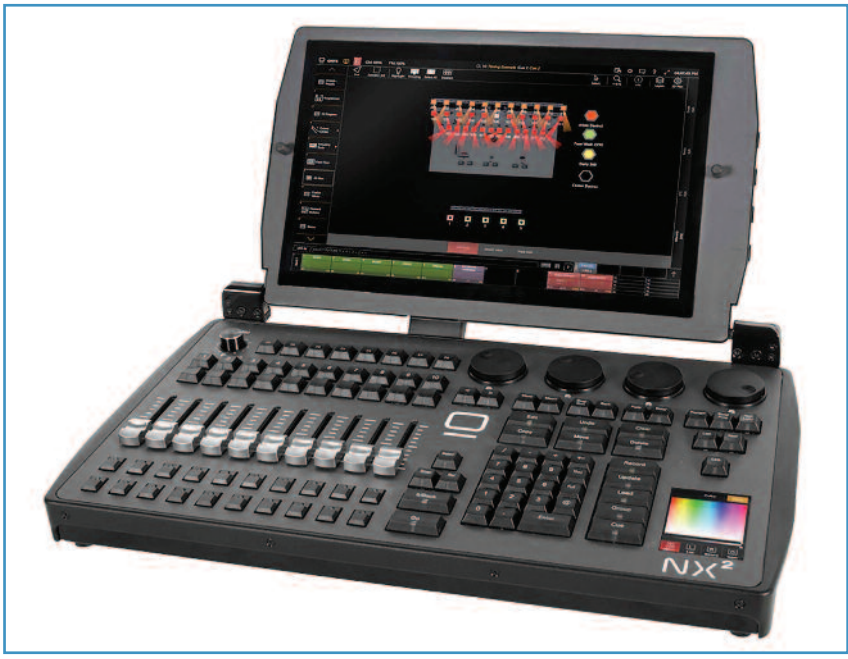
Obsidian Control Systems NX 2 Lighting Console

By: Richard Cadena

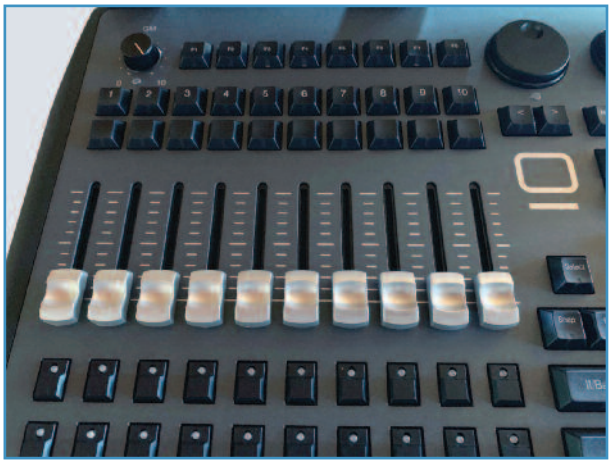
When I sit down to program a show, I want a console that's intuitive enough that I can figure out how to program most, if not all, of it without spending a lot of time studying a user manual or watching video tutorials, yet powerful enough to make quick work of even the most complex of programming tasks. Once I'm finished programming and the show is over, I want to be able to pack up the console by myself and carry it with me, instead of asking for help to load it into a road case and figuring out how to get it onto the truck. If those criteria resonate with you, then you might consider the new NX 2 lighting console from Obsidian Control Systems.

At about 21" wide, 12" deep, and 20lb, it's small and lightweight enough that I can put it—along with its accessories, which include an external power supply, cover, and task lamp—in a flight case small enough to carry it onboard and store in an overhead bin; I can also carry it to a gig, set it up, and put it away myself, without the help of other hands. It's small, yet it doesn't seem to be lacking any critical hardware. It has a built-in "industrial" 15.6" TFT touchscreen display with a 16:9 aspect ratio and 1920 x 1080 resolution. The display folds up for programming and lays down flat for transport, which makes it very easy to carry as a unit. You might think that a 15.6" display might not be big enough to show much information, but that's not what I found. It's big enough for the information you need to cue a show, but small enough to fit the compact form factor of the console. Some of the soft buttons on the display are just big enough to comfortably select, although there were times when I had to take a couple of stabs at it before my finger landed properly. There is also a small (3.5") built-in RGB touch screen for parameter groups, effect parameters, fanning, and global timings, and I found it very helpful for quick access to relevant controls. If you still want more screen real estate—and who doesn't want more screen real estate when you're programming?—you can also connect two additional 4K touch screens. In my experience, the 4K resolution is really important because it allows you to make the text very small and still legible, even if your eyesight is not the greatest.

