SADiE BB2J

Answering the call of new market directions is not just about price, it is also about serving the requirement. It's small, blue, smart and even sensuous according to ROB JAMES.

DIGITAL AUDIO WORKSTATIONS have a very short history, in practical reality, less than 20 years. Over the years a slew of manufacturers turned their attention to this new growth area. A few grew rapidly while many others equally swiftly fell from grace. A reliable and well-supported product is one of the keys to success and longevity, listening to the users is another. But, by themselves, these are insufficient to guarantee continued success. There is a third, equally important, factor — keeping one jump ahead. By this I do not simply mean one jump ahead of the competition but, far more importantly, one jump ahead of the customers. Slavishly following the dictates of the 'wish list' will never produce true innovation. Without 'blue sky' thinking, the DAW might never have been invented in the first place.

SADiE produced its first DAW in 1992, which makes it a veteran manufacturer by the standards of this market. Success has been achieved by following the key factors. Today, SADiE has a large and loyal worldwide following, especially in radio and mastering. The BB2 and BB2J are aimed squarely at radio and represent a departure for SADiE, one of those 'missing link' jumps in thinking.

At fist glance the BB2J is desirable, and that's even before you know what it is and does. There is rightness about the look and feel that puts a smile on the face and a hand on the chequebook.

It looks for all the world like a 'SADiE blue', 9-button trackball with the ball replaced by a jog wheel. If it was just this, it would be desirable enough but it is a lot more than a simple hardware controller. The diminutive exterior conceals stereo audio I-O and Sharc DSP. Used with a suitable laptop or desktop PC,

the BB2J is a complete workstation. Three versions are offered. The BB2 lacks the jog wheel and buttons of its sibling, but comes with simple and quick BB2 software at UK£645 plus VAT. The BB2J with BB2 software is UK£945 plus VAT or, for more proficient operators and situations that require more than simple editing the BB2J can be specified as the Sadie PCM2, at UK£1995 plus VAT with SADiE PCM V5.X software. This will be immediately familiar to SADiE users and opens up the

BB2J to a wide range of optional plug-ins, even the CEDAR processors such as Retouch.

At the front, the long black key toggles playback/stop and the rest of the keys fall easily to hand. The weighted jog wheel is positively sensuous *(Steady Rob. Ed)*. Once I managed to tear my fingers away, a cursory examination of the rear panel revealed the I-O arrangements. Four phonos for stereo analogue input and output, with the latter doing double duty as SPDIF/AES-EBU I-O, 3.5mm jacks for stereo mic and headphones, a 4-pin USB socket and a 5V DC power socket.

The BB2 software offers a simplified SADiE editing interface with a single window for recording and editing. There are a maximum of 8 tracks with level control, pan and master output level controls. You can record new material via the line or mic inputs, rip CDs without drama and import files in a variety of uncompressed and compressed formats. Editing is normal cut/copy and paste and Playlist and Region editing functions are supported.

There is no 'mixer' window or automation to complicate life but, if you haven't looked at SADiE software for a while, there are some useful innovations carried over from the full version. A rather fetching 'yellow duck' icon opens the Region duck window. Using this dialog, the level of a previously defined region can de dropped or 'ducked' — for example, if you need to lower music under a speech cue. The dialog enables you to set the amount of attenuation and the transition time and to select which streams are to be ducked. Much quicker and easier to do than describe and ideal for relative novices. Once set up, a single keystroke ducks a selected region using the same parameters.

Next to the Duck icon you will find a cartoon speech bubble. This opens the Speech Edit window. Speech Edit performs two basic functions. It can 'chop up' a selected clip either by simply putting cuts wherever the analysis determines there is a transition from silence to sound (spliced edit) or by removing the sections identified as silence (Gated Edit). The second function alters the length of the silent sections to produce time compression/expansion or 'scrunch'.

