



MIMETISM 15.2

The name refers to the act of imitating...apt enough for a device whose role is to help imitate a live musical performance. But what is this company?

Mimetism is the brand of Audio System Manufacturing, indirectly related to another French company about which we have said (mostly) good things, Vecteur. But Vecteur was bought by a conglomerate, and the brains behind the remarkable designs, William Andrea, decided not to follow. The 15.2 integrated amplifier is his first independent creation...rather further upscale than any of the Vecteur models.

Andrea's been around for a while. He once worked at Supravox (the speaker maker) for instance, and he had a hand in the design of several YBA amplifiers, including the legendary Intégré. He further continued his reputation at Vecteur, where he turned out one great design after the other (the Vecteur speaker is the only product of the marque that ever disappointed us).

The good side of his Vecteur designs was that they were surprisingly affordable considering their decidedly upmarket sound. The bad side was that the price was kept down with shortcuts in certain critical parts, such as jacks. We had long wondered what Andrea could do if he had the budget to use top-grade parts.

Here's where we get to find out.

The Mimetism is a large amplifier, and its depth, not far from a half meter, requires a deep and robust shelf. The chassis, front panel and cover are high-grade aluminum with a finish in line with the price. Its feet look, from a distance, like the usual plastic feet, but they're actually robust chunks of machined aluminum. It was only when we finally popped the cover for the pictures that we realized the truth: this machine is *built!*

Two huge knobs flank the blue LCD panel. At the rear are double sets of nice quality binding posts, well-made phono jacks, and six XLR jacks (four for the two balanced inputs, two for the balanced outputs from the preamp section). Both have small switches for reversing phase, for those searching to get their recordings into absolute phase. Actually we thought those switches belonged on the remote control, and when we re-read the instructions we discovered that one of the buttons on the remote does exactly that. The preamp outputs can be either uncontrolled, to be the equivalent of tape out jacks, or controlled, as for an active subwoofer.

The rear panel has an RS232 jack, to interface with computer. The jack is not shown in the booklet, however, and hardly any modern computers have these connectors.

We were puzzled by the fact that the labels on the rear jacks don't match the input names that appear on the screen, but it turns out those names can be changed anyway ("iPod," anyone?).

Inside the 15.2 is a 1000 VA toroidal transformer (that's large...watch your back when you lift this amp), 60,000 μ F of filter capacitance (that's large too) and two complementary pairs of MOSFETs per channel. The circuit layout is neat and well laid out. With a rated output of 180 watts per channel, the Mimetism has a limited selection of competitors among integrated amplifiers.

We were less enthusiastic about the controls, which look like refugees from *baddesigns.com*. The two huge knobs on the front are unlabelled, but you expect them to turn, because knobs have been designed to turn since the 19th Century. Well, these don't. Despite their appearance they are both spring-loaded *switches*, which you *twist* to choose an input (left knob) or adjust volume (right knob). Also counterintuitive is the fact that these "knobs" also do something if you *push* them: put the amp into standby mode in one case, dim the display in the other. We figure that in a previous life this amplifier was a car radio!

The remote control, for all its luxurious heft and stylishness (it rather matched the 15.2 itself), has buttons labelled with what look like Egyptian hieroglyphics. In the instruction manual the icons are printed so small that the odds of you figuring them out are no better than even. There is work to be done for what we suppose will be called model 15.3.

We are delighted to say that this pretty much ends our list of complaints.

We installed the Mimetism in our Omega system, substituting it for our Copland preamplifier and Moon W-5LE power amplifier. We did the listening session with an SACD recording, a DVD-Audio and two Red Book CDs (used on some of the other reviews in this issue as well).

The first was an SACD of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 5*, with Colin Davis conducting the BBC Symphony (Pentatone 5186 102). The large symphony orchestra is difficult to reproduce with perfect clarity, so that the timbres of its many varied instruments don't tend to run together.

Our listening sessions were not in the same order as the reviews published in this issue, and by this time we had heard the same recording with lesser amplifiers. “This is an amplifier for grownups,” said Albert enthusiastically.