Obsidian NX 2 is not a a PC and a wing, running software (although there is an NX Wing that runs with Onyx on PC); it's a fully integrated console that can output 64 universes of DMX without any external processing via four DMX ports and one Ethernet port. Besides the aforementioned screens, the hardware includes eight assignable encoders, keypad and command section, a dedicated grand master, and ten 10mm x 60mm playbacks with four assignable buttons. The programming area is laid out well; it



The NX 2 lighting console is small in size but not in power.



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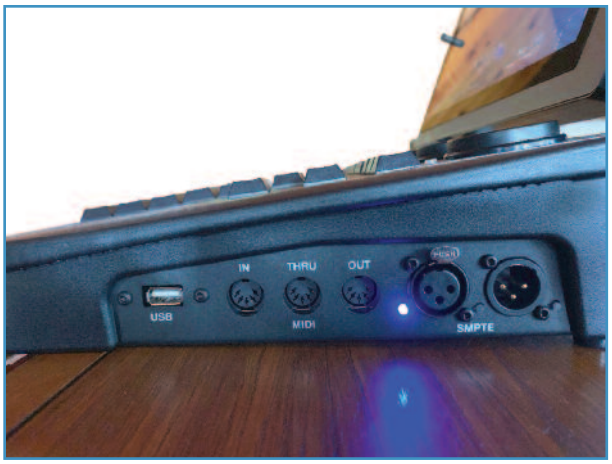
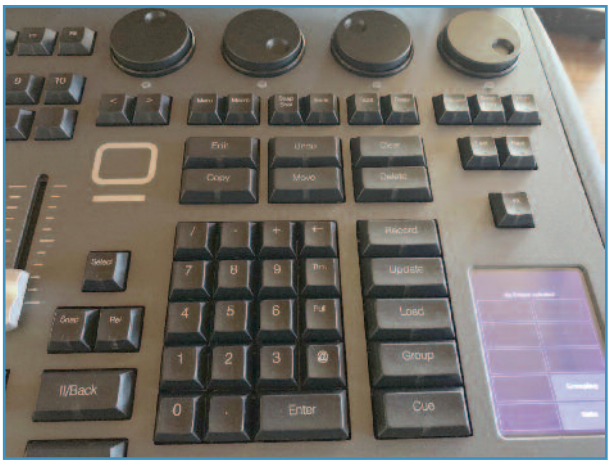
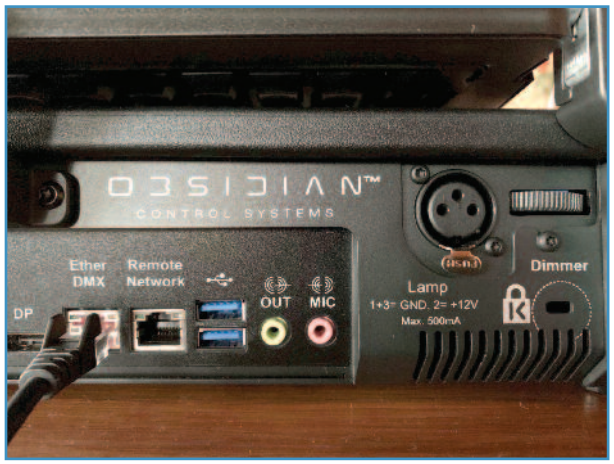


Features include USB; MIDI in, out, and thru; SMPTE, and other hardware features found on full-sized consoles, but in a compact form factor.



