



Aesthetix Atlas Eclipse Power Amplifier

Greek Myth or Audio Powerhouse?

Don Saltzman

Aesthetix has developed an enviable reputation as a manufacturer of elite components at down-to-earth prices. The company's earliest products, the all-tube Io phonostage and Callisto linestage, have long set the stage for what is possible in modern all-tube designs. As the mainstay of Aesthetix' top "Jupiter" line, these products have received updates and modifications through the years and have developed a loyal following among audiophiles who value the sound of all-tube electronics. In their latest "Eclipse" finery, the Io and Callisto are major players at the highest echelon of the audio world. The prices have gone up, of course, but Aesthetix founder and designer Jim White still prices these units below the cost of most of the direct competition.

As the popularity of the Jupiter line increased, Aesthetix developed a second line of electronics in 2002, called the "Saturn Series," designed to showcase the sound of tubes in less expensive and more user-friendly gear. To keep costs down, solid-state components replace some of the tubes, but it is fair to say that the Saturn line is predominantly tube driven. This series pres-

ently consists of phonostages, linestages, an integrated phono and linestage, an integrated amplifier, DAC and CD player combination. Jim has continued to improve most of these products with higher quality components and improved designs, the latest and best of which wear the "Eclipse" label.

Against this backdrop of an all-tube "Jupiter" lineup and hybrid "Saturn" series, sits the subject of this review, the Eclipse version of the Atlas, the only separate power amplifier manufactured by Aesthetix. First introduced in 2007, the Atlas resides in the Saturn series and utiliz-

es a hybrid design featuring a tube input stage and a solid-state output stage. To my knowledge, the Atlas quickly developed a reputation as an outstanding, powerful, and reliable amplifier at a price that didn't require a second mortgage. Jim believes, and I (now) agree, that the Atlas is a great match not only with other Saturn components, but with the all-tube Jupiter gear, as well. Of course, the Atlas also works well with front-end preamplifiers from other manufacturers.

At this point, a disclaimer is in order. I have been a friend of Jim's since his early days at Theta, before Aesthetix was

Specs & Pricing

Type: Monoblock power amplifier

Power output: 300w into 8 ohms, 600W into 4 ohms

Tubes required: One 6SN7

Frequency response: (-3dB points at full power)
4Hz–150kHz

Inputs: One single-ended and one balanced for direct input; one single-ended and one balanced for crossover input

Input sensitivity: 3.1V RMS for 300 watts into 8 ohms for rated output (balanced)

Input impedance: Direct input: 470K ohms single-ended or balanced for each phase

Crossover: Variable

High-pass crossover: 6 dB/octave, 16 settings from 40Hz to 200Hz in approx. 10Hz increments

Dimensions: 17-7/8" x 7½" x 18"

Weight: 62 lbs. each

Price: \$28,000 per pair

AESTHETIX AUDIO CORPORATION

5220 Gabbert Road, Suite A

Moorpark, CA 93021

(805) 529-9901

info@aesthetix.net

Associated Equipment

Kuzma Stabi M turntable with Kuzma 4Point 'arm and

Lyra Etna, Koetsu Rosewood Platinum

Signature cartridges

EMM Labs CD playback system

Audio Research REF 10 phonostage; Aesthetix Io Eclipse phonostage

Audio Research REF 10 linestage; Aesthetix Callisto Eclipse linestage

Aesthetix Atlas Eclipse monoblock amplifiers, Audio Research REF 750 SE

Amplifiers

Purist Audio Design, Transparent, and Audioquest cabling

Sain Line Systems power cables

Stillpoint Ultra 6 feet; Stillpoint Aperture acoustic panels

even a glimmer in his eye. Regular readers know that I am a big fan of tube amplification. I have owned one version or another of the Io and Eclipse for many years, currently in the Eclipse iteration. With this background, can I still offer a fair and unbiased review of the latest Atlas? I think I can. I hold Jim's products to the same standards I hold all audio gear: How close do they come to the faithful reproduction of live, unamplified music? To this end, the fact is I always admired the early Atlas amps, but was not in love with them. I thought their tonality and power were great, but I could not overlook what I perceived as a very slight loss of

Throughout the entire review period, I never heard or felt any sense of strain from the Atlas Eclipse.

transparency, especially compared to some other quality amplifiers at similar prices. I mentioned this to Jim, on more than one occasion. I'm certain he wasn't thrilled with my assessment, and thus, even though we are friends, I was pleasantly surprised when he told me I must hear the Eclipse version of the amp.

