

EAW UMX.96

EAW's surprise offering aims to be a no-fuss drop-in for a comparably-sized analogue console. But with SIA's Smaart on board, there are obviously more than a few inducements.

Text: Paul Mac



► One of EAW's design objectives for its new digital console was to show that technology now enables live sound systems to work as a single unit – not wholly divided into drivers, crossovers, amps, consoles and so on, where the main problem is one of connectivity and control. The ultimate goal of the UMX.96 is to sit among a unified live sound system.

During the recent ProLight+Sound show in Frankfurt I sat with Loud Technologies' Ken Berger for a rundown of the console's strengths. The first message that Ken was keen to get across was one of target market. He explained: "This configuration is designed as a direct replacement for an analogue console. You've got 48 mic inputs, and all your outputs are analogue, on the back, with a complete set of analogue inserts and everything on it. So the back of the console just looks like an analogue console. There's a bunch of XLRs and ¼-inch jacks. You can take this into an application that has an existing analogue console, unpatch that, then patch this thing in."

Okay, so there are 48 mic inputs, and the name is UMX.96... That's because a planned optional expansion comes into play, which will bring the input count right up to the 96 – hence the title. The good thing at the moment, however, is that there are 48 inputs, and 48 physical channels on the left hand side of the board.

Being digital, these 48 physical channels can be configured anyway you like – set by programming user layers – although there are already a number of layer options preset on the Master Bank Select sections (one for each row of 24 channels). The first four Bank Selects cover the full 96 input channels in sections of 24; then there's an Aux Grp 1-24 button, and then two user banks. There are options too for the V Pots (one on each channel), and these combine with the three-colour Assign button, which brings the most immediate feedback on the mode you're working in.

The V Pot is a twist and push type, and can be very quickly assigned/reassigned. The display in each channel shows the channel name and the function assigned to the V Pot. Above that display, each channel has its own small channel meter, plus gain reduction LEDs to give the user an idea of what the dynamics are doing.

The right-hand side of the console is dominated by the large touch screen, where most of the detailed functionality, setup, and graphic feedback is centred. And there's the 'detailed channel strip', which in EAW-speak is the Fat Channel. This includes the VCA master section and the master snapshot and mute group control section, though surrounding these are the

full complement of controls for the 24 auxiliaries, the built-in effects controls, the gate/compressor, the preamp controls, pan, its own channel select section, mute, EQ (four-band parametric plus swept HPF and LPF), a fader, and the solo button.

One interesting control is the 'Adaptive Feel' encoder, (aka a haptic encoder). There's an integrated motor within the control, which can change the feel of the knob depending on the function. It takes controls that are touched onscreen as its guide, so touch the Slope Select control onscreen and you've got a four-position switch. Very neat.

The screen provides the most comprehensive control over the console, and of course provides the advantage of graphic manipulation of things like EQ curves and so on. There are a couple of highlights on this board that aren't covered by the normal console feature list. One is the Smaart System, which is a test and analysis system for the venue and the full PA system, and then there's the speaker processing. The default configuration for this section is three into 12, so there's up to four outputs for each of the Left Centre and Right outputs. Each of the 12 output legs has crossover (HPF and LPF), six-band parametric EQ, delay, and limiter. However, this matrix is configurable, so you can set up discrete output paths from auxiliaries, the matrix, and the output buses for delay stacks, fills, subs, and so on.

As well as being a launch pad for this 'system-wide concept' the UMX.96 is also a starting point for EAW's Ubiquity network. Suffice it to say, with Ubiquity, EAW believes it has expandable, efficient, audio and data-friendly networking. The internals of the UMX.96 are connected via a version of the Ubiquity network, although the console itself, in this initial configuration, isn't 'externally' equipped.

There's obviously more to this console than this preview can explain but there is also a little way to go in its development. As mentioned earlier, units are being readied for road testing, although the estimated time for shipping is still a few months off yet.

Other manufacturers, with their first digital live offerings, have set out to wow the world with monsters of the digital age. EAW has, on one hand, pragmatically decided that what the world needs is an affordable replacement for a bunch of analogue consoles – one that doesn't require an IT support team to connect it. On the other hand, the integrated speaker processing, effects processing, recall, and so on, are assets that the analogue world can only gawp at. ■

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Price

From around \$95k

Contact

Production Audio Services
(03) 9878 1444
www.productionaudio.com.au
sales@productionaudio.com.au