The console runs Onyx software, which is well-developed and has features like the Onyx Remote software app for iPhone to provide wireless control for remote focusing, remote cue execution, and fixture testing.



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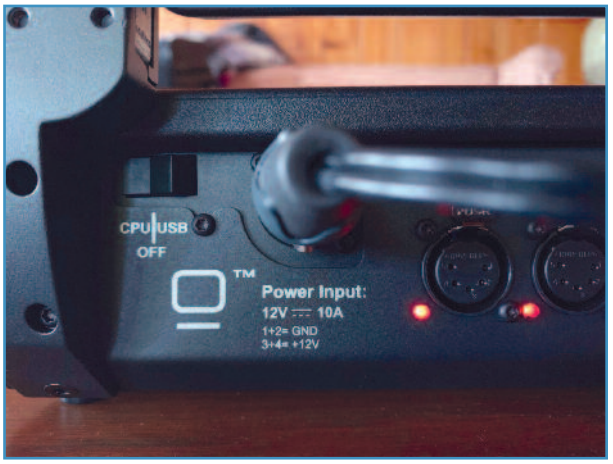

A three-way power switch allows you to leave the console off but still charge your tablet or phone through the USB ports.

looks familiar, the syntax feels familiar—no curveballs here—and the tactile feel of the keys is solid. It's not a monster-sized console with all the bells and whistles; it's just enough to program a show without having to page through screen after screen. It also has SMPTE time code in and out; MIDI in, out, and thru; and two Gigabit Ethernet ports, one for Art-Net or sACN and another for the Onyx X-Net protocol.

The proprietary Onyx X-Net allows you to build a network and set up a master console and a backup. I wasn't able to try out this feature because I didn't have a second console. According to the documentation, the master/slave feature will synchronize the show file, but it requires manual intervention to switch the output to the backup console. There is, however, a way to toggle Art-Net on and off using a function key so, once it's set up, it should be quick and easy.

To be sure, Obsidian NX 2 is not much different than many lighting consoles in terms of the hardware and its capabilities but, as small as it is, it's not lacking in that regard either. In fact, it has some hardware features that I haven't seen on any other console, like the three-way switch that allows you to leave the console off but still charge your tablet or phone through the USB ports.

Under the hood, it has the new Intel Hexa-Core i5 processor, NVMe solid-state hard drive, and 16GB of DDR4 RAM. The software behind the console is the well-developed Onyx platform from Obsidian, and it has features like the Onyx Remote software app for iPhone to provide wireless control for remote focusing, remote cue execution, and fixture testing. There is also an OSC skin that is freely downloadable for iOS or Android.

The console boots in a little over 30 seconds, and on startup it offers the option to create a new file, open an existing file, join a group programming session, or go through a tutorial. Although I never had to go through the tutorials, I did have to reference the user manual, which is available online or on the console, to figure out a couple of things. Other than that, it was pretty easy to go through my normal programming workflow—patch fixtures; create fix-

ture groups and palettes for colors, gobos, beam effects, and intensities; create preset focus positions; record cues; and tweak the timing.

Currently, there is no way to automatically create color and gobo palettes based on the patched fixtures, like some other consoles can do; I didn't find that to be a great hindrance. In fact, creating everything from scratch made me wonder if the default color and gobo palettes I've used on other consoles really have much value. It might be better to think about your approach to palettes rather than rely on the machine to create a pool of palettes as a jumping-off point, sort of the way lighting designers who use fixed lenses might be forced to think more about their lighting positions than those who use zoom lenses.

Other than having to manually switch between master and slave consoles, and the lack of auto-palettes, I think this control environment is well-developed. I really like the form factor and functionality and, retailing at $9,350 ($7,480 MAP price), I think the pricing hits the sweet spot. This also includes a license for Capture Solo, the lighting design and visualization software, so you can program your show right out of the box.

Choosing a lighting console is a very personal choice, but if you're looking for one that is reasonably priced, compact, and portable, but doesn't hold you back on features and functionality, this one is worth a test drive to see for yourself.