So, what exactly is the Atlas? We know from Greek mythology that Atlas was sentenced by Zeus to forever hold the heavens above the world. Through the ages the name "Atlas" has been used to denote unusual or great strength. Does the Aesthetix Atlas Eclipse live up to its name? (Without trying to give too much away, after this review was written I suggested to Jim he should change the name of the amplifier.)

In terms of pure power, the Atlas is rated at 300 watts into 8 ohms and 600 watts into a 4-ohm load. This is certainly competitive rated power at its price point, but still less than the huge amplifiers offering 700+ watts into 8 ohms. From a different perspective, though, there is a giant price leap from the Atlas to any all-tube amplifier offering 600 or more watts into an 8- or 4-ohm load. In my audio world, power is at a premium because my speakers of choice are the very inefficient Magnepan 20.7s. As I have noted in many of my reviews, these speakers will certainly

play music well with a 200–300 watt amplifier, but really don't come alive without 500 or more watts per channel. By "come alive," I mean sound effortless to the point you forget about the amplification, regardless of listening level. Parenthetically, I pause to observe what many other audio writers have noted: for whatever reason, a tube watt seems to have more juice than a solid-state watt. For example, a 150-watt all-tube amplifier such as the Zesto Eros 300, or a 250-watt all-tube amplifier such as the Audio Research REF 250 SE, do surprisingly good jobs of driving the big Maggies to reasonably high listening levels, on most types of music. But as good as these amps are, with my speakers they won't shake the rafters playing Mahler's Fifth.

Fortunately, the Magnepan 20.7s present a 4-ohm load to the amplifier, thereby availing themselves of the full 600 watts on tap from each of the Atlas monos.

In practice, in my listening room, the Atlas lived up to its name. It was truly effortless in driving the Maggies at all listening levels, including levels at which I started worrying about blowing up the speakers. (But at least I never worried about blowing up the amps!) Throughout the entire review period, I never heard or felt any sense of strain from the Atlas Eclipse. In saying this, I must also give a tip of the hat to Magnepan. As an owner of all prior versions of the 20 series speaker, I used to have plenty of reasons to worry about blowing out a tweeter or even a mid-range section. But the 20.7s are another matter, reliably playing to very high levels without sign of stress or fail-

Electronics Focus Aesthetix Atlas Eclipse Power Amplifier

ure (so far). I seriously doubt that any other full-range planar loudspeaker (except the new Magnepan 30.7) is capable of playing cleanly at the sustained high levels of which the 20.7 is capable.

Because it is a hybrid design, the Atlas is different from most other amplifiers. Through use of a tube input stage, Jim White (and other designers of hybrids) attempt to infuse the sound with the properties of the tube or tubes chosen to serve as input amplification. I am not qualified to delve into intricacies of amplifier design, but as I understand it, designers choose a hybrid topology when they want to obtain a tube-type sound with the benefits of a solid-state output stage, such as higher output and tighter control of the bass. Furthermore, a hybrid design can generally offer a higher power output, at a lower price, than similarly priced

all-tube designs.

Not all hybrids, of course, are created equal. Years ago I tried some early hybrid amps made by Counterpoint. They had some nice qualities, but almost no control of the bass. But time and technology move on; the Atlas Eclipse is a state-of-the-art design with none of the flaws of those older amps. The gain stage of the Atlas uses one 6SN7 tube per channel. As this tube provides all of the voltage gain for the amplifier, it is fair to say that much of the sound of the amp is provided by this tube. Jim White informs me that as a zero-feedback design, the Atlas is unique in the world of hybrid amplifiers. He believes the lack of feedback is essential for maintaining air, space, and coherence. The Atlas' inputs are sophisticated and flexible in that both single-ended and balanced are provided, as well as a separate direct input that bypasses all

internal crossovers and switching for additional purity.

