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Behringer X32 Digital Mixer

By: Mark Johnson

When Behringer contacted *Lighting&Sound America* about reviewing the X32 mixer, I was curious as to what influence Midas might have played in the development of this product. (Behringer acquired Midas in 2009.) The question was answered as soon as I took delivery of the console; emblazoned on the shipping carton, there it was: “X32, Powered by Midas.” Now, the phrase “powered by” is used quite a bit in advertising these days, often to describe situations where no power of any sort is utilized, and you don’t really know what it means until you take the product for a spin around the

block and have a look under the hood. In the case of the X32, there are microphone preamps designed by Midas and some networking technology from Klark Teknik thrown in for good measure—and a list price of just under \$3,000.

Overview

Regarding the number of input channels, the product’s name is a dead giveaway. That’s 32 Midas-designed, fully programmable mic preamps, along with 16 mix buses, six mute groups, and eight DCA groups. That’s quite a bit of functionality packed into a relatively small form factor—and it

looks cool, too.

The console provides a pretty compact footprint—less than 3' wide (okay, it’s 35") and 21" deep, and the angle of the control surface seems like it would be comfortable over an extended gig. (It’s about 1 ½" at the front and about 7" tall at the rear). The console weighs in at about 45lbs., and there are handle cups built into each end cap, so it’s pretty easy for one person to carry. There are 25 – 100mm motorized faders (16 for the inputs, eight for the mix buses, and one for main output) and three control panel areas on the console work surface. At the top of the con-



sole are the input channel preamp, dynamics, EQ, bus sends, and main bus panel; main display, monitor, and talkback panel; as well as the main out, scenes, and assigns (user-definable) panel.

The display features a 7" color TFT liquid crystal display and individual and dynamic LCD scribble strips for each channel and bus. A USB port allows for two-channel uncompressed recording and file storage as well as an input for loading show presets and firmware updates.

On the far left of the control surface are five buttons: The bus master assigns faders to control output level of the 16 console bus outputs, a line input/USB select button, a layer select button for channels one through 16, a layer select button for channels 17 through 32, and a remote button that allows the group fader section to control compatible DAW functions. The input channel strip is typical of many other digital mixers on the market: fader, mute button, solo button, select button, and level meter. At the top and bottom of each channel level meter is a compressor and gate LED that indicates if either of the two functions are active on that channel.

Bring up the rear

The rear panel features 32 XLR inputs as well as two AES50 bi-directional ports, AES/EBU output, MIDI I/O, an Ultramet output for personal monitoring, six aux in and out connectors, 16 assignable XLR output connectors, monitor and control room outs for recording applications, Ethernet and USB for remote control, and an expansion card slot outfitted with a 32-channel FireWire and USB interface.

There are a few other stand-alone digital mixers out in the market place now with all the I/O connectors on the console proper and the power supply integrated. This makes for an easy retrofit in existing sound sys-



tems that are already equipped with an analog snake system—especially in houses of worship and smaller performing arts centers.

Lighting&Sound America was fortunate to be at the front of the line to receive an X32 for review. It was a preproduction unit expedited out of Europe for us to try, and as such it was only equipped with the European version of the IEC power cable. However, like so many other old sound dudes, I have more IEC power cables lying around than I have stuff to plug them into, so I grabbed one and was powered up and ready to go in no time. Of course, production

models will be shipped with the appropriate power cable.

The console comes with a hard copy Quick Start Guide, which will get you up and running relatively quickly. Also, the system is set up so the default setting will get you passing signal through the console immediately once you turn it on. With my music source selected and plugged into inputs 15 and 16, it came right up on the channel meters. Next up, I plugged in a condenser vocal mic, turned on the phantom power for that channel, and we were making sound.