It was unanimous. We appreciated the fine subtleties of individual instrumental timbres, which allowed us with no difficulty to distinguish the violins from the violas, the clarinets from the oboes, even when they were all playing together. “You can even hear things you’d rather not hear,” said Gerard, “like one of the trumpets that is consistently out of tune with the others.” The space seemed vast, and we could hear all the way to the back of the hall.

And despite the claim we often make that modern speakers don’t need huge amounts of amplifier power, we could *hear* that this amp was a powerhouse, and we were glad it was. The ease and the lack of any effort or strain made the music joyful.

If playing loud is a challenge, so is playing very softly. Carlos Salzedo’s harp masterpiece, *Variations sur un thème ancien* (from *Caprice*, Klavier K11133) includes passages that require power, and others that are so soft they sink into the flog. If there *is* fog.

But there wasn’t. In the louder section, at the start and reiterated near the end, the timbre of Susann McDonald’s magic harp was as clean and realistic as we could wish, but it was in the very soft passages that the *Mimetism* showed what it could do. “I can’t believe all we can hear!” exclaimed Reine. In passage after passage, as the trills and arpeggios moved up the scale in the direction of inaudibility, we could hear notes of ethereal beauty, emerging from a black velvet of silence. The music itself was lyrical and touching. “A revelation,” concluded Reine.

Some amplifiers with inadequate power supplies can sound anemic faced with a



barrage of notes at low frequency. We were by now quite sure this wouldn’t happen, but who can tell? We played the DVD-Audio version of *Take the ‘A’ Train* from the Ray Brown Trio’s *Soular Energy* disc (Hi-Res HRM2011, a double-sided disc that also includes a 24/96 version for DVD players).

We had earlier listened to the LP version of the same piece, and it seemed to us that the DVD-A version didn’t go down as far, but with this amplifier we weren’t so sure. There was a log of weight to Brown’s bass, but it was *natural* weight. “I’ve heard him twice in concert,” said Gerard, “and he sounded a lot like this. On this recording he’s the one carrying the main theme, and it’s not always you can hear a bass sounds this melodic.” Albert agreed. “It’s got weight,” he said, “but it’s agile at the same time.”

The other aspects of the music were exceptional as well. Gene Harris’s piano came through well, with power, but without the “tinkly” tone on

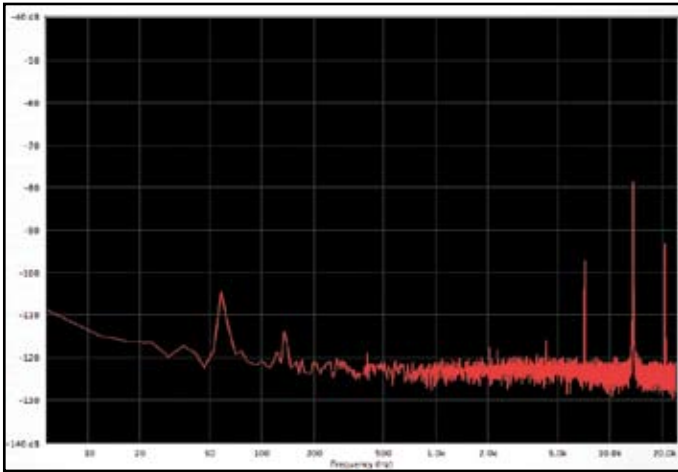
the higher notes we had heard with some other amplifiers (though not with our reference). The rhythm was solid and comforting. The cymbal, which plays softly through much of the piece was startlingly real.

We ended with Hugh Masekela’s moving *Stimela* from his *Triloka* album *Hope* (444 477 203 2). This famous piece about Africans being shipped to Johannesburg to work in the mines before Nelson Mandela came to power, is arresting in its intensity, and moving too. Hearing it with the *Mimetism* we didn’t much feel like writing. “The rhythm becomes music,” said Reine, “and Masekela’s emotion becomes *our* emotion.” Everything was natural, from the clanging cowbell evoking the coal train to Masekela’s voice and his trumpet.

“I’ve fallen in love,” said Reine when it was over.

From there it was onto the test bench for some measurements. Could it *really* deliver 185 watts per channel?

