCA connectors grafted onto an older pair of Discovery Signature interconnects -- showed me that at least *some* of the bass missing from some components' sound can be attributed to the RCA jacks on our connectors. Without making this a review of the Nextgen connectors, the degree of bass punch, weight, and clarity I heard in all the music I listened to led me to definitely conclude that the A-60 would have delivered a decisively better effect had these been available to me. (A rumor that Nordost will soon change its connectors to Nextgen RCAs was confirmed to me when I called them to ask about reterminating my Valhalla interconnects.)

As it was, big cymbal crashes heard through the Genesis-Accuphase combination were unsurpassed in my experience. The bass frequencies seemed balanced out by the higher frequencies, instead of the sizzling, undefined sound so frequently heard in lieu of big cymbal crashes. If your speaker system is equally well balanced from bottom to top, it will startle you to hear the A-60's balance of lows and highs.

Speaking of the top end, here is where the Accuphase had considerable success. Higher frequencies shimmered as well as I can recall hearing them do so in concert -- provided the hall can support the airy qualities of higher percussion. One hall that does *not* support the highs the A-60 is capable of is Davies Hall in San Francisco, where I lived for 30 years. Davies doesn't exactly deliver the harmonic overtones the A-60 is capable of conveying from CDs recorded in better halls. While Michael Tilson Thomas and the San Francisco Symphony's recording of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet* is tonally beautiful [SACD/CD, RCA 09026 68288], the high frequencies do not sparkle, much as they don't at many seats in Davies Hall. Contrast this with Paul Paray and the Detroit Symphony's disc of overtures by Franz von Suppé [CD, Mercury Living Presence 470 638-2], where the percussion sounds jump off the instruments and hover in mid-air.

The highs were just gorgeous with the A-60, especially when heard through a ribbon tweeter such as that on the Genesis 6.1 speakers. It will take a transducer such as this to present the true glories of the A-60's abilities.

The ability to retrieve ambience from CDs is one of the benefits of having such elegant highs. On Nancy Wilson's *Lush Life*, I could hear the recording studio surrounding the singer, even though she is closely miked. Lower-level details were abundant in the higher frequencies, allowing a sense of space to unfold beautifully. I had no reservations about the A-60's handling of the upper frequencies. If you live for overtone structure and you have a system that can deliver them, the Accuphase will *not* disappoint. Time after time, I found myself mesmerized as a whole range of overtones that I had never heard before. This is probably also due to the superb Genesis tweeter, but I think any really good tweeter will demonstrate this effect.

This effect of the high frequencies filtered down into the midrange as well. The midrange was more notable by my *lack* of noticing it than by any artifacts that marred its presence. In fact, the very pure sound of the A-60 was what allowed the entire frequency spectrum to ensnare me. The midrange benefited by simply presenting voices and instruments with no particular emphasis -- more to the point, with no obvious weaknesses that might have made me want to change the disc. Voices sounded lovely through the A-60, the distinct tonal qualities of individual singers coming through -- there was no mistaking one singer for another. Nancy Wilson sounded exactly as she did when I heard her in Carnegie Hall last year. (Well, not entirely. Her voice was in better shape ten years ago, when *Lush Life* was recorded.) In fact, its reproduction of the human voice was one of the A-60's strongest points.

## Conclusion

The Accuphase A-60 is a very, very good amp; in some respects, it is downright outstanding. If you value such musical details as tonal purity, low distortion, and a full palette of tonal color, you'll find the A-60 wonderful. Its high price of \$17,600 does mean, however, that it has a lot of competition out there. But while other contenders may suit your audio hot-button hierarchy (or system) just as well, this does not diminish one bit the Accuphase A-60's elegant musical presentation. Hear it for yourself.

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**Accuphase A-60 Stereo Amplifier**  
**Price: \$17,600 USD.**  
**Warranty: Five years parts and labor.**

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