

Lexicon Omega

It would appear that the latest acronym á la mode is USB. The last months have seen a plethora of preamplifiers with USB ports enabling an interface between the outside world and computer recording programs. **TERRY NELSON** reports on a desktop recording studio with USB.



is used, for example.

The Monitor Mix and Output Level controls are at the bottom and the mix knob acts as a balance between the direct signal from the Omega and the playback signal from the computer. The middle setting, for instance, is handy for doing overdubs. The output level control sets the level sent to two analogue line out connectors.

There is also a small metering section between these two knobs, this being a 4-segment stereo meter with a pushbutton assigning the meter to USB buses 1-2 or 3-4. The section is completed by two LEDs marked USB and +48V — USB indicates that the computer is talking to the Omega and the other is self-explanatory.

Two 1/4-inch jack sockets, one for an instrument input, the other for stereo headphones complete the front panel. Again,

there is a pushbutton for USB assign and two LEDs marked 1-2 and Lock respectively.

The rear panel contains four TRS line in jacks, two mic input XLRs together with associated TRS insert jacks and -20dB pad push switches, MIDI In/Out, phono SPDIF I-O, a +48V phantom push switch for the two mic inputs, two TRS line output jacks, a USB port, and a power connector.

The mic and line inputs have more than enough gain for most applications and the analogue line outputs can drive up to a healthy +19dBu, which again will happily drive active monitors or other equipment in a signal chain. The headphone amplifier is very beefy.

The audio performance is 24-bit and just using the mixer as a standalone unit with active monitors plugged into the line outputs showed that the signal quality is fine. I used a variety of dynamic and

condenser microphones on the mic inputs and these gave an excellent account of themselves. Patching an outboard processor into the insert was without problems. In terms of input gain, just making the peak LED flash occasionally is probably the optimum setting though there is still headroom.

Omega accepts SPDIF digital signals and the Lock LED illuminates to show that your source and the Omega are talking to each other. Pressing the Assign switch causes the USB 1 and 2 LED to illuminate and routes the SPDIF source to USB buses 1 and 2. In this case, any analogue signals being received must be routed to USB buses 3 and 4, thus allowing a mix of analogue and digital inputs.

The instrument jack serves as the integrated DI box and plugging into this socket routes the signal to line input 3 and disconnects the line input jack at the rear. It was tested out with an electro-acoustic guitar and was found to be very responsive. Input impedance is 1Mohm so loading effects are avoided.

As a standalone USB interface, the Omega has a lot going for it but the recording package is the icing on the cake. This includes a CD-ROM for the various USB drivers and CD-ROMs for Pro Tracks Plus for PC users (Windows 2000/XP) and Deck 3.5 SE for Mac. The cherry on the cake is the Lexicon Pantheon reverb plug-in, which features six reverb types and 35 presets. You can, of course, create your own programs within the six types available.

The system was tested on Windows 2000 with Pro Tracks Plus and this provides up to 32 stereo tracks plus unlimited MIDI tracks. Loading the drivers and Pro Tracks Plus went smoothly enough and the Lexicon user instructions are clear. A quick blast through the tutorials demonstrated that Pro Tracks Plus has a lot going for it — including a virtual console and synths — though here the user guide is not quite in agreement with how the program responds! However, experienced DAW users should have no difficulties.

As an extremely portable studio system, the Lexicon Omega should have a lot of success and for beginners it is an ideal way to start. I can recommend it very strongly. ■

Many thanks to Pilote Films, France for supplying a first production unit.

Contact

LEXICON, US:

E-mail: www.lexiconpro.com
UK, Stirling: +44 20 8963 4790

LEXICON HAS GONE ONE BETTER than the now frequently encountered USB interface with what can be justly called a desktop recording system. The Omega system consists of a small mixer for the hardware side and the inclusion of the Pro Tracks Plus program for the recording side. Add to this a Lexicon reverb plug-in and you have a complete mini-studio.

The Omega itself is a small desktop box built from high-impact plastic and requires an external 9V DC power supply that is included with the package.

The unit includes two microphone preamplifiers (courtesy of Harman kinsmen dbx) with balanced XLR inputs, four line inputs on TRS balanced/unbalanced jacks, a monitor mix control and an output level control. The front panel contains the controls for the aforementioned and these are arranged in two vertical columns of 4 knobs each. Each input control has an associated peak LED and each pair of inputs (e.g. Mic 1 and 2, Line 1 and 2, etc) features two dedicated pushbuttons, one for USB assign and the other for Monitor. Pressing the Assign button routes the inputs to either of the USB buses or isolates them. Two LEDs indicate status for USB 1-2 and USB 3-4. The monitor switch selects whether the monitoring of the input — or inputs — will be in stereo or mono, the latter being useful when only one input

PROS

Portable full mini-studio system with MIDI and analogue/digital I-O; accepts mic/line/instrument/digital sources; balanced/unbalanced operation with good operating levels.

CONS

Four out of the 6 input channels can be used simultaneously; external PSU.

EXTRAS

The 960LS brings Lexicon's reverberation algorithms and 960L control to the stereo world. It is identical to its predecessors, without multichannel surround functions or digital I-O although both can be added as separate options, allowing the 960LS to be upgraded to a full 960L. It offers eight channels of balanced analogue I-O that can be configured as four stereo machines at 44.1/48kHz or two stereo machines at 88.2/96kHz.

