



WHEN 2 BECOME 1

An integrated amplifier consists of a preamplifier and an output stage, discretely combined in one body. But it is very rare to discover such strong similarities between “sibling”-systems as between the brand-new Aesthetix Mimas and its big “brothers” Calypso and Atlas.

Aesthetix founder and mastermind Jim White doesn't seem to be in a particular hurry, for he has exhibited his products at all important hi-fi trade fairs for many years, but would often not present any, let alone several, new products, as is otherwise customary in the industry. Instead, the American takes his time to develop new products, until they are ready to enter the long-term production cycle, during which, additional, and usually retrofittable, qualities are added. Not only the resulting product consistency, but also the updateability are features obviously much appreciated by his customers: only very rarely is the name Aesthetix found

on the usual resale websites, despite the fact that the quantities sold have added up significantly over the years. The Mimas is the first integrated amplifier from the American manufacturer, and a look at its construction details sparks the hope that it could have benefitted from the company's valuable “gene pool”. This, for example, includes the rocking function of the blue LED display, otherwise characteristic of the “Saturn” series. It indicates the selected input and controls the volume when pressed on the left or right. However, not only such external appearances are already

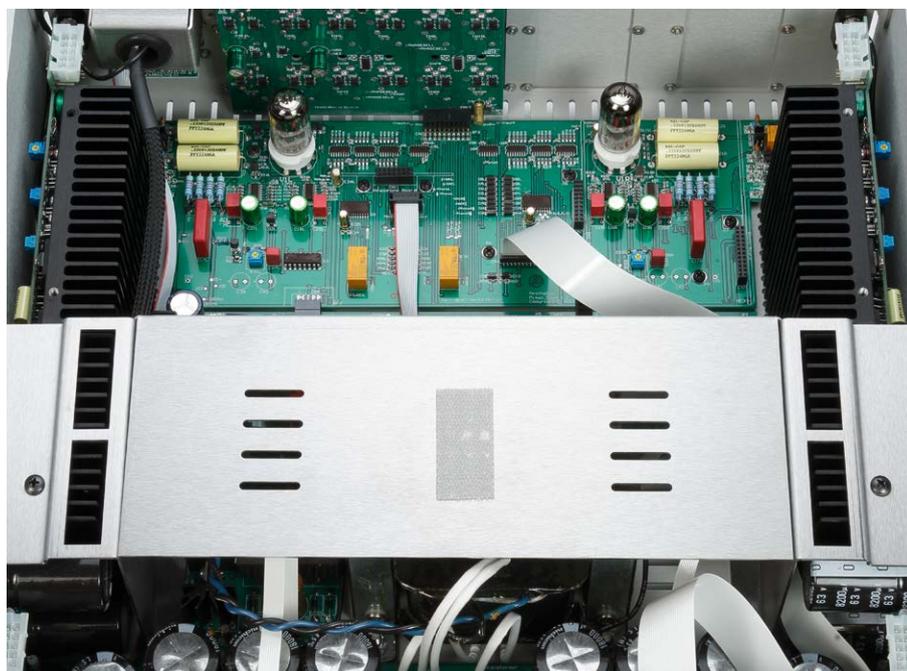
familiar from other Aesthetix devices, the interior also shows evident parallels:

Extreme volume control

Like the Calypso preamplifier, the Mimas features an 88-level, uncompromising volume control, made from metal film resistors that are selected to an accuracy of 1%, exceeding any calculatory reasonable level. While every manufacturer knows that a potentiometer can harm the sound, Jim White takes a stricter approach and has the component banned entirely. He believes that an important part of the globally appreciated Aesthetix sound is created that way, combining tube magic with sound neutrality and richness of detail. In the fully balanced preamplifier section there is one 6922 tube per channel, which is heated for 100 hours before installation and selected for low distortion, insensitivity to microphony, noise level as well as for an equal



◀ You can get an adaptive, illuminated and motion-sensitive metal remote control for around 400 euros extra charge.



▲ The neat, channel-separated design of the preamplifier and power amplifier sections and the solid workmanship can impress.

◀ Instead of the conventional, externally made toroidal transformer, Aesthetix uses a homemade one.