Both the Eclipse and the less expensive Signature versions of the Atlas utilize 16 bipolar output transistors per channel. Both versions also add a unique, but amazingly useful, wrinkle to connectivity. In addition to the full-range direct input, the Atlas has a separate set of inputs that allow the use of a built-in high-pass crossover. The crossover is adjustable and allows the user to roll off the low frequencies going to the loudspeaker driven by the Atlas. This capability is perfect for those who use subwoofers (or who own speakers such as Vandersteens with self-powered bass). The built-in crossover means there is no need to place an external crossover before the Atlas to remove the low bass frequencies before the Atlas sees the signal. This avoids any sonic degradation that may be added by the external crossover (including crossovers that may be built into subwoofers) and also eliminates the need to purchase additional connecting cables. Front panel controls on the amp allow 16 different crossover settings, all with a slope of 6dB/octave. This flexibility should allow the Atlas-driven main speaker to blend well with any subwoofer.

You may be thinking that since both the Signature and Eclipse versions contain so many of the same features, let alone the same essential circuit topology, can it be possible that the Eclipse sounds significantly different than the Signature? It can, and it does. Before examining the sound, it is important to note that the Eclipse differs from the Signature in many important respects. They both use the same number of output transistors, but for the Eclipse these transistors are carefully hand-matched across several parameters. Statistically, Jim informs me that 200–300 devices need to be measured before they obtain a matching set of 16 output transistors. He believes that this extreme matching leads to a



reduction of distortion and a greater liquidity to the sound. This is all well and good, but of course the proof is in the listening.

The Eclipse also differs from its junior brethren in other important respects. First, each output transistor is accompanied by a dedicated reservoir capacitor (in addition to the large reservoir caps in the power supply). The aluminum casework has been redesigned to be more rigid and reduce resonances. The Eclipse also uses StealthCap coupling capacitors specifically designed for the Atlas by Peter Moncrieff. Changes have also been made to the power supply: The high-voltage transformer and choke are de-coupled from the chassis using specially designed isolation mounts. This reduces mechanical vibration introduced into the chassis, with the goal of increasing transparency. The power supply receives an additional upgrade in the form of lower-gauge winding made of the same material used in very high-end power cables.

It is apparent the Atlas Eclipse excels at connectivity and offers crossover features found almost nowhere else. It also contains many advanced design features. But these features would be wasted, in the final analysis, if the Eclipse did not offer sound reproduction noticeably superior to the Signature version of the amp. I am pleased to report that Jim's efforts have succeeded in taking the performance of the Atlas to an entirely new level. Most importantly, the unflappable ease and power of the earlier Atlas versions have been retained, but with a new three-dimensionality and transparency unique to the Eclipse.

The Eclipse completely banishes any of the veiling I heard in the earlier Atlas. Its transparency is pristine—not like a very clear window, but like no window at all between the listener and the music. This utter transparency is a hallmark of all great modern amplifiers, to whose ranks the Eclipse belongs. There is an overriding sense that you are hearing everything on offer from your musical source, with nothing hiding in the shadows. Whether it is the smallest instrumental nuance, or a reverberation from the back of the hall, the Eclipse reveals all. By this I do not mean to say that the high-end of the amp is tilted up. It is not. But it is an extremely revealing device which, with some material, can lead to an impression it is more extended in the high frequencies than many all-tube amplifiers of the same power rating. This is only an impression; some might contend that the all-tube designs are unnaturally rolled off and hence more forgiving, but I do not find that to be the case with the best modern tube amplifiers. In any event, the Eclipse owner may be confident that he or she is hearing everything the source material has to offer.

I do not want to skirt the obvious question: Does the Eclipse sound like an all-tube amplifier? To my ear, the answer is “no.” Does it sound like an all-solid-state amplifier? The answer is still “no.” What it does sound like, as illustrated below, is a state-of-the-art amplifier that exhibits many (but not all) of the virtues of tubes and many (but not all) of the virtues of solid-state amplification, in one compact package. The flipside of this design approach is that it also seems to minimize what may be perceived as weaknesses of all-tube or all-solid-state designs. I think this is what Jim White, as well as other designers of hybrid amplifiers, set out to do. That is, obtain as many of the strengths of both tube and solid-state amplification as possible, while minimizing their sonic deficits.