If Gated Edit is chosen, compression and expansion are possible. With Spliced Edit only time compression can be applied (by automatically shortening the tail of
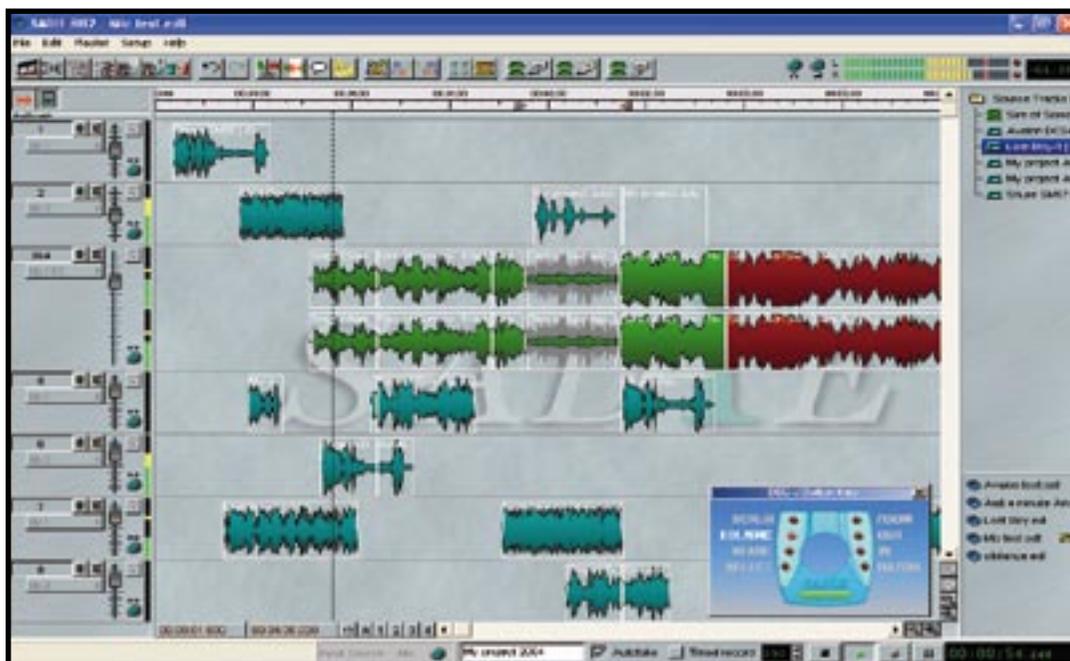
each of the generated clips). The dialog allows you to switch between Gated and Spliced Edits, set minimum clip and gap lengths, set the scrunch ratio from 0.5 through unity to 2.0 times and adjust the Gate on and off thresholds. The result can be placed on a new track or written back to the current Playlist. With careful adjustment, the Speech Edit function can make the more tedious aspects of speech editing a lot less of a chore.

Playlist and region editing offer a subset of the full SADiE armoury of tools, easy to learn and productive once learnt.

With editing completed, the Mix Program window enables the results to be mixed down — either in preparation for burning the files to CD, producing Master files for storage on a server or Playout system, or to bounce clips into a single entry in the Playlist. This is the equivalent of Bounce in the full SADiE software, but simpler.

Once files have been prepared for CD writing, you use the CD writing software on the PC or Windows Media Player on Windows XP to actually burn the disk. The entire Playlist can be rendered as a single track or each yellow clip group in the Playlist can become a single CD track.

If the edit needs further work, such as EQ, effects, automation, or needs to be integrated into a larger project then the entire BB2 project can be imported into a machine running a full version of the SADiE software, which could easily be the BB2J with SADiE V5.

SADiE's radio experience really shows in this product. Based on short acquaintance during this review, I reckon untrained, but computer literate, journalists and producers should be able to produce simple items after only a few hours instruction and practice, certainly far less time than learning to edit tape... The BB2-J Button Key window interactively illustrates the button functions to aid familiarisation.

Thoughtful management tools help make the BB2J even more effective in multi-operator environments. For example, the BB2J buttons can be locked to the default set of commands. This guarantees every machine will work in the same way. Alternatively, via the BB2 Configurable Hotkey plug-in, custom assignments may be made by an administrator or free customisation by every user can be enabled.

Although leveraging the company's not inconsiderable experience in radio, the BB2 and BB2J represent something of a new direction for SADiE. A rinky-dink external controller/processor/audio interface/dongle is a very interesting move for a company best known for complete turnkey systems. It demonstrates a fine appreciation of where the market is heading and a determination to be part of that future. I suspect it may prove to be one of the best things SADiE has done for a long time. If it can repeat the 'jumping ahead' trick with similar diligence for other applications, I expect to hear a lot more from SADiE in the near future. No one involved in specifying editing equipment for radio production can afford to ignore the BB2J.

PROS	First of a new species; excellent jog; productivity.
CONS	Indicator LEDs for the buttons might be nice; price may seem high to people who don't understand what they are getting.

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Retouch V3 for SADiE

WHEN I FIRST looked at Retouch V1, some 18 months ago, I was more than a little impressed. At long last, here was a tool that intelligently addressed the removal of recorded problems such as chair creaks, coughs, mobile phones and similar fairly long duration disturbances. All previous alternative approaches share a common defect. The original material including the desirable parts is lost.

Retouch is a time and frequency space editor. It moves sections of audio, precisely defined in time and frequency range, from one place to another.