▲ Endstufensektion links und rechts, fünf Eingänge und ein Pre-Out jeweils in Cinch und XLR, Einschuboptionen für DAC und Phonoboard – ein pralles Ausstattungspaket

channel gain factor of 0.1 dB. In the power amplifier section there is a large difference to the Atlas output stage: the driver stages are constructed here without the driver tubes installed in the separate power amp, as they did not fit into the Mimas.

What remains, however, is the feedback-free, balanced circuit without

capacitors at the output as well as another specialty of the Californians: the complex power supply comprised of a 900 VA transformer wound by Aesthetix itself, whereby White consistently dispenses with the installation of a conventional toroidal transformer. As expected, it has various secondary windings to separately

supply individual sensitive circuits with powerful and cleanly smoothed voltage. This task is performed by high-quality capacitors with a filter capacity of almost 180,000 uFarad. At every point it is essential to White that the component specifications are strictly adhered to. Both the FETs of the drivers and the bipolar transistors of the power stage are carefully selected. This way, operation together with almost any loudspeaker is guaranteed, despite the lack of negative feedback. Generating a good 150 watts per channel into eight ohms and almost twice as much into four ohms, it seems too have all the necessary attributes.

But enough about the electronics, let's take a look at the equally impressive equipment of the Mimas, which by the way is named after the tenth of Saturn's 62 known moons: all of the five inputs are available in both cinch and XLR form, while unbalanced signals are always converted internally into balanced ones. Outputs for the operation of additional power amplifiers or subwoofers are also available in both connection variants. If you want to reduce the load on your main speakers during subwoofer operation, you can activate a multi-staged, switchable high-pass filter. Home cinema fans will be delighted to hear that each input can be enabled as a bypass for home cinema applications. Optional slots for phono and D/A-conversion will be available in the future for around 1000 Euro each. The former will be granted MM- and MC-system support and will even be adjustable in gain, capacity and terminating resistance by remote control. Being built without tubes, it is still fully discrete, and no cheap IC-grab.

At least on paper, the digital board is also impressive: the analog section is fully balanced and the digital sector offers two coaxial inputs, accepting signals up to 192 kHz each, and two optical inputs, as well as an asynchronous USB input that processes up to 352 kHz and 24 bits and even DSD signals at double rate. The slide-in converters are the finest and best currently available on the market - ESS Sabre, type 9038 pro. We will test both options as soon as the products are available.

For those who still haven't had enough, the standard headphone output can be replaced with a high-quality class-A-technology one, featuring 1 watt of power with 32 ohms – unfortunately there is no price yet. Another practical feature is the

possibility of connecting a separate infrared receiver. If you prefer to hide the Mimas from potential visitor's views, you can then still control it remotely. Software updates can be carried out using a RS 232 interface – if you can find the necessary cable, as it is rarely used today. Even if you can't, your trusted retailer will be happy to help. What else is there to be said? For instance, that you can name each of the five inputs with an abbreviation of a maximum of four letters and that each input can be individually adjusted by a few dB in volume. If you have an especially power-hungry speaker, the Mimas also offers an internal gain adjustment of 15 decibels by means of a jumper – and it really makes a difference, adding slightly more dynamics and openness. For those unsure: if the loudspeaker has a sensitivity of about 85 dB or more, it is definitely worth a try. And for the curious and experimental it is a hard-to-resist temptation – isn't it? The mechanical quality of the case and keys is also very trustworthy and allows you to expect years of untroubled listening pleasure.

Working with giants

Right from the beginning there was an especially difficult task on the agenda - to get the 116 kilo heavy and man-high PMC MB2 XBD SE running, perhaps the most voluminous loudspeakers that ever found their way into our listening room. Immediately the Mimas was ready to go and fascinated with the most wonderful and rarely experienced variety of timbres. Voices from Lyn Stanley and Diana Krall to Alexis Korner appeared charmingly, giving the impression of transporting the performer's exact mood while recording.

The American amplifier revealed another quality when it came to depicting spaciousness and depth, doing it on an almost wasteful scale – you could nearly feel the air in the room. Contours, though,

where drawn with a broad brush rather than a sharp pen, thus slightly blurring the very last detail. Listeners of magnetostats will know this effect, which can also occur if the speakers are either too far apart and/or have not been angled to the required extent. We also noticed the bass being springy and swinging, lacking a bit of tightness, though never sounding too soft.

