



Midas XL48

Midas has joined the interface league with a box that does things thoroughly and slightly differently. **ZENON SCHOEPE** likes the package.

As product categories go there is more activity these days in the world of the audio interface than just about any other gear type. Predictably this has everything to do with getting in to a DAW — it's where the two domains meet and then, more often than not, part. Most of these interfaces build on the notion of a channel strip as some super front-end that then becomes digital in perhaps a couple of flavours. The emphasis is normally on adding analogue features to that front-end so you get to tweak and tickle the signal on its way into the box. Too often that's at the expense of the integrity of the audio process and if you're only going to see analogue again in the monitoring chain how that original signal is handled and manipulated matters lots because it's effectively what defines the source at the point of capture. What is unusually rare today are multichannel interface boxes that also offer signal splitting and distribution.

Midas is not a name that you would think of immediately when considering a front-end to your digital system yet the introduction of the XL48 puts the brand into the fray with an intelligent and solid box of features and capabilities. The XL48 is an 8-channel mic preamp with digital and analogue splits — interestingly enough I've spotted the packaging across the room and that's pretty much what it says on the box.

It's a brute of a 1U that is surprisingly heavy and robust — I know that Midas drop tests its consoles and I'm not sure if it does the same with its outboard but I can warrant that it survived something akin to a roly-poly (albeit on carpet) without any adverse effects apart from my heart stopping. For all the internals and I-O it runs admirably cool and sports a

tidy little silent fan on the side next to the PSU.

You'll want to be comfortable with 25-pin D-Subs if you get an XL48 as that's the order of the day on the back panel although this is hardly surprising given the density of I-O that is about to be revealed. There are 25-pins for eight balanced analogue channel outputs, eight paralleled balanced analogue channel inputs and two lots of eight AES3 outputs. You also get two ADAT optical outputs, BNCs for Work clock I-O and finally the eight XLR channel inputs. All the outputs can work simultaneously, which takes the XL48 away from simple conversion and towards splitting duties that can be applied in all sorts of ways to distribute your signals for safety, flexibility or even to navigate latency issues. If you patch this box up fully to release the I-Os then I believe you will find many uses for it.

The front panel amounts to eight identical channels of mic preamp plus a slither at the far right with a switch and some indicators that serves as the means by which you change sampling rate (44.1, 48, 88.2 and 96kHz) and the internal or external clock status. The button is slightly recessed and repeated presses cycle through the four frequencies in internal and external clock with the associated LEDs illuminating appropriately.

The preamps are beautifully packaged and are derived from the XL4 — a console I've never used — although they are said to be improved. You get individually illuminated switches for 48V, a 20dB pad and phase reverse. Gain sweeps from +10dB to +60dB and there is excellent 8-segment three-colour metering which is scaled sensibly to inform and not scare; there are two types of metering I don't like —

the sort that never gets going and the sort that always looks like it's about to explode.

Finally there is the absolute delight of sweepable high and low pass filters working over the ranges of 10-400Hz and 1-40kHz respectively. I don't know if I somehow missed the industry directive that outlawed these but it's a rare occurrence to see a pair of swept filters on or near a front-end these days. I find them indispensable as good ones are a perfect way to clamp down and focus on sounds that you know you are going to have to EQ later on anyway; it removes some of the bother and it's gentle and refined. The preamp itself is a corker and wide and quiet enough for any application; it's characterful and refined (that word again). It's all screwed down fantastically — the knobs are firm to the casing and smooth in operation, the switches don't click and the casing extends to behind the rack ears to increase the support when bolted in. It's a quality item in all respects.

Some entry level digital desks suffer from rather lack-lustre preamps and while they are bought for their other features and convenience and not with the intention of using the preamps they frequently do end up getting used purely because they are to hand and they are all the same. The XL48 would be a classy solution to this scenario that you would guarantee to use.

The inclusion of ADAT outputs is pivotal in this box's appeal in recording setups complete with 24-bit conversion in single and double rates. I believe that there will be certain types of user who will read off the I-O count and immediately get how it will benefit them. It has got to be the unit of choice for compact setup multichannel recording because it has the capability to interface with others who might want to access your signals and because it has the integrity of audio that no broadcast OB is going to look down there nose at. The Midas sticker does put you in a different league here and those splits are going to be clean and at the appropriate level. Try doing that with your average 8-channel mic pre to ADAT unit.

If there is a downside it's that not every studio is wired for 25-pins (although it is becoming more common) and you can't even get analogue output without a 25-pin breakout. Worth mentioning but not a game changer for me. I wish I had more time with this box and a couple of other exercises to test it on although I am very impressed with it already; it's a high quality item with excellent sonic performance. If the connectivity makes sense to you then you must check it out. ■

PROS Superb preamps; high and low pass filters; connectivity and flexibility.

CONS 25-pin sockets aplenty.

Contact

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