When a range is defined in SADiE, and the Retouch button pressed, the audio is copied and opened in the Retouch window. When Retouching of this section of the project is completed, pressing the OK button writes it back to SADiE and closes the Retouch window.

In V1 there was one significant limitation, it was not possible to audition audio or the results of processing within Retouch. Now you can play audio in the window before and after Retouching it.

In V1 there was only one process, Interpolation. This uses adjustable 'wings' either side of the defined problem area as a basis for synthesising new material to replace the area with the unwanted audio partially or completely. The level of synthesis determines what percentage of the original will be replaced. As an aid to productivity, multiple areas can now be selected by holding down the Shift key. So long as the Shift key is held down each of the areas can be individually adjusted before invoking Retouch. Multiple selections can be useful not only in the time domain for a repeated problem, but also in the frequency domain to deal with harmonics.

What used to be known as the Select Area tool in V1 is now called the Interpolate tool. This has been joined by two new process tools, Patch and Copy.

Patch allows you to replace a section of audio with another of the same duration and range of frequencies (although they can be different actual frequencies). The patch can overwrite the existing material or can be mixed with it in equal proportions by pressing the appropriate button. Patching begins with drawing a box around the offending area and adjusting as required. This time there are no 'wings'. Once the selection is made the box is clicked and dragged to an area containing suitable replacement material. The original box shows a copy of whatever is under the moving box to help the visual match. For many purposes suitable replacement will mean a position earlier or later in time, so the Frequency lock button is active by default. Unchecking it can produce some creatively interesting (and/or horrendous!) sounds when material is moved vertically i.e. pitch shifted.

The other variation, Copy has the same options as Patch but works in a slightly different way. It enables you to select an area of the Retouch screen and to duplicate it elsewhere. When a box is drawn while the Copy button is pressed, no wings appear. Left clicking and dragging the box will produce a copy of the originally selected area, where the mouse button is released.
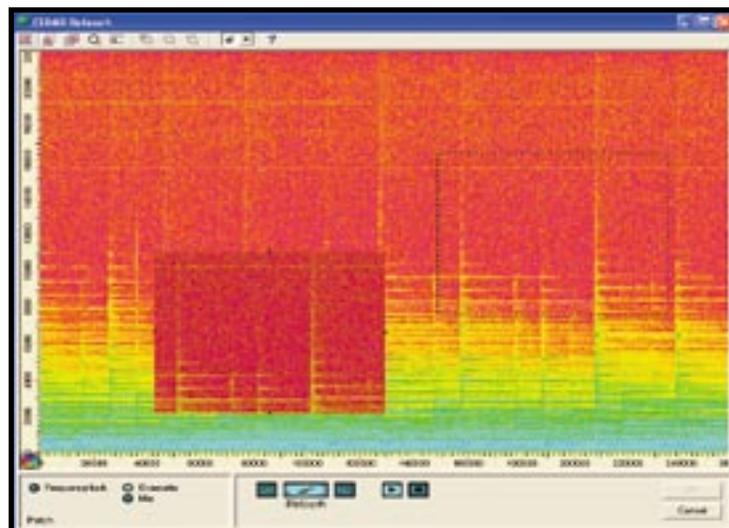
Apart from the obvious surgical repair applications, these processes can also be used to create new and interesting sound effects.

Where V1 was limited to two channels, V3 deals with up to 64 channels of audio in one operation (depending on the capabilities of the host workstation). Retouch provides a simple drop-down list for selecting individual channels or All. If you wish to use groups, this must currently be done from within the SADiE environment.

The gain of the replacement audio can now be varied from +20dB to -90dB. In V3 synthesis must be set to 100 if you wish to increase the gain. With synthesis set to zero, gain reduction can be used to attenuate or emphasise harmonics, breaths, etc.

In each case the maximum duration of audio to be processed in one hit is 10 seconds. For problem fixing you will generally use far less, but this longer duration can be useful for more creative activities.

If the original was impressive, this new version is even more so. It will be a free upgrade for existing SADiE Retouch users and UK£2000 plus VAT for everyone else. Apart from the improvements detailed above there have also been a host of minor tweaks. Taken together, these improve the appearance of the interface and increase productivity. How else would you deal with a mobile phone ringing in the middle of a 48-track recording of a live performance of Wagner's Ring? The new processes extend the repertoire considerably and not only for fixing problems. Patch and Copy add some new colours to the sound designer's palate.

With these improvements Retouch remains in a class of its own. ∎

PROS	Now you can audition results inside Retouch; up to 64 simultaneous tracks; useful new processes.
CONS	Legends can disappear off screen in Measure mode; it would be useful if track groups could be used inside Retouch.

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