

Digico D5T

AT headed to 'Theatre Central' – London's West End – to check on the latest updates to the D5 mixing platform. Jim Evans reports.

In terms of live sound technology, one of the biggest success stories over the last couple of years has been that of the Digico D5 Live platform and the D5T theatre version. "It's going great," says Digico's Dave Webster with due modesty. "The D5T is in *Les Misérables* and *Mamma Mia* in London's West End and will be starring in *We Will Rock You*, currently in rehearsal in Las Vegas." Well over 100 D5 Live systems have been sold, while sales of the D5T version are rolling along nicely. "We thought this would go well, but maybe not so quickly," says Webster. "It's not that we are taking business away from anybody else, rather that more people are embracing working in the digital domain. Of course, the larger matrix helps, and people in both the live and theatre sectors are finding the platform versatile and easy to use. It has much to offer."

pleased to say that so far everyone involved at Digico with both the hardware and software developments has been impressively responsive and understanding to our requirements. I feel right now is the perfect time to embrace this technology and being in from the start should allow us the benefit of helping shape the software for future theatre use."

James Gordon, Director of Sales (Digico): "We are in the fortunate position of having had direct communication with a number of the best known and most respected sound designers and engineers. Their collective input has helped us fine-tune the D5T for theatre applications."



D5 On Tour

Bobby Aitken of Bobby Aitken Sound Designs: "I used the D5

Live last February on a production of *La Bohème* at the Royal Albert Hall. Sound design for opera in-the-round is complex and the console, along with Richard Sharratt, the mix engineer, handled the challenge well. Time saved by not installing a large analogue console and the associated cabling allowed us more time to listen and fine-tune the system. It was a great success both from my point of view and that of the press.

"Now the full D5T software is available it affords me the opportunity to use the console on a greater number of my projects. As a result, we have decided to specify the D5T and the Soundtracs DS-00 (for monitors) on all forthcoming productions of *We Will Rock You* and *Mamma Mia*.

"Making such a fundamental change to one's way of working is a decision not to be taken lightly. I am

Theatrical License

Looking to emulate the success of the D5 Live, Digico developed the D5T Digital Theatre Mixing System, which is making considerable waves in the theatrical world. With a 72-bus DSP engine, a 32 x 32 matrix, 41-fader surface and up to 128 channels with full dynamics processing (or 96 channels with onboard effects), the D5T combines a full spread of facilities in a compact worksurface. Dave Webster points out that this offers the potential to give back hundreds of seats a year to large productions. "*Mamma Mia* has added thousands in ticket sales through extra seating becoming available since switching from its former large analogue desk," he says. Other key features of the D5T include dynamics processing (72 with side chain EQ); up to 240ms of delay; four bands of parametric EQ, high- and low-pass filters; 72 user-assigned buses; 32 x 32 output matrix; group outputs, each with delay; six bands of parametric EQ and a compressor and pre-equaliser group outputs for use by measure-

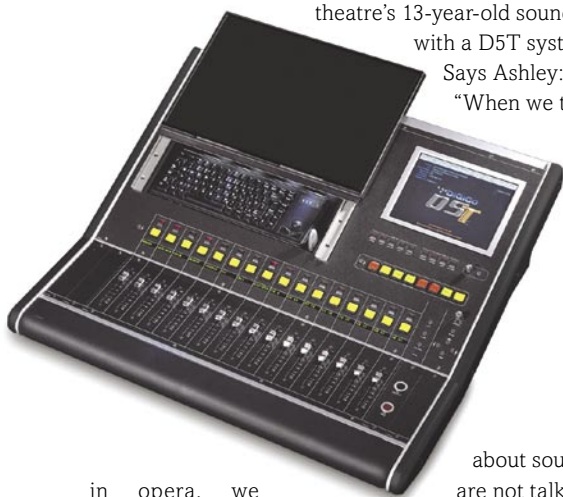
ment systems such as SIM; dedicated illuminated Next/Previous Cue buttons; full off-line Digico Cue Composer Show programming software; user definable I/O specification and high-quality on-board effects. The D5T software allows communication with Cue Composer running on an external PC, and the console recognises Channel Aliases and pre-defined Sets and responds accordingly when synchronising with the Cue Composer. First introduced with version 2 software on the D5 Live, the D5T also has the ability to configure multi-console setups to share common I/O within a redundant fibre loop, with the added advantages of remote control and console mirroring. This allows stage monitoring consoles to be connected to the same digital inputs, but with independent control, utilising the automatic Gain Tracking and allows either console operator to alter input gain without affecting the mix on either console.

D5T in Action

Following four years restoration work (that was not always problem free), the Coliseum in London's St Martin's Lane re-opened earlier this year as home of the English National Opera (ENO). Sound Manager Philip Ashley took the opportunity to replace the theatre's 13-year-old sound desk

with a D5T system.

Says Ashley:
"When we talk



about sound in opera, we are not talking about enhancing singers' voices, instead it's about certain effects which may be called for. Some composers, especially contemporary ones, have very specific requirements concerning certain sound quality or atmosphere written into the score. Also, I have to consider how friendly the desk is for sound engineers who are coming in to ENO and may not use the desk all the time. I need a desk that is friendly and intuitive.

"We looked at the main digital desks and found some of them to be a bit complex and, as our rehearsal time is very short — when we've got an orchestra and a chorus, rehearsal time is also very expensive — we quite often only get one or two shots, and certainly no sound checks on small pieces. So we wanted to assign a desk that would have good access to channels and so on. We finally selected the D5T. We had a desk on loan

so we could introduce it to the crew and they all found it easy to work with, which settled the decision."

One of the main issues for the ENO was to have some form of remote desk that they could take out into the auditorium for rehearsals or a live show. Their main desk sits in the control room at the back of the stalls, "which is Okay for simple shows," continues Ashley. "For large-scale or medium live shows we could move the main desk out, but we also wanted a desk we could move out quickly, sometimes only for rehearsals, and Digico's D5RC remote controller does the job. The advantage with the remote control with the D5RC is that it's exactly the same work surface; it's just one channel assignment, one master assignment."

Recording Options

Meanwhile, Digico and Soundtracs have been demonstrating and promoting an integrated digital system for live and recorded sound, with a live link-up between a Digico D5 FMX and Soundtracs DS-00. The two consoles share a common software platform and MADI digital interfaces, and employ identical file formats. "Total integration between our products has always been fundamental from the very beginning," says Managing Director Bob Doyle. "The D5 Live FMX is a complete mixing system in itself, and the DS-00 has the ability to be specifically tailored for broadcast, post and music. This allows a live and recording production — such as a large TV music show — to be mixed live at both front-of-house and monitors on the D5 FMX system, sharing a common fibre loop, while being recorded through a Soundtracs DS-00 on the same loop. The benefits are a completely stable gain structure, total freedom from ground buzzes or other earth related problems, and the ability to exchange effects and dynamics settings and all snapshots freely."

Taking the concept a stage further, the show could also be recorded direct to a DigiTracs hard disk recorder, a high-capacity, plug-and-play rackmounted system. Its editing interface is based on Merging Technologies Pyramix system, allowing instant location editing on a Windows PC.

"The complete system allows live and broadcast audio teams to work closer than ever before," adds Doyle. "And greatly reduces signal problems on location, allowing more freedom for resource sharing and mutual creativity, and reducing setup time for everyone involved in a production."



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Distributed by:

- Random Audio

Phone: (02) 9667 3411
Email: sales@randomaudio.com.au
Web: www.randomaudio.com.au
or www.digiconsoles.com