

Euphonix Artist MC Control V2

A year or so after looking at the first pair of units in a new range of affordable control surfaces from Euphonix, **ROB JAMES** investigates the improved MC Control.



The Euphonix Artist Series of affordable controllers was initially introduced with the MC Mix eight-fader mix controller and was quickly joined by the MC Control, which combined a 'centre section' with transport controls and four faders. More recently the range has been expanded with the MC Transport, which as the name implies is a smaller transport controller, and the MC Color, which is designed specifically for use with the Apple Color grading application. Multiple units can be combined to form comprehensive custom control surfaces to suit a variety of tasks. Individual units can be free-standing or physically joined after removing the side cheeks. Several operating heights and angles can be achieved by using four flip-out feet, similar to those found on PC keyboards, or by adding rather insubstantial plastic risers. Ethernet is used to connect the Artist series to the DAW(s). Each unit needs a separate port so an Ethernet switch or router will be required for a multi-unit system. Ethernet confers many advantages when compared with the MIDI connection used more commonly to connect controllers.

The original MC Control was a real curate's egg. The disappointments were the appalling jog shuttle wheel and a flickery LCD. The new V2 version addresses these issues with a new and vastly improved jog wheel and an increased scan rate and improved graphics for the touchscreen (estimated US street price \$1499.) Where before, if you touched a soft button label, all you got was an annoying 'nag screen' telling you to press the button, now the labels function the same ways as the buttons themselves.

Before MC Control V2 can be used, the EuControl software application must be installed. This locates, links and communicates with all Artist/EuCon control devices on the network. Once installed, the application(s) you wish to use must be dragged into a section of the EuControl window and the applications themselves must be set up to accept EuCon control. The procedure varies between apps and is well detailed in the on-line manuals. Only one instance of EuControl can run per Mac, but multiple workstations attached to a single network can each run EuControl. Each instance of

EuControl can connect to an MC Control and up to four MC Mixes on the network. The devices then act together as a single control surface. Once connected to a workstation, devices are not available to any other instances of EuControl until they are released. An Artist device can also control applications running on a second computer. Any workstation running EuCon software can be in this list, including those controlled by the System 5-MC, MC Pro, and MC Control, although the Artist Series is only supported currently for Mac based applications.

MC Control can use several control protocols, EuCon-aware applications (for example, Cubase, Nuendo and Logic Pro) support the EuCon protocol directly with specially written software. This provides the most comprehensive integration plus high-resolution controls and high-speed connectivity. Applications that are not EuCon-aware but which support the Mackie Control or HUI protocols (for example, Pro Tools, Final Cut Pro and Digital Performer) can also benefit from control of many functions. No doubt, now that Euphonix has joined the Avid family, Pro Tools and Avid users can look forward to all the benefits of a native control protocol; lucky them!

MC Control can also transmit keyboard shortcut commands over EuCon providing a degree of control over many other applications and adding to the functionality in software already of EuCon and Mackie Control/HUI aware.

It is worth rehearsing the original virtues of the MC Control. Centrepiece is a large LCD touchscreen. Four touch-sensitive 'Soft Knobs', which double as switches, are ranged on either side of the touchscreen, vertically, and there are two rows of six Soft Keys underneath along with Soft Key paging buttons. At the bottom of the touchscreen two rows of six Soft Key labels correspond to the physical Soft Keys.

In the fader section four identical strips offer Solo and On buttons, a motorised touch fader and Rec and Select buttons, Automation and Assign, respectively when shifted. To the right of the touchscreen the Control Room (monitor) volume knob and Power button sit above the Navigation keys. The knob controls the

Studio Monitor Express software included or any application that supports a EuCon monitor section. Pressing the knob toggles mute. Application toggles between the two most recently used open apps and (Top) goes directly to the top level while (Workstation) switches between controlled Macs when more than one is set up to be controlled. Page keys move between parameter pages in plug-ins.

In the most logical place at least for right-handers, at bottom-right, the Transport controls are arranged in an arc around the Jog/Shuttle wheel. Record is sensibly offset on the right. The leftmost two are jog/shuttle and Zoom Horizontal (Vertical). In operation the MC Control is much more intuitive than most other controllers and also manages to be a lot more comprehensive.

I once again chose to use Final Cut Pro and Soundtrack Pro to exercise the MC Control V2. The several pages of keyboard shortcuts are a real productivity aid and transform the FCP experience. Near instant switching between applications remains just as impressive. You can jump from one to the other at the touch of a button and the control surface updates instantly to reflect this. It will even control iTunes if you wish.

The software and firmware is much more developed than it was a year ago and downloading and installing updates is trivial. It is still a matter for regret that the Artist series can only control Mac applications. There are an awful lot of us using PCs for very serious work and Euphonix is missing out on a huge potential market.

MC Control V1 was a flawed masterpiece, although the software, design and functional concepts were always excellent. Now, although the buttons remain a bit imprecise, the major issues have all been addressed successfully. The jog wheel is now the equal of anything in this price range and the touchscreen no longer gives me a headache after five minutes use (*Brilliant but delicate, readers. Ed*). Last year I said MC Mix could be recommended pretty much unequivocally. Now I'll extend that to MC Control V2. The price is right and it does far more than you would expect at first glance. I had very high expectations of these units originally and now they deliver in spades.. ■

PROS

Excellent concept execution for the price; seamless control over multiple applications; about as intuitive as you'll get.

CONS

Transport Buttons still a bit rubbery; still Mac only; extension legs somewhat flimsy.

EXTRAS



The MC Color offers control and integration with Apple's Color 1.5. The slim-line controller attaches to the Mac via Ethernet and features high-resolution optical trackballs, track wheels, displays, encoders and programmable keys to speed up and enhance the Apple Color workflow.

Contact

EUPHONIX, US
Website: www.euphonix.com