

A Pirate's Dream?

Ups and downs of digital capability

By Michael MacDonald

The 2004 AES Convention in San Francisco brought with it a small (but growing) wave of new digital PA consoles, and with them came some new features and refinements.

Of particular interest is the new trend of provisions for direct digital multi-track recording in some of the new desks. DiGiCo is the first company (at least that I'm aware of) to offer this feature on a full size digital desk, found on the D5 Live that debuted a couple of years ago.

At AES, Digidesign introduced its new PA console, called Venue, which also has the ability to record directly, in this case, to a (Digidesign) Pro Tools file. Yamaha and digital boards from other makers can also be fitted to do the same tasks.

What a great feature: a console with the facilities to track a show. If you're a follower of progressive 70s bands, you'll recall that many of them put a high value on recording every performance. Artists like Frank Zappa and The Grateful Dead made efforts to record every show. If you subscribe to this philosophy, then there should be much appreciation of the recording functionality of the new digital consoles.

The utility is twofold. First is the recording of performances for future

content value, for example, to be featured on a "greatest live hits" album. What band would pass on the opportunity to track every show on the hopes that they might capture that once-in-a-lifetime performance?



The second capability of digital console technology may be more important: the ability to track a show and play it back later refining, practicing and programming the console during off-line mixing sessions, in order to

improve the mix on subsequent shows. I can think of no better way to polish the sound quality of a performance than through the use of the actual performance recording itself!

However, even with these positive attributes (and others), I wonder about potential problems.

Will artists fear they could lose control of their material by unscrupulous individuals who might take advantage of this new technology? Will sound mixers make unauthorized recordings of the shows they are mixing? What control does the artist have over the recorded files from these systems?

We're not talking about typical "board tapes" here; rather, digitally recorded source tracks. This recorded material could be good enough to be mixed for commercial use and distributed through mainstream channels or over the Internet. It might even wind up as fragments of remixed works by other artists.

As the recording industry goes through some of the darkest times in its history, this presents yet another challenge to deal with. Digital recording came with the promise of improving the sound quality of all the music we listen to.

Unfortunately, with it comes the ability to move music files around very quickly and easily. And this has reduced the perceived value of the artist's product.

When you talk to kids today about downloading musical files, they don't understand the value of the music. Rather, they believe without the physical compact disc (CD) along with its jewel case, liner notes, artwork and the like, that the music in downloaded form should be free, or close to it.

There remains an abundance of pirated material available at no cost on the Internet, and it can't be argued that this degrades the value of an artist's work.

When a band steps on stage to perform, I hate to think that the artist now has one more worry that takes his or her mind off the music. I'm sure that console/multi-track recording functionality will proliferate, but I wonder if it will, in the future, have control features that will allow on stage control of the record function, thus ensuring the artist is aware if a console is enabled to track the show.

The trick here – and the case with much new technology – is the ability to control this capability in a way that maximizes the positives and minimizes the (possible) negative effects. In an industry already rocked by pirating on a massive scale, this is a small problem; the positive benefits of these systems far outweigh the negatives.

That said, I believe that the manufacturing community needs to do everything it can to support the recording industry's efforts to put the control of recorded material back into the hands of the artist as well as the record companies that own copyrights to music. ■

Michael MacDonald has been involved in the professional audio industry for more than 20 years. Beginning as a freelance mixer/engineer in the 1970s, he transitioned to working for manufacturers and has been employed by, developed products for, and consulted with major companies such as JBL Professional. (And he still mixes!) Reach Michael at mchlmacdonald@aol.com.

butterfly...
Perfectly Simple

© Sources: Butterfly System White Paper by Guido Moroni

D.P.R.W.G.

Double Parabolic Reflective Wave Guide (*)

Single Hi-Pack element features:

- Volume = 0.067 m³
- Weight (including flying hardware) = 36 kg / 77 lb.
- Number of speakers = 5
- Centre-to-centre step = 0.243 m / 9.5 in.
- Continuous power = 920 W RMS (AES Standard)
- Max. SPL (peak) 1 m. = 140 dB

16-element Hi-Pack array features:

- Max. array height (straight array) = 3.89 m / 12.8 ft.
- Total weight (including flying frame) = 620 kg / 1365 lb.

outlinearray

www.outline.it