The unflappable ease and power of the earlier Atlas versions have been retained, but with a new three-dimensionality and transparency unique to the Eclipse.

Some illustrations are in order. In terms of sheer power, I noted above that the Atlas has always been a powerhouse, and the Eclipse version is no exception. The Eclipse monos drive my Maggie 20.7s so effortlessly that they should be able to do the same with any speaker on the market. For review purposes, most of my critical listening was done with my Kuzma Stabi M turntable with Kuzma 4Point arm/Lyra Etna combination. For front-end electronics I alternated between the Aesthetix Io Eclipse/Callisto Eclipse combination and the Audio Research REF 10 Phono/REF 10 Line Stage combination. These are some of the best preamplifiers available, at any price, and easily allowed me to discern the sound quality of the Atlas Eclipse.

Even though I started preparing listening notes shortly after the Atlas monos were installed, it is important to report that the longer I had the amplifiers in my sound system the smoother they became in overall response and the more open in soundstaging. After about 200 hours of use, they sounded *much* better than during the first week of my review period. So much so, in fact, that I basically had to start the review process

again and revisit the same material I had played weeks earlier. I also found that placing Stillpoint Ultra 6 feet under both Eclipse monos was very beneficial; background level was even darker and musical instruments had greater body and sounded slightly more three-dimensional. I would suggest to any prospective purchasers that they experiment with connecting cables and support devices for the amps; it is well worth the effort for these and most amplifiers. I would also caution prospective purchasers of the Atlas (as well as dealers setting them up for demonstration) that they will not really hear the full capabilities of the Eclipse amps until they have broken-in for at least 200 hours, possibly longer. This is not a strange phenomenon in the world of high-end audio equipment, encompassing a broad range of electronics, cables and loudspeakers, but it bears mentioning, nonetheless.

Once the amps were broken in, one of the first records I played for review purposes was *Somethin' Else*, one of the fantastic Blue Note reissues I received from Music Matters. I have several fine copies of the original, and generally I am not a fan of many reissues, but I think this particular one is equal to or better than the original in almost every way. (I feel the same way about many of the other Blue Notes I have received from Music Matters.) With the Atlas Eclipse monos in the system, “Autumn Leaves” and “Love for Sale” sounded spectacular. The piano sounded natural and dynamic, centered in the mix as the perfect backdrop to Miles Davis' trumpet and Cannonball Ad-

Electronics Focus Aesthetix Atlas Eclipse Power Amplifier

derley's alto sax. Likewise the stand-up bass, occasionally overblown on some Rudy Van Gelder recordings (at least in my experience), was tighter than expected and well-defined. No bloat or unnatural heaviness, yet no thinning-out either. Talk about a mix of tubes and solid-state: the horns had a body and richness closer to the sound of all-tubes, while the bass was presented with the clarity and control typically exhibited by fine solid-state amps. I also developed the impression that the Atlas Eclipse was very extended in the high frequencies, exceedingly clean and airy, seeming to have more bandwidth than many of the tube amps I have heard, especially of the more vintage variety. A thoroughly enjoyable listening experience.

For fun I next listened to another favorite LP, Duke Ellington's *Jazz Party in Stereo* (Classic Records). Again, I have several copies and am a big fan of the original LP, but I thoroughly enjoy this Classic Records reissue. This was one music party I'm sorry I missed (even if I was only 13 at the time!). The studio sounds cavernous, like a large auditorium. The sense of space is heightened by the clapping of the many Ellington friends lucky enough to attend the recording sessions. Accompanied by a huge percussion section, Duke was also joined by jazz greats Dizzy Gillespie and Jimmy Rushing, not to mention Clark Terry and Johnny Hodges, among others. Daring and imaginative, this was Duke Ellington at his innovative best. Fortunately for us, it was recorded with sound quality to match and if you don't have the original, Classic Records has given us a great reissue.

