



## Merging Technologies Pyramix 5 and Isis Controller

There are few major sound postproduction facilities in the UK that don't now include Pyramix among their available DAWs. This rapid take-up by the post industry was one of the things that spurred Merging Technologies to refocus its efforts on features requested by this sector. The recently released Version 5 software reflects this shift.

JIM BETTERIDGE

**F**OR THE UNINITIATED, Pyramix is a PC-based DAW that gets its processing power from a PCI board called a Mykerinos card, leaving the PC's processor free to do other things including run VST and Direct-X plug-ins within Pyramix. One card is sufficient to run a fairly hefty system. If, like me, you're using an external mixer to cope with most of your levels, EQs and effects, 64 I-Os is quite possible — and all on a pair of BNC coaxial cables via MADI. If you're using the built-in mixer in stereo out mode, the maximum number of tracks is, as always, down to the amount of EQs, effects and other DSP-hungry processes you engage. The nice thing about the system is that you can add further Mykerinos cards as needed. For instance, a recent four-card demo system included 112 channel strips, each with Strip Tools (dynamics, parametric EQ), being summed into six 5.1 surround stems plus a couple of 5.1 aux sends and a reverb.

It took Merging rather longer than expected to give birth to V5 but it has to be said that it is a significant improvement on V4 and pretty stable from the off. On a well-maintained system without too many interfering third-party apps knocking around, it is rare that the program crashes, and with client-attended sessions, this is really important. It's also very flexible and allows files of any type, bit depth or sample rate to be dropped on the same project timeline.

All sorts of basic everyday functions are now a lot faster and more reliable. Much improved is the Media Manager page. A nice feature here is that folders are always mounted and displayed in a discrete fashion, as opposed to one big undefined list in an audio pool as with other well known DAWs. New within Media

Manager is the Media Browser which provides the user with a window similar to My Computer, wherein you have access to all files and folders, be they local or network connected, without the need to mount them. Unlike My Computer, the lists also contain the full set of metadata (timecode, sample rate, etc) and you are able to easily audition a file before mounting it or the folder that contains it.

Having selected a file, a built-in clip editor allows you to top and tale it, add a sync point, deselect one or more of the tracks (if it's interleaved), listen to your selection, and then drag it on to your project timeline; very handy when dragging a small part of a large file into a tightly packed project.

The search process has also been refined: you've always been able to search the folder or library you're currently in but now you can define a disk or set of folders (including nested folders) to search. You can also more narrowly define your search by adding extra terms with 'and', 'or' and 'not' functions and each term can be any one of many metadata elements, such as Scene, Take, Sample Rate, Format, etc. Though perhaps rarely useful, it is the sort of feature that might just save your job one day. It also comes into play with the new 'relink to new media' facility found in V5: let's say, for example, that you've exported a project back to an Avid for reworking, and then the reworked project has been re-exported back to you. However, in the process the clip names have been altered to preclude simple relinking with the original media. Using the different parameters the machine can take a very good stab at a happy reunion. Similarly, if the files you want have been

unwittingly mixed in with other audio, by applying what you do know about the errant files to the relink criteria, a tearful homecoming can often be achieved (*Emotions run high at Stationhouse readers. Ed*).

If you've used Pyramix to digitise your sound effects CDs and made use of CDDB database to name the tracks, you can create a searchable effects library within Pyramix from which you can simply drag sounds on to the timeline without need of a third-party SFX database.

A massive improvement is to be found within the transport window that can now contain as many machines as you've got 9-pin ports (and this is practically unlimited via USB-to-9pin convertors), any of which can be the master with any or all of the others slaving under the full control of Pyramix. All my Sony video machines seem to respond well although my DA88 is a bit reluctant for some reason. (*Perhaps it's feeling tearful. Ed*).

The inbuilt mixer has been completely redesigned and is far easier to configure. It also has a new monitor control section that allows selection and adjustment of various sources from mono to 7.1. As mentioned, I currently use an external mixer but even so the ease of configuration is still very apparent and a great improvement. It does encourage me to consider more seriously using my DM2000 as a controller and keeping all the mixing internal, especially as the imminent new software version (service pack 2) has apparently greatly improved controller mapping for the DM. With the new software supporting 128 physical I-Os from a pair of Mykerinos cards and all the new surround monitoring facilities, it does look very promising.



