

Apogee Digital Rosetta 800

Intrinsically linked with the interfacing of analogue and digital, Apogee has expanded its portfolio with the addition of smart and sensible advanced digital functionality. But first, **ROB JAMES** wants to tell us a story.



IN 1799 A FRENCH SOLDIER, working on a fort at the Egyptian village of Raschid, found a compact basalt slab covered in symbols. The stone became known by the French name for the village, Rosette. The Rosetta stone contains a decree in honour of the Pharaoh Ptolemy V, written in two languages (Egyptian and Greek) using three scripts, hieroglyphs, demotic and Greek. The meaning of hieroglyphs had been lost for centuries. However, since the decree was the same in each representation, a French scholar, Jean Francois Champollion, eventually managed to decipher hieroglyphs. The key to this was the realisation that hieroglyphs are not simply ideograms but phonograms (pictures representing sounds) as well (*Thank you for that brief historical interlude. Ed*).

Apogee's Rosetta 800 is a compact 1U unit with some comparable attributes. It converts 8 channels of audio, bi-directionally, between analogue and digital in any one of three digital connection formats at one time. AES-EBU 25-pin sub-D and ADAT/SMUX optical Toslink connectors are built in and an expansion slot enables a digital interface option card to be installed. Sampling rates up to 96kHz are catered for by the UK£2099 (+ VAT) standard unit with the option of upgrading to the 192kHz capable model. For the higher sampling rates Rosetta 800 supports single and dual wire AES and optical ADAT SMUX.

Rosetta has further talents, each odd/even channel pair input and output can take or feed either an analogue or digital signal and the unit also makes use of Apogee's two stage 'Intellilock' technology (as employed in the Big Ben clock unit) to minimise jitter.

Rosetta 800 follows Apogee 'house style' in appearance, operation and sound. Although basically neutral, some character can be imparted by using Apogee's proprietary 'Soft Limit' on the analogue inputs and UV22HR bit reduction on the outputs.

Front panel controls appear deceptively simple and at the surface level they are. However, pressing and holding some of the buttons gains access to advanced settings, while a second and sometimes a third button modifies parameters.

Like the Big Ben Digital Clock, Rosetta 800 has a programmable power switch (via internal jumpers) that can work in a number of different ways. For example, when power is applied the unit must be switched On via the front panel switch, or it can be set to wake up powered on with the switch still operational. Further internal jumpers set the analogue I-O calibration.

Analogue connections are 25-pin sub-Ds with Word Clock on BNCs. The front panel shows most of the currently selected set-up parameters at a glance, thanks to a forest of LEDs. Three top rows of signal LEDs flag up input A to D clipping in excess of 3 samples duration, the other two rows show digital and analogue output activity. Each button cycles through the list of possible options for the particular parameter.

Setting becomes slightly more complicated with the advanced options, for example, if you wish to use four analogue input channels with four AES-EBU input channels. First you have to press the Sources to Digital Outs button until both the Analogue and AES LEDs are lit, then press and hold the button. The current configuration is shown on

the Signal LEDs. If the Digital Out LED is lit the source for the pair is analogue, if not, it is digital — AES in this case.

To modify the routing you hold down the Sources to Digital Outs button, and use the Soft Limit button to select the channel pair (indicated by flashing A-D Over LEDs) then press the Output Resolution button to toggle the selected pair between Analogue and the selected Digital source. Similarly the second signal path, to the analogue outputs, can be modified by pressing and holding the Source to Analogue Out button, and so on. Not very intuitive, in fact deciphering hieroglyphs might be easier. The manual (*Written by Champollion? Ed*) makes everything clear and I quickly became accustomed to it.

The unit is ideal for mounting at the operating position since it is completely silent, there are no cooling fans. This will be of considerable benefit not only to small studios but also in the many situations where a separate machine room is not an option. In any case, I believe this type of unit is far more convenient to use when positioned near the operator.

As I would expect from Apogee the sound quality is subjectively excellent, clean and open with solid imaging. I have learnt to appreciate the character and extra headroom offered by Soft Limit and the sound of UV22HR bit reduction.

Rosetta 800 is a rich confection of transparent, convenient audio interface and impeccable clocking with Soft Limit and UV22HR adding a spicy finish. It is a thoroughly credible contender in the highly competitive arena of really high quality, one-stop solutions to audio interfacing with Macs or PCs. When the FireWire and Pro ToolsHD option cards become available, this already desirable unit will become almost irresistible. No matter which workstation you favour, Apogee will have a solution for you. ■

Option cards



Already available, the X-Digi-Mix card interfaces directly with Pro Tools Mix Core or Farm cards. It also provides a Superclock (FSx256) output.

This will be joined by the X-HD option card, which will allow direct connectivity between Pro ToolsHD and the Rosetta 800. The X-FireWire Card will enable direct connection to any FireWire equipped computer. Based on the new S800 standards (with backwards compatibility for S400 connections) two FireWire sockets will allow a further Rosetta 800, or other X-Series units, to be daisy-chained with up to 16x16 24-bit channels at 44.1/48/88.2/96kHz or up to 16 24-bit channels at 176.4/192kHz from a single PC or Mac connection.

PROS

Possibly the only interface some people will ever need; highly versatile; silent.

CONS

User interface can seem opaque until learnt; premium price for a premium product.

Contact

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