In the next listening session, having moved into the small STEREO listening room, the Mimas first played on the brand-new Canton Reference 8K and was compared to the entire elite of integrated amplifiers that we were able to find in-house (see box: test components).

Different speaker, different experience

Listening to the set-up, all being fed by T+A's streamer/CD player Music Player Balanced, combined with the Canton, the Mimas again captivated the listener with an extraordinarily emotional address, without crossing the border to being beautifully colored and flattering. In direct contrast the opponents seemed a little cool, almost clinical. The Mimas, on the other hand, has to take some critique in the bass-range, which we experienced lively and powerful, but without the last kick of precision.... Nevertheless, there was a definite consensus about the performance: strong! You can be perfectly happy for a long time with this setup... if you don't make the mistake of letting a Gauder DARC 100 play instead of the Canton. Sure, the twelvefold price is a bitter pill that can only be swallowed by very few fortunate people, but the experience left a lasting impression – there was truly only music in the room.

Whereas before some kind of comparison was required to find a personal favorite, Aesthetix has proved itself to be the master of the situation with David Munyon (Track 8, Stockfisch Vol. 4) as well as with the Supreme Sessions of the Swedish loudspeaker manufacturer Marten. Its warm, friendly tone, which previously sounded a tad impure combined with the Canton speakers, is now its trump card, while any trace of lacking precision has been wiped out. None of the competitors can keep up with its naturalness. They all sound comparatively emotionless. If you haven't given Aesthetix your attention before, you should do so now at the latest.

Michael Lang

TEST-COMPONENTS

- TURNTABLE: Transrotor Rondino nero; Technics SL-1000R
- CD-PLAYER: T+A MP 3100 HV; Music Player Balanced
- AMPLIFIER: Audionet Watt; T+A 3100 HV; Symphonic Line RG9 MKIV
- SPEAKERS: Canton Ref. 8K; Gauder DARC 100; PMC MB2 XBD
- CABLE: div. Audioquest

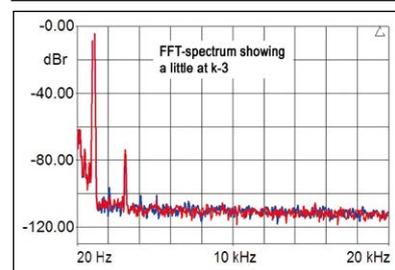
AESTHETIX MIMAS



from 7950€
 (available in silver and black;
 phono- and dac-module optional,
 each costing around 1000 euro)
 Dimensions: 46x15x44cm (WxHxD)
 Warranty: 2 years
 Contact: Aesthetix Audio
 Tel.: +1 805-529-9901
 www.aesthetix.net

Conclusion: The work of an expert. Sounds extremely emotional, yet very three-dimensional. Excellent workmanship. Expandable by phono and DAC module.

MEASUREMENT RESULTS



Continuous output (8 Ω/40 Ω)	181 W/261 W
Pulse output 4 Ω (1 kHz)	338 W
Distortion factor at 50 mW/5 W/1 dB max level	0.01 %/0.02 %/0.1 %
Intermodulation at 50 mW/5 W/1 dB max level	0.02 %/0.006 %/0.05 %
Signal to noise ratio at 50 mW/5 W	71.2 dB/90.4 dB
Attenuation factor with 4 Ω (63 Hz/1 kHz/14 kHz)	33/33/40
Upper cut-off frequency (-3 dB/40 Ω)	>80 kHz
 Mains Phase on tested device	Crosstalk line1 > line2 79.5 dB
Volume at -60 dB	0.02 dB
Power consumption standby/idle	47 W/112 W

LAB COMMENT: Flawless performance in the lab, superior channel equality and crosstalk attenuation, very broad band, powerful. Low attenuation factor due to the circuitry.

EQUIPMENT

Five RCA/XLR inputs each; pre out Cinch XLR; one pair of speakers with bananas or cable lugs; home cinema mode; headphone output; subwoofer output with switchable high-pass filters; LED display for input selection and volume, dimmable; remote control; metal remote control + 400 Euro; phono & DAC module each 1000 Euro

STEREO - TEST

SOUND QUALITY 98%

PRICE/PERFORMANCE

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

OUTSTANDING