Another flexibility that becomes appealing as you get into the program is the facility to customise the user interface to contain only the buttons you want, either large or small. Any of the functions in the menus can now be given a button on the main project page plus, if desired, a keyboard short cut. So you can pare down your interface to suit a particular job — record VO, ADR, edit, mix, etc (or make an SACD master, if that's your thing) and save it as a preset. A given arrangement can also be saved within a Windows user account to make switching between tasks or operators simpler. And if you're moving between studios, the general settings, macros and shortcuts can be saved to a USB stick and loaded into any other Pyramix V5 system to make it look and act like your own.

If you're using your Pyramix without a mixing console the new monitor section will be invaluable. Having created your mixer with its various output busses — 5.1, stereo, mono, aux sends, 2-track monitor — the monitor section allows you to switch between them and also to switch between destinations, i.e. different speaker sets. You can also mute or solo

individual speakers, mute or dim the whole set and of course there's a big knob to turn the volume up and down.

A major new addition to the Pyramix family is the Isis dedicated hardware controller which uses Merging's Oasis protocol to reach to the depths of the system's parameters to offer detailed control. Other controllers and consoles are capable of controlling Pyramix via MIDI, but to date these have not been very satisfactory — although, as mentioned, improvements are reportedly imminent. There's also the excellent Euphonix MC which connects to Oasis through its own EuCon protocol to great effect, but for the controller plus 8-fader bank you'll be in the £25k to £30k region. The Isis comes in two parts. First there's the controller itself containing a large jogwheel, transport buttons, dedicated edit function buttons, track arming buttons and an LCD with eight soft keys. Then there's the fader unit, which is of a similar size and contains eight faders and an assortment of buttons.

I moved to Pyramix after a decade of using the Akai DD1500 (plus Cubase for music production)

with its much loved hardware controller. At that point I hated the idea of being forced to use a QWERTY keyboard for proper audio editing; how could it ever replace all those beautiful big buttons and that fabulous jog wheel? At that point I would undoubtedly have bought the Isis and would have been grateful. A few years down the line, with a long list of keyboard shortcuts under my fingers and a few nifty macros honed in the heat of battle, I'm rather fond of the QWERTY and mouse combo and found the Isis strangely cumbersome and unnecessary.

A freelance engineer who works at Stationhouse on and off and is required to straddle several different platforms in his travels, thought it was excellent and that I should definitely buy one. I think this is the crux, if you're wedded to your QWERTY and especially if you're using an external mixer, it may not appeal. If you're coming from a dedicated worksurface (AudioFile, DAR, etc) and especially if you're doing all you mixing within Pyramix, this may be a very useful and affordable tool. Though not overwhelmingly sexy the controller is quite presentable and the jog wheel is really excellent. The choice of buttons is also quite well reasoned and can be changed as required. The size and location of the buttons is not what I've been used to: they're a bit small, a bit far apart, rather spongy and, most strangely, the transport buttons are about two-thirds up the panel with nowhere to rest your wrist — try hammering those up and down the timeline for 10 hours straight.

One of the beauties of Pyramix is its macros. With a little application you can get it to do quite complex processes with a single key stroke, such as cueing-up pips for the next cue in an ADR session and perhaps muting or unmuting the guide track up to that point. With a keyboard full of hundreds of possible keystroke combinations, moving to the Isis seems to reduce the level of control. It's not for me, although I imagine if you're basically editing but need some simple mixing facilities, an Isis plus your mouse could be the answer.

All in all V5 is a significant improvement and expansion of the previous version and it's nice to know that any user can pick up the phone and speak to one of the designers or engineers in Switzerland and they will take the time to listen and consider your requests. ■



**PROS** Fast, user-adaptable interface; can add on extra Mykerinos cards for extra DSP; powerful machine control; good video solution; stable.

**CONS** No MIDI, so it may not appeal for music making; can't use the Mykerinos hardware for other apps like Cubase or Logic.

**EXTRAS** Basic native system: UK£437 + VAT  
 Film/video Post system including:  
 19-inch rack integrated PC; 3 x 17-inch TFT monitors; SCSI 72Gb removable HD; 600Gb internal RAID 0 media drive; Pyramix Post Pack software; RS422 control; video support with capture/playout; video/timcode sync; one Mykerinos card; dual analogue/AES I-O card and cables; AAF import/export; Prosoniq MPEX2 time/pitch scaling software — UK£10,813 + VAT

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