For further info and more detail, Behringer directs you to its website



for a downloadable version of the full manual. The manual has some nice sections that address specifically how to accomplish a given task, such as "How do I add one of the eight internal effects to the sound?"—which I think is a handy feature. I do like referencing the manual when I'm checking out a new piece of equipment; a minor gripe with manuals in general is that sometimes the language doesn't match the labeling used on the console. In this case, the manual instructed me to push the "FX" menu button while on the console the button is labeled "Effects." While seemingly minor, for someone just starting out, this could lead to them scanning the control surface for a not-to-be-found "FX" button. Another gripe is when the diagrams don't readily identify some parts of the console. The good news is updates are easy, since the manual is in digital form.

Since I was doing the initial check out in the privacy of my home, I was

going to use headphones. Behringer advertises two headphone outputs on the X32. They were nowhere to be found on the console surface and there wasn't enough real estate at the front edge for headphone jacks. Oh no, I was thinking, not on the back! Then I saw it; about two thirds up on the side of the control surface was a little headphone icon with an arrow pointing to the side of the mixer; there was one on the other side, as well. Behringer has cleverly put the headphone jacks in the handle cups. They're protected but still accessible, and it helps to avoid cables getting tangled if you use two sets of headphones.

The amount of info presented on the main display can be challenging for those of us who need readers, bifocals, or trifocals if you're looking at the home screen, which provides an overall view of the status of the console parameters. However, each parameter is accessible on its own on

the control surface, and, once you look at them singly via the tabs, it is easier to see.

People familiar with digital console functionality in general should be able to drive the X32 after a short time becoming familiar with its particular work flow. And for those less familiar, again the manual does a pretty good job of walking you through the steps required to accomplish a specific task or dial in an effect. Also, there are user-definable controls available that could be set up for quicker access to any of the parameters that do need to be adjusted on the fly, without having to go the specific effect in the display.

How does it sound?

I listened to music of different genres (classical, jazz, old and new rock, and just voice) through a couple of sets of speakers and compared it to my own personal analog mixer, which also comes from the other side of the

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pond. Overall, I thought it sounded pretty good. Sadly, due to scheduling and deadlines I wasn't able to find a performance situation on which to use it. It would be fun to do some shows with it.

Things that make it cool

The key features include a 48-channel, digital snake ready with two AES50 ports, and Klark Teknik SuperMAC technology, which provides the option of using a digital snake and facilitates use of two consoles for front of house and monitors. Others include:

The XiOControl iPad app for remote control operation: Setup was a snap, and after a few minutes I was controlling the mixer from across the room. While the functions that you can control are rudimentary, I suspect control of more aspects are just a firmware and/or an app upgrade or two away. Speaking of which, when I first fired up the XiOControl app, it told me there was a firmware upgrade available for the console. After downloading the upgrade onto a flash drive, I turned off the console, plugged in the drive, and turned the console back on. A few minutes later, I was back up and running with the new firmware.

The console works well for recording purposes, providing a 32-channel interface for recording via the FireWire and USB input/outputs. The X32 is also capable of Digital Audio Workstation (DAW) remote control via HUI and Mackie Control emulation.

Teeny-tiny displays: As noted, each input channel strip has a small LCD screen that displays channel number, name, and an icon graphically representing the input source. And you are provided with an assortment of choices for color-coding the individual inputs. There is also a handy place to put your smartphone (Behringer calls it a smartphone bay, though there are no connections of

any sort available, just a rubber pad to prevent slippage).

And have I mentioned the price? A 32-input digital mixer that is designed and built with influence from Midas and Klark Teknik for under \$3,000? Enough said.

The Behringer X32 is a great value, especially for smaller houses of worship looking to move from analog to the digital domain, to install a digital console into a fellowship hall, or for youth services. The X32 would also work well for a small production facili-

ty, like a community arts center or even a regional touring band, sound company, or hotel AV system where the ability to store and recall settings can help improve consistency and reduce setup times.

As with any first-generation product, the true test will be time. How does it perform doing gigs night after night or after it's been hauled around in road cases and banged up a bit? But right now, it's looking and sounding pretty good. 📶

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