Most of side one of *Jazz Party* is a set of cuts that together form "Toot Suite." Listening to this music with the Atlas Eclipse in the system was a huge joy. Transparency was exemplary—seemingly nothing between the musicians and the listener. Each of the performers was presented in his own space, spread across a seemingly enormous stage. Moreover, the Eclipse monos allowed the instruments to sound three-dimensional, with the same tonal balance as heard live—nothing sterile and no paper-cut-out instruments. But most importantly, to me, the Eclipse showcased the sheer exuberance of the performers; they were clearly having a great

time and, as a listener, the fun was contagious. The percussion was driving, the horns sounded remarkably life-like and the piano sounded natural and percussive, with due weight in the lower octaves of its range. The bass line reproduced by the Atlas on this recording is unusually tight and well-delineated (possibly, one of the benefits of a solid-state output stage?).

At this point in my listening journey with the Eclipse monos, I was generally extremely pleased with the ultra-high performance of these new amps. My initial trepidation, based upon my experiences with earlier versions of the Atlas, gave way to pure enjoyment. I could, and did, listen for hours on end without fatigue. You know you are on to something good when a new piece of gear prompts you to pull out more and more of your favorite music.

Straining to find any potential weaknesses of these amps, I can only come up with two caveats: (1) While the soundstage offered by the Atlas Eclipse is very wide and deep (if the recording permits), it may not present the last 5-10% of depth offered by the very best, high-power all-tube amplifiers; and (2) while the extended high-frequencies of these amps usually opened a world of air, nuance, and fine detail on the recordings I played, on occasional hot recordings I can imagine that some listeners might prefer an amplifier with a seemingly more forgiving (i.e., rolled-off) high frequency response. In my view, I accept that all recordings are not optimal or reference quality, and I appreciate all audio equipment, whether tube, solid-state, or hybrid, that allows the free flow of everything contained on the recording, without omission or emphasis of any part of the frequency spectrum. In my experience, problematical recordings always sound problematical, regardless of the playback equipment in use. In truth, during the vast majority of my listening with the Atlas Eclipse monos, most often I was blown away by the air, detail, and sense of space offered by these amplifiers.

To get a full take on the sound quality of the Eclipse version of the Atlas, I listened to a wide range of other recordings. I can sum up that listening experience by highlighting my listening notes. Curious as

to how the Eclipse would sound with solo and massed string instruments, I turned to Jacqueline du Pré playing the Haydn Cello Concerto in C (EMI). In addition to beautiful playing by du Pré, this recording offers a very wide stage and sumptuous cello tone. The Eclipse monos did not disappoint. If anything, the soundstage seemed even wider than I recalled. Her cello sounded rich and three-dimensional, as it would when heard live; again, no thinning-out of instruments was taking place. In particular, the entrance of the cello in the second movement was exquisite; the Eclipse amps allowed this music to flow seamlessly and with great delicacy. The massed violins also sounded resinous and lifelike, while orchestral depth on this recording was excellent.

Mahler's Symphony No. 5 with Zubin Mehta and the L.A. Philharmonic (Decca) was equally rewarding. With the Atlas Eclipse monos in the system, the huge string sections all sounded natural and the horns soared above the orchestra and through the room. The double basses sounded deep and articulate, with no unnatural heaviness. Simply put, this is a stirring performance of a great symphony; the Atlas amps did not editorialize or get in the way of the music.

I didn't limit my evaluation to jazz and classical music. Female and male voices were reproduced by the Atlas Eclipse amps with pristine clarity and definition. By way of example, I started listening to a few songs from the Norah Jones' *Come Away With Me* record (Capitol/Blue Note), but ended up playing the whole album. On the Hank Williams' classic "Cold Cold Heart," Norah is serenading in your room while the stand-up bass accompaniment is well-controlled and defined. Complete transparency is the order of the day.

Moreover, the Eclipse versions of the Atlas capture all of the rhythm and energy of rock and roll and electronic music. I was fortunate to see Neil Young reunited with his old band, Crazy Horse, a few years ago at the Outside Lands festival in San Francisco. This great combination of musicians was both loose and tight at the same time, not unlike the Rolling Stones or the old Rod Stewart bands. This version of Neil Young is much more rock-

Electronics Focus Aesthetix Atlas Eclipse Power Amplifier

and-roll than his country-oriented albums (which are also fantastic). I had almost forgotten that aside from his composing and singing, Neil Young is a spectacular guitarist. His extended riffs with Crazy Horse guitarist Danny Whitten blew me away at the festival.

