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Swiss precision and French passion from Mimetism's new audio superstars

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EDITOR'S CHOICE
HI-FI CHOICE
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A right impression

The 20.1 CD player and 15.2 amp are a perfect wedding of high-end know-how!

PRODUCT Mimetism 20.1 & 15.2

TYPE CD player and integrated amplifier

PRICE £5,107 (20.1); £5,415 (15.2)

KEY FEATURES (20.1) Size (WxHxD): 13x43x47cm
 ● Weight: 18kg ● Digital outputs: S/PDIF RCA, AES/EBU XLR ● Analogue outputs: XLR, RCA
 (15.2) Size (WxHxD): 13x43x47cm ● Weight: 28kg
 ● Rated power: 180 watts (8 ohms), 360 watts (4 ohms) ● Inputs: 2x XLR, 4x RCA phono
 ● Outputs: fixed/variable XLR & RCA

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www.mimetism.com

Mimetism is the least famous name in Absolute Sounds' select Absolute Studio product range. It sits alongside Dartzeel amplifiers and the Continuum Caliburn turntable, as an example of what new companies can bring to the high-end market. Mimetism is a collaboration between William Andrea from France, who does the engineering, and Yvan Coderey from Switzerland, who conceived the industrial design. Their creations are distinguished by casework that could be a minimalist's wet dream – there is not a single letter or number on the front panel of either unit and just two knobs with which to operate them.

This control system is initially confusing, but surprisingly intuitive once you start pressing and turning the knobs. We even managed to open the disc drawer on the 20.1 CD player without resorting to the manual, but that was largely luck. Click the right hand knob anti-clockwise twice and out comes the drawer. Alternatively, familiarise yourself with the variations on the usual control graphics on the Zap remote handset and you're away.

Both these units are unusually long – their feet would sit on our conventional depth rack but not without jutting over the edge. This wouldn't be a concern if the units could grip glass, but every time you plug in a lead it's difficult to stop them from sliding forward. The 47cm case depth is significant enough to warrant a dedicated or custom built support system for aesthetic reasons, if no other, but at this price you probably aren't going to shove them on any old equipment support.

If the sound quality is anything to go by then it's obvious that the Franco/Swiss team has been paying attention to detail under the lid. The 20.1 CD player has an ATAPI interface

DVD-ROM drive, which runs at high speed and streams its output to a Crystal CS8416 receiver, the latter being a low-jitter device that recovers the clock from the incoming stream. An asynchronous sample rate converter upsamples the signal to 192kHz and passes it on to a Wolfson WM8740 DAC, which provides a balanced output. The analogue output stage

uses FETs, while the digital output goes through a pair of in-house transformers to isolate it from the power supply. Six separately regulated power supplies run the player from a single 100VA mains transformer.

Functionally, the 15.2 allows you to change the name and relative level of inputs, the latter by plus or minus 10dB, which should be enough to have all your sources coming through at around the same level – source material notwithstanding. It has outputs

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The 15.2 amplifier manages to double its output into a halving of load, something that you rarely find with integrated designs – but then again not many integrated are this big or expensive. The circuit employs high-tolerance, surface-mount devices, in order to keep signal paths short, while amplification is provided by two pairs of Hitachi MOSFETs per channel. Each channel has its own 60,000 microfarad power supply with separate windings on a 1,000 VA toroidal transformer providing the juice. And should a fault occur, then Mimetism employs a protection system to stop this behemoth from destroying your speakers. With solid copper bars connecting the output

WILLIAM & YVAN

William Andrea has worked with some of France's foremost companies. His resume includes developing active loudspeakers for Supravox. He also worked for FAMCO (French American Company) where he developed the Nuance and Plenitude pre/power amplifiers. After designing the P-UN preamp and PP-UN phono stage for Yves Cochet, he went on to work for Phlox where he developed products for the YBA name. At Vecteur, Andrea created the well-regarded Club Twelve/I-6.2 integrated amplifier (£1,845) in 2003.

Yvan Coderey owns the store L'Audiophile in Lausanne, Switzerland and distributes various brands as Audio Synthese. What connected the pair were the equipment supports that Yvan designed and which were distributed by Vecteur in France.



in RCA phono and XLR form that can be used in absolute and relative modes – the former being full signal for a recorder and the latter being variable for a subwoofer or second power amplifier. As the weight suggests, construction is on the solid side, with a 10mm aluminium front plate, 10/15mm 'processed iron' chassis and a 10/15mm aluminium top plate, with damping to minimise resonance.

