Aesthetix Mimas

A high-end, high-power, configurable tube/turbosolid hybrid integrated amplifier – tightly targeted but the Aesthetix Mimas could easily seduce the separates purist

Review: Ken Kessler

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ah, downsizing: if it keeps the high-end healthy, I’ll be all for it. US boutique brand Aesthetix’s Mimas integrated amp joins a sector that’s increasing in numbers if not dimensions, set to satisfy the modern afflication of space shortages, especially for city dwellers. Along with Wilson’s Tone-Tot monitor ([HN Nov ’18], the all-in-one SME Synergy turntable/phono stage package [p36], TechDAS’s Air Force V ([HN Jan ’19], and other ultra-compact yet truly high-end items, the Mimas demands little room. Even its £8750 ticket is in the lower reaches of high-end pricing. While the sample here is entry-level and line-only – the optional modules are a few months away – it’s a powerhouse that easily accomplishes its in 43x40x44mm (hwd) volume, which is achieved by separate pre/power combinations. To put that into context, it’s no larger than a circa-1979 AMP receiver from Yamaha or Tri-A.

COMPACT HYBRID

What you get in this compact box, offered in silver or black, is music to a purist’s ears, especially when you discover that all of its five inputs are available on both balanced XLR and single-ended RCA. Also addressing those who are either indecisive or prefer to have their options left open, the Mimas is a tube/solid-state hybrid like the McIntosh MA252 ([HN Jan ’19] and Unison Research Decade ([HN Feb ’19], hybrids satisfying those who want a taste of tubes and transistors. Aesthetix has created a merged version of its Calypso/titanos pre/power amplifiers. It uses the same volume control as the Calypso, with 88 steps in 1dB increments, employing individual switched 1% metal Calypso, with 88 steps in 1dB increments, and the display informs you that you’re in headphone mode. You can also select between them if you choose to leave the ‘phones in situ. It was pointed out to me that many might miss this trick: the display panel is actually a rocker switch. To increase the volume, you press the right-hand side of the display panel, while to lower the volume, you press the left-hand side of the display. Most of the menus also use this method for up/down adjustment.

Meanwhile, home theatre bypass allows every input to be defined as a bypass input, and the preamp output can be used for a subwoofer. The LED display has adjustable brightness and Aesthetix’s room light sensing, and it displays the selected input name, and the current level. Each input can be given a four-letter name, have its level matched with others, or be set completely to ‘off’. Other commands include headphones turn on or off in software, balance, switch-on level, maximum level, display settings and the restoration of the amp to its factory presets.

Although I didn’t get to try them, those tempted by the Mimas should know that the upcoming options include an MM/MC phono card with variable gain and loading, as well as separate pre/power combinations. The ¼in socket obviates the need for a standalone headphone output. The five buttons are augmented by a ‘trick’ display with touch functions and the headphone section

MEET THE PANEL

I cannot overstate how fully-equipped this amplifier is, even without the optional boards. The XIN socket headphone output – rated at 0.5W into 32ohm – drives various Audezes with ease, but there is also an optional 1W/30ohm, fully discrete, Class A amp. The unit automatically mutes the speakers when you insert the jack, and the display informs you that you’re in headphone mode. You can also select between them if you choose to leave the ‘phones in situ.

Aesthetix, ‘not covered under warranty’. This is because the Mimas’s power amp stage actually comprises two matched amplifiers per channel – one handling positive-going signals while its ‘mirror’ handles the negative-going signals, the ensemble connected as a balanced, bridged output. Lab testing such an amplifier must proceed with extreme caution! Moreover, the subjective benefits of low- and mid-frequency signals are legion among audiophiles, but the drift (hysteresis) of distortion with temperature (see inset Graph) is also not uncommon with such designs. But it does sound glorious! PM

ABOVE: Don’t let the Mimas’s minimalism fool you: the five buttons are augmented by a ‘trick’ display with touch functions and the headphone section

Fagen is known to be a sound quality obsessive and the opening notes of ‘Trans-India Skyway’, a masterpiece of funk, treated me to some of the richest bass I’ve ever heard from a hybrid. With ears used to all-valve sound, one tends to anticipate a certain sacrifice when solid-state stages interfere, but Aesthetix has found a near perfect balance, even if its tuning is slightly on the dry side. Where the solid-state aspect showed its command in the crispness of the percussion, such as the backing in ‘Tomorrow’s Girls’, which was fast, tight and punchy. Even better were the moments in the song when the backing vocalists spread out across the room.