Much of this Neil Young with Crazy Horse excitement is captured on Young's second studio album, *Everybody Knows This is Nowhere* (Reprise; there are also quality reissues). The Atlas Eclipse amps allowed me to play this album, especially the extended cuts "Down by the River" and "Cowgirl in the Sand," at concert-like levels, without strain or compression. Again, kudos to the Maggie 20.7s, all the better when (very judiciously) paired with the REL 212/SE subwoofers. Because it's a studio album, Neil Young's voice sounds cleaner and more detailed than at a live festival performance. And the extended guitar riffs, with the Eclipse monos in the system, sound as gritty and electrifying as when heard live. I couldn't help but play some of the songs more than once.

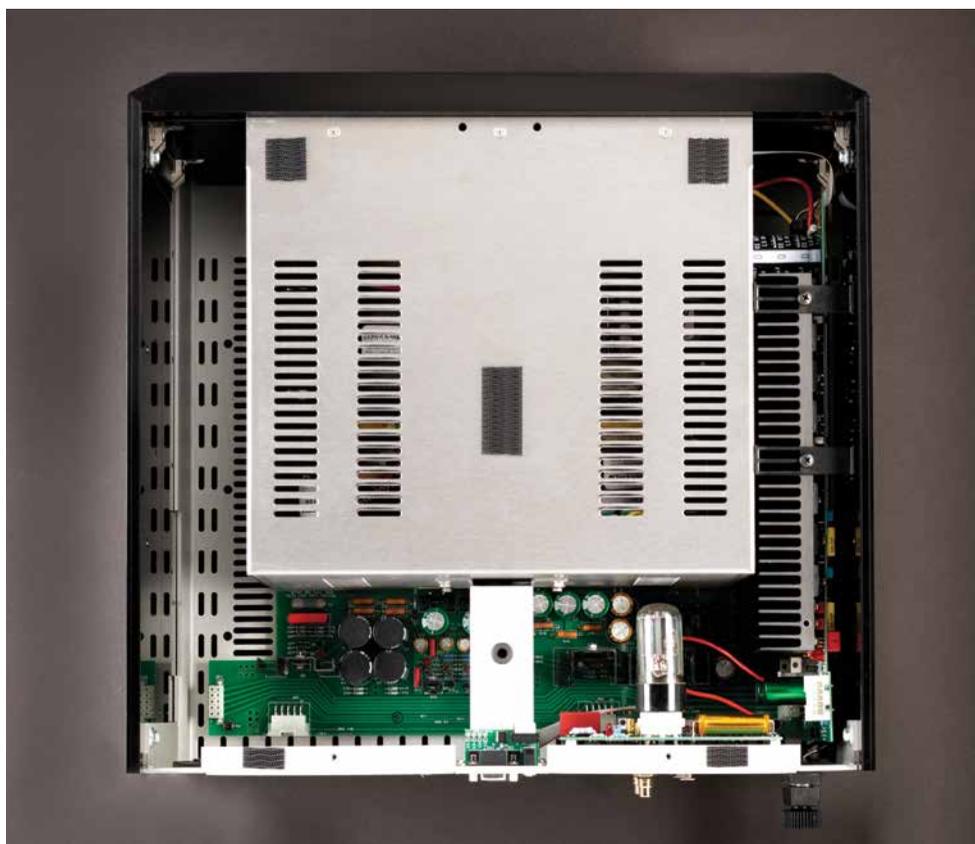
The Neil Young album helped show me that the Eclipse amps were not only transparent and tonally accurate, but also excelled at retrieving the passion of the performance. So did another recording, *The Kills Live* (Third Man Records). I've seen The Kills at a few music festivals and they put on an exciting show. I admit their music may be an acquired taste, and the recording quality of this album is good, but not reference. (It was recorded at Jack White's Third Man record studios and it has a garage quality to it—in a good way). Nevertheless, the Eclipses allowed me to crank this music up to near-ridiculous levels, without issue. I can't really say how accurately the amps captured the "sound" of The Kills recording session, but without doubt the Eclipse monos succeeded in transporting me back to the excitement and

emotion of the music festivals where I had heard The Kills play live. This is what I am looking for and the Atlas amps delivered the goods.