SOUND QUALITY

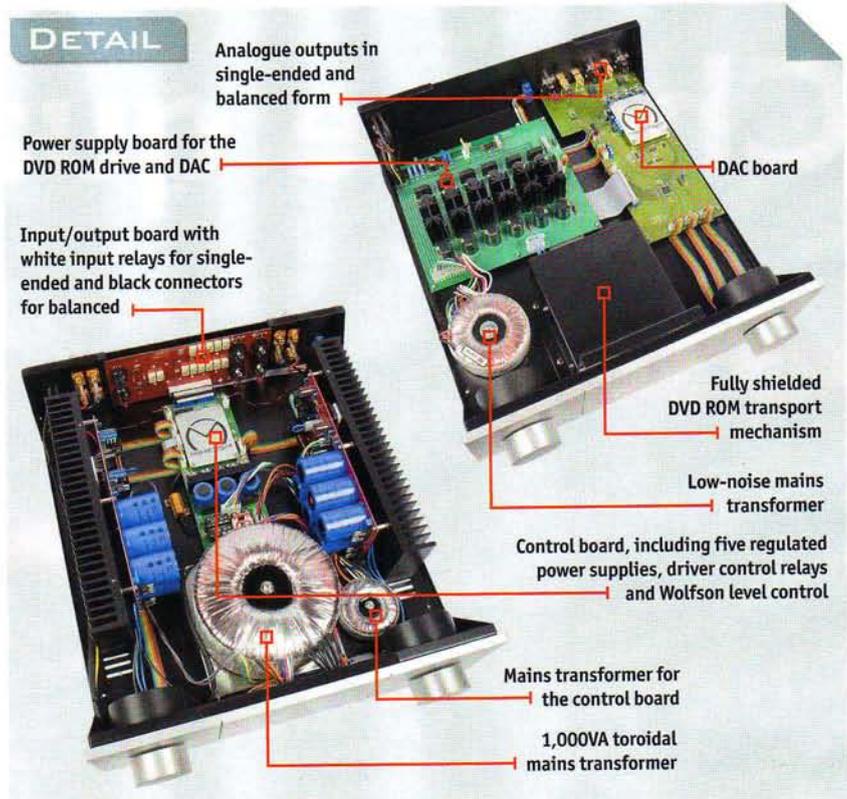
Once we'd got some idea of how the two knobs operate these components and had hooked them up to our Bowers and Wilkins 802D loudspeakers, the fun began. We first auditioned this pair an hour or so after turn on and heard a lively, enthusiastic and unusually dramatic result that was highly atmospheric, but perhaps a little too effusive. The result after the system had been on for three days is distinctly more relaxed and refined. The lack of a power button on either front panel is not merely for aesthetic reasons. Now the sound is strong on detail, as well as substance, the timing is better than average, and the dynamics are right on the money.

What became clear with continued exposure, is that the Mimetism pairing can deliver a lot of detail without the slightly etched quality that detailed systems often have. It seems entirely natural in balance, thanks to very clean high-frequencies and power reserves that allow it to control the speaker without making a big deal of the fact.

ABSOLUTE STUDIO

We talked to Absolute Sounds' MD Ricardo Franassovici about his Absolute Studio collection and the thinking behind it. According to him "There are a lot of people making stuff out there that is supposed to be high end, but they don't have the vision to do what it takes to make a serious high end product. To do that you've got to be able to do a few laps around the circuit and then make it five, six or ten times. For the Studio, I looked for smaller brands which have already got to this stage, which have a track record – companies that have proved themselves."

We also asked how he came upon Mimetism? "I listened to players from all the underground companies that fulfilled the criteria mentioned above and it [the 20.1] was the one which was the best that I could find at that price according to the Studio's philosophy of sound." That philosophy is that "there is in the flow of music something that's made to caress your senses. An organic quality that sound has, you don't need to be an audiophile to appreciate this, it's not in the beat, it's in the complete envelope and this is what Studio systems deliver."



A tough test of this sort of thing is Schubert's *Winterreise* D911 *lieder* (Schäfer/Schneider), where the high female voice can reveal the slightest insecurity in the treble. The Mimetism pairing is more than equal to such a task, producing a strong image of the singer which really stood out.

The heavily treated sounds of Cornelius' *Sensuous* album are reproduced with greater depth than usual and it's easy to hear the harmonics of each note. The shades that combine to produce each sound are readily apparent because the presentation is calm without being slow. The bass harmonics on a loosening guitar string are particularly rich and solid from a three-dimensional point of view.

Comparing the 20.1 CD player with a couple of alternatives (at admittedly lower price points) revealed a bit more. Next to the Leema Antila, it is significantly more detailed as well as more relaxed and effortless. The Onix XCD50 is slightly better at creating image depth, but can't compete in terms of dynamics and allows the 20.1 to show of its remarkable ability to create a sense of musical presence, thanks to a revealing midband and solid, yet articulate bass. It took an MSB Platinum DAC III to improve on the 20.1 and that is the Signature version with the Mimetism providing transport duties.

Bettering the 15.2 also proved difficult. In fact, none of our sub £5,000 amps could come close. Only the very impressive, but single input Digital Do Main B-1a at £6,500 managed to deliver a more natural and fluid result. The only area where it could be bettered is in a sense of grip. The better pre/power amps in the price range have more welly, especially in the bass.

That the Mimetism 20.1 and 15.2 come out of such analysis so well, is a testament to their fundamental strengths of high-resolution combined with very clean power. It's not the most dynamic or speedy system but it's a lot better than most in these respects and many others. It may be a new name, but the pedigree of its makers has ensured that the results should propel it into the first degree. Mimetism looks like another winner for the Absolute Studio. **HFC**

Jason Kennedy

VERDICT - 20.1 CD

SOUND
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★★

CONCLUSION

An impressive player from a relatively small company, the 20.1 comes in substantial casework and produces a very convincing and musical sound that's strong on detail.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

★★★★★

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VERDICT - 15.2 AMP

SOUND
★★★★★

FEATURES
★★★★★

BUILD
★★★★★

VALUE
★★★★★

CONCLUSION

The 15.2 is one of those rare things, a powerful integrated amplifier with great dynamics, high resolution and a musical fluidity that's rare even at this price.

HI-FI CHOICE
OVERALL SCORE

★★★★★

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