Not here it couldn’t, despite a high line voltage (119 volts). At 1 kHz the amplifier clipped at 153.1 watts, and that was true even after we had given it a good long time to warm up, running at half power into our dummy load (which got plenty warm, as you can imagine!). The good news, however, is that the



clipping point remained exactly the same at all audible frequencies, without the sagging we often see at 20 Hz. That shortcoming was a disappointment in an amplifier not noted for shortcomings. On the other hand a surprising number of high end amplifiers seem to be rated under unattainable conditions, especially

those from countries that have a different power line voltage from ours. Besides, need we remind you that 153 watts per channel is still a *lot* of power?

Switching of inputs is done by relay, not by an audio signal travelling through a rotary switch, and so the crosstalk between adjacent inputs is excellent: an astonishing -88 dB at midband, and a still superb -69 dB at 10 kHz.

There's an Irish proverb that says, *Seeing is believing, but feeling is God's own truth*. This amplifier, by its incomparable ability to move the emotions, is a demonstration of the truth of the proverb. It is the peak of *savoir-faire*, the Everest of amplifiers, at least until it is surpassed. If it ever is.

During this extended session it announced its colors: space that extends horizontally and vertically, plus in depth of course, an ample and lively image, admirable definition over the entire frequency spectrum. It can recreate a vast hall, and the next moment it puts you into the intimacy of your music room...pure magic! In either case there is micro-information in profusion, letting you sense each intonation of each syllable of a vocal piece, each modulation of each instrument, and an admirable sonic coherence. The dynamic range serves up changes of colors ranging from pianissimos to the most troubling fortissimos.

As for the transients, their bite gives the music vitality. This amplifier has such a huge reserve of energy even in the bottom of the spectrum that it can withstand the most extreme stress. As a result, it has a sumptuous bottom, allowing a string bass, for instance, to take all the room it needs to develop its rich sound. A full orchestra comes

across as an opulent whole with energetic but smooth strings, brass that is bright but never shrill...I'm thinking of one segment where one can savor at once the agility and the enchanting tone of the trumpet.

The harp and piano deliver their notes with an airy lightness and beauty that pushes emotional limits. Voice is warm and natural. Our hearing delights in this music, as do all our senses.

I know you're wondering whether you'll need to blow your life savings for this well bred electronics. Perhaps not. Compare with other amplifiers of this category, and you'll see that it is eminently reasonable.

—Reine Lessard

I must admit that I'm at a loss for words. What do you say about an amplifier like this, when you feed in all your favorite recordings, and out they come the way you had always hoped to hear them? Do mere details matter when everything is so obviously right?

And what about those details? Tell you what, just translate the symbols on the remote into an Earth language, and I'm happy.

—Gerard Rejskind

If I had to select an amplifier for the pro-

SUMMING IT UP...

- Brand/model:** Mimetism 15.2
- Price:** C\$6990/US\$5790
- Dimensions:** 42.8 x 47.2 x 12.5 cm
- Rated power (per channel):** 185 W
- Most liked:** High power, extraordinary musical performance
- Least liked:** Obscure controls, mistifying remote
- Verdict:** Says Albert, *an amplifier for grownups*

hear it). Hum was an astonishing 104 dB below full power, and the rest of the noise was not very far from the residual noise in our instruments.

We need hardly repeat that the Mimetism 15.2 is not an ordinary amplifier. "If I didn't have anything, and I were looking for a really good system," said Albert, "this is what I'd buy."



LISTENING ROOM

CROSSTALK

verbal desert island, I would definitely pick an integrated amp, and chances are it might be this one. And I know that the transparent and pristine water lapping the smooth edges around the island would always remind me of the sound quality that this unit is capable of producing.

I know I wouldn't miss the interconnect cables and the sophisticated connectors, and with the savings I'd be able to bring more music along. (And I wouldn't need to carry a basket of tubes either.)

No matter how vast my listening room might be, I know it will be easily filled with music, and the music will always be steady and true, whether an orchestra thundered during a storm or a single voice lamenting under the stars.

"Can we get on with it? Did you *really* like it that much?"

The answer is no, I liked it *more* than that. Actually, even if I *weren't* headed for a desert island, even if I had to set up a system today, right here, with a cost-no-object choice of preamplifiers and power amps, I'd still give this integrated amp a very special spot on a very short list.

Drop everything and go see if I'm making it up.

—Albert Simon