Of all things, I wrapped up my review by listening to some digital music from my computer—a brave new world for me. I'm working on an informational piece about Yarlung Records, a small company with which some of you may be familiar. Yarlung takes that bold step beyond reissuing older recordings: they make new recordings of interesting music with outstanding musicians. They are to be applauded for the effort alone. I have been to a few of their recording sessions and can report that along with the quality of the performance, they take recording and sound quality as their highest priorities. Many of their recordings are available on vinyl and CD, while all of them are available as

high-resolution digital downloads. I downloaded many of their recordings to my computer, but for now I listened primarily to a new recording provided to me by Yarlung called *Lifeline*. *Lifeline* is a collection of beautiful spirituals recorded by Yarlung at Segerstrom Hall in Costa Mesa, California. The songs are performed by the Lifeline Quartet and feature spirituals from the Civil War era and earlier. The singers are spectacular; in particular, the power and range of Michelle Mayne-Graves will give you goosebumps. On this recording, the Atlas Eclipse monos were able to reproduce the full dynamic range of the singers, each in their individual space, with power and finesse and with no sense of strain or compression. On my Maggie 20.7s, the only other amplifiers that have exhibited the same effortless ability have been much larger all-tube amplifiers, at considerably greater cost than the Atlas.

All in all, my listening experience with the Atlas Eclipse monos was thoroughly enjoyable. They are extremely transparent, thereby curing the major issue I had with earlier versions of the Atlas amps. All music emerges out of a completely black and quiet sonic background, thereby enhancing low-level detail. Further, these amps are very powerful, easily getting the best performance from my inefficient Magnepan 20.7s without any strain or sense of compression. The Eclipse offers many of the sonic advantages of all-tube designs, approaching and sometimes equaling many of those designs in depth and width of soundstage and three-dimen-



Electronics Focus Aesthetix Atlas Eclipse Power Amplifier

sional reproduction of instruments and voices. At the same time, the very extended upper frequencies of the Atlas may seem, on some recordings, not quite as laid-back as some tube amps. Over time it became apparent that these amplifiers do not impose any particular sonic signature upon the music and, far more often than not, reveal air, space, and detail lost on lesser gear. Moreover, in the low frequencies the Eclipse amps seem to exceed the performance of many tube amplifiers in that they exhibit the power and tight control of high-power solid-state amplification, yet without dryness or loss of instrumental texture.

The Eclipse monos are also very user friendly. They are physically extremely quiet and make no noise whatsoever that would intrude into the listening room. They put out very little heat (only becoming slightly warm to the touch) and do not require the owner to periodically replace many tubes. With only one tube to replace every few years or so, they are almost as easy to maintain as a pure solid-state amplifier.

A bonus for many will be that the Eclipse amps also contain a built-in high-pass crossover. For those who use subwoofers with satellite or full-range speakers, the Eclipse can be set up to drive the main loudspeaker while rolling off the low frequencies going to those speakers. With 16 different crossover points on tap, it should be possible to obtain an ideal match of main speaker and subwoofer in almost any combination. In short, proper setup will allow the user to minimize duplication of frequency response in the crossover range covered by both speakers, with

the result of greater transparency in that region and less of the heavy quality sometimes associated with subs. When subwoofers (or loudspeakers with self-powered bass drivers, such as Vandersteens) are used, the internal crossover in the Eclipse also eliminates the need for an external crossover and eliminates the need for and expense of an extra set of cables between crossover and amplifier. If you don't need this crossover feature, the direct inputs of the Atlas completely bypass the crossover circuit, for maximum sonic purity.

To answer the question I posed near the beginning of this review, I believe that while the Eclipse definitely shows Atlas-like strength and power, I no longer believe "Atlas" is a good name for

this amplifier. In my view, it is so sonically superior to its Atlas predecessors, that it deserves a new name. While the Atlas monos are not inexpensive, neither are they overly priced. Competing tube or solid state amplifiers that offer this level of sound quality, with the power to drive almost any loudspeaker, usually cost far more than a pair of Eclipse monos. And there is good news for current owners of earlier versions of the Atlas: their amps are not obsolete. They can be upgraded at the factory to full Eclipse specification.

In short, the Atlas Eclipse monos are highly recommended. They offer elite high-end sound quality, great flexibility and user friendliness at a reasonable cost in today's market. **tas**