



TC Electronic Studio Konnekt 48

Building on the trend to create ever more sophisticated single-box DAW support devices, TC has eclipsed the competition by putting more in its box than the rest. **ROB JAMES** says there's even more in there than you'd think.

Just like the real (?!) world, audio is subject to trends and fashions. One season you cannot move for flares and mic preamps, another it is ra-ra skirts and monitor controllers. Now it seems that Ugg boots and one-box workstation support devices are everywhere you look. The basic premise is: 'You can get rid of that big ugly mixer, our box provides all you need to build a complete studio, apart from the workstation itself, mics and monitor speakers/amps.' (*And the Ugg boots too? Ed*)

Most examples simply combine the functions of a number of discrete units into one box and present them in a familiar way — mic pre(s), A-DC and D-AC, monitor controller and MIDI interface, sometimes with the addition of a remote control for monitoring. To obviate the need to install an internal soundcard many manufacturers have opted to use FireWire to transport audio, MIDI, clock and control signals to and from the DAW. I'm still not convinced by the notion of using IEEE 1394, FireWire, i.Link, call it what you will, for real-time audio and always recommend internal cards, but I cannot deny the attraction of a one cable connection and, of course, internal cards are less practical with laptops.

TC Electronic's Konnekt series of interfaces ranges from entry level to the current top dog, the Studio Konnekt 48 (Euro 1499 suggested retail price). Offering a glittering array of features, there is more to this 1U than meets the eye. Certainly the expected components are all present, four mic and instrument combi analogue inputs with switched phantom power, meters, front panel pots and -20dB pads plus another eight analogue line ins. There are eight analogue line outs, two independent stereo headphone outputs and an XLR stereo pair of main outputs. Sixteen channels of optical digital I-O switchable between ADAT and SPDIF and a stereo coaxial SPDIF pair nicely complement the analogue I-O.

The DICE II FireWire chipset provides 24 channels to and from the DAW along with accurate and stable clocking and there are three assignable speaker sets for stereo and surround monitoring with level and dim control and talkback.

All of which is indisputably useful but there are some unexpected and very welcome extras. First, a dinky remote control with a big domed knob/button and LED ring. Then there is a 24/8 DSP mixer

with recall and DSP effects insert points and speaker management, with individual level and delay control, and bass management based on the AIR technology found in Dynaudio speakers. The mixer uses 48-bit double precision summing on all mix buses with 56-bit internal processing.

If all that isn't enough to make your ears prick up then how about two (at 48kHz) simultaneous stereo Fabrik C channel strips with 4-band EQs and multiband compression based on TC System 6000 algorithms and a built-in Fabrik R reverb, based on TC 4000 technology? As the icing on the cake TC has thrown ResFilter and Assimilator Konnekt plug-ins into the mix along with an Integrator plug-in for external hardware effects and a guitar tuner that makes use of the big, bright LED ring on the remote control.

The whole shooting match is controlled via the TC Near application.

Installation is simple on Mac and PC with the usual 'install the software before plugging in the FireWire' routine. The plug-ins are supplied in VST and AU flavours and applications can use the FireWire interface in VST, WDM and Core Audio modes. Multiple Konnekt units can be daisy chained with common monitoring, all controlled from a single instance of TC Near. The front panel meter block also has indicators for FireWire, MIDI and digital I-O. Once set up, the Konnekt 48 can be used 'standalone' without a computer if required.

As a change from my usual PCs and applications I have been using the Konnekt 48 with Final Cut Pro and Soundtracks2 on a Mac for monitoring and acquisition.

The TC Near application is not the most intuitive I have encountered. The labelling of the playback DAW FireWire channels was particularly confusing when used with Soundtracks. Talkback dim only affects the headphone outputs. I would like to have seen an option to dim the main monitor output as well.

A number of features are sample rate dependent. For example, at the maximum 192kHz you lose the mixer completely. At 96kHz you only get one stereo Fabrik C or the Fabrik R.

The drivers are now at V2 but there are still some anomalies. I had to re-start the Konnekt once because of garbled audio and to restore to factory defaults because of corrupted graphics. After this, things seemed to settle down.

Studio Kontrol is the hardware remote. The big encoder controls the Master output level by default and after one of the modifier buttons is pressed it automatically reverts to this mode if no change is made for a user-determined period (default 2.5s). When the knob is pressed it invokes dim and controls the dim level. A second press returns to main output level. The Panel button toggles popping-up the TC Near window over the DAW application and minimising it again. Further buttons allow the knob to be used to adjust level and pan, etc for inputs. Modifiers enable muting of inputs and invoke the guitar tuner and control effects. Although this is a far from conventional set of functions on a small remote, it repays the learning curve with near instant access to many frequently tweaked parameters.

Fabrik C and R are world class processors. OK, you only get one reverb and two stereo channel strips at 48kHz but they are more than worth the effort and the GUIs are both based on the MINT interface and offer a revolutionary glimpse of what is possible when designers stop imitating conventional analogue controls. Even so, the effects allocation seems a little stingy considering that Studio Konnekt 48's junior siblings, the Konnekt Live and Konnekt 24D, are similarly equipped.

The mic pres and analogue I-O are subjectively excellent and the audio in general can be characterised as clean and quiet. However, as I said at the beginning, FireWire remains questionable as a professional real-time audio interface. Driver performance is critical; the TI FireWire chipset is highly recommended, if not essential, and don't even think about connecting anything else to the same FireWire bus if you want reliable performance at low latencies.

Bottom line is that the sound is excellent for the price, the effects are a big bonus but, despite TC Electronic's sterling efforts, questions remain over the drivers and it may take a while to get your head around the patching. ■

PROS Excellent sound at this price point; Fabrik effects are superb; versatile; nice remote.

CONS Complexity; more instances of the effects would be welcome; suitability of FireWire as a professional real-time audio interface?

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