WILLIAM WATSON

This highlighted another aspect of the sound that ensured I wasn’t going to be distracted by the superlative bass during the listening sessions. This unit conveys air and space, even the artificial layout of the studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the Mimas’s conventional, wholly-acceptable-in-domestic-conditions 434mm girth that deals with literal space concerns. Its soundstage is one that ignores walls. The artificial layout of a studio-sourced recording, with so much grace, such aplomb, that I began musing about how ‘it’s not just the
ABOVE: Pictured here in its most basic form – note blanks in place over optional MM/MC phono bay [far left] and digital input bay [left] – the Mimas offers five line inputs and one pre-out (on RCAs and XLRs) plus fully floating 4mm speaker terminals.

of copyright lawyers in certain territories, hence the £11 price tag on the 10CD set, Connie Francis: 19 Original Albums & Bonus Tracks [Intense Media 60026 f]. Yes, 19 albums on ten CDs. Being in a maudlin, soppy mood on my late mother’s birthday, I subjected myself to ’My Yiddische Momma’ and ’Mom-E-Le’ to see how long it took me to well up and reach for the Kleenex. Two seconds – that’s all. Thank goodness I wasn’t listening while writing or I’d have shorted my computer keyboard.

Piano so far stage left that it was in another room. Connie just to the left of centre. Slight echo filling the area of this voice-and-piano-only intro. Then the strings… oy-oy-oy, such rich, cholesterol-laden schmaltz like you’ve never heard.

Mournful, dark, so poignant that I subjected myself to blaspheme (in musical terms): the sense of loss and love caused by the strings – even via a cheapo CD, was reminiscent of the finest RCAs, which led me to my trusty Otari reel-to-reel. But instead of some silky soul challenger, I turned instead to the rousing masterpiece that is Hail, Sousa! [Vanguard StereoLab VTC1650] which boasts ’The Largest Band On Records – 100 Men Strong’.

OK, OK, so Sousa is another of my guilty pleasures. But then I’m old enough to remember when the USA hosted parades for any and every occasion, and it was the sound of marching drums and Sousaphones that long preceded my love for music based on The Beatles. With this tape comes crescendos and bursts and explosions to embarrass the Telec 1812 Overture and other legendary wooler busters.

ROCK THE RAFTERS

With the smiling spirit of Wilson Audio’s late Dave Wilson looking over my shoulder, me recalling his delight when I told him I was a Sousafan, we revelled in the majesty of 100 musicians.

VTC1650 [7½ips/¼-track] which is 5Hz-40kHz at 10W/8ohm (one channel driven) stepped attenuator volume control is accurate to ±0.05dB over respectively. So the Mimas really is a powerhouse, its 135W idle power consumption falling to a still significant 53W in ’normal standby’ setting (1-2W would be standard here)! Finally, the perfect terminator volume control is accurate to ±0.05dB over the top 60dB of its dynamic range while channel separation is a fine >100dB through bass and midrange. PM

ABOVE: Dynamic power output versus distortion into 8ohm (black trace), 4ohm (red), 2ohm (blue) and 1ohm (green) speaker loads. Max. current is 27.4A.

ABOVE: Distortion versus extended frequency for 5Hz-40kHz at 10W/8ohm (one channel driven)

LEFT: The HRC-3 handset offers control over input selection, volume, mute and the Mimas amp’s menu