



THE PRICE IS RIGHT

ONE OF THE BIG TALKING POINTS AT LAST MONTH'S PLASA SHOW WAS SOUNDRAFT'S NEW 'MID-MARKET' Si3 DIGITAL CONSOLE. TPI REPORTS...

Owing to deadline pressures, TPI was not able to bring you a preview of Soundcraft's latest digital console development in our September issue, so let's get down to business...

In the wake of the Vi Series desks that brought new levels of respect to the Soundcraft brand, the Harman-owned brand has now focused on the middle market with its new Si3 — a console whose intuitive operation and high input/buss count will no doubt find its way into the hands of many an eager user in all forms of live applications.

Its single chassis contains the console surface, all input and output connections, and power supply — so it can literally drop in and replace an existing analogue desk as almost certainly no additional cabling would be required to install it.

This compact footprint desk can directly handle 64 mono inputs, four stereo inputs and has full connectivity for all 35 output busses (24 aux/group, eight matrices and L/C/R mix busses) — rare for digital consoles at this price level. Add to this four Lexicon effects processors, 12 VCA groups, eight mute groups and bar graph metering for all 35 bus outputs, and the extent of the package begins to really build up.

The Si3's operating surface is far from cumbersome. Although it does have a small central touch screen, it is really there for console management, cue lists and labelling, etc. All the normal mixing operations are carried out adjacent to the channel faders, continuing Soundcraft's philosophy of 'where you look is where you control'. An amazingly crisp and bright OLED

display clearly shows important channel data for every fader on the desk, while in the centre section, OLEDs provide the same for the output faders.

BORROWING FROM THE PAST

Soundcraft has revisited the control topology employed on the ground-breaking Spirit 328 and 324 digital consoles, and made it even easier.

The model is this — above each fader is a rotary encoder, the function of which changes according to the mode selected. This 'bank' of encoders, known as the VCS (Virtual Channel Strip) can be set to control every function of a channel (known as Channel mode), so mic gain, EQ, dynamics, auxes, panning are all controlled as if there was a normal analogue channel strip laid sideways in front of you. The VCS also incorporates all the switching you would find on an individual analogue channel strip (48v, phase reverse, EQ in, etc.).

Alternatively, in what is called Global mode, each encoder controls the same function for each channel. For example, the encoders could control all the mic gains, pans or a chosen aux bus (very useful for creating monitor mixes).

The encoder and OLED displays located in the output section are used primarily for output signal controls such as EQ, dynamics and matrix contributions, but also double up as dedicated controls for the onboard Lexicon processors.

When using these processors, you can expand the controls to adjust virtually every parameter available, giving you outstanding control over the



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effects. Each of the four Lexicon engines can be assigned by the user to any channel. The gates and compressors, as you would expect, draw on the heritage of BSS Audio and dbx, Soundcraft's sister companies within Harman.

The output encoders and OLEDs can also be assigned to control EQ and dynamics control for any selected input or output channel for those who prefer central control.

Like the Vi4 and Vi6, the Si3 uses the patented Soundcraft FaderGlow system to show what mode your faders are in, whether they are controlling inputs, aux or effects sends or buss outputs. For example, when faders are controlling aux sends, the faders glow yellow, while for VCAs they glow blue. In fact the colour codings closely follow the Soundcraft Vi6 set-up, so engineers moving between consoles will be equally at home with both.

Complete desk settings may be stored as snapshots, as you would expect on a digital console. These can be sequenced from a cue list on the central touch screen and controlled with dedicated snapshot automation buttons. Global snapshot filtering is also available.

INSIDE

Under the hood of the Si3 is an array of new technology, most notably EMMA, a single-board digital mixing console with an embedded operating system. This compact PCB holds not only the processing and DSP to run the mixer with its EQ and dynamics, but also four Lexicon AudioDNA chips to provide the Si3 with some of the best effects available in the pro audio world.

The team of developers at Soundcraft — including Stefan Ledergerber, VP of R&D for Soundcraft and Studer, product manager James Shears, and R&D project manager Matt Rowe — was responsible for the entire development and coding of this new mixing core which is also the base core of further new console designs already in development.

Needless to say with the wealth of experience in digital platform development that Studer and Soundcraft have with the Vista and Soundcraft Vi Series, the Si3 has inherited the same sound quality pedigree, and coupled with Graham Blyth's talents in mic pre-amp design and the extensive development of the integral dynamics and gates and Lexicon FX, sound quality is a given.

On the rear of this highly-featured console are all the I/O connectors you'll need. Sixty-four XLRs for the mic/line inputs, four stereo line level inputs, 24 buss output XLRs, eight matrix output XLRs, L/C/R mix output XLRs, L/C/R monitor output XLRs and comprehensive internal/external talkback and Oscillator connections. There are also eight analogue insert connections which allow outboard

processing to be inserted into any input channel output buss.

The power supply for the Si3 is integral to the chassis, and a secondary PSU module can be fitted for total redundancy. There are also four spare slots for other optional cards such as MADI interfaces or AES/EBU inputs.

Of course, the Si3 has been developed with Harman's HiQnet networked audio system in mind, and connection is included.

To make preparation of the console set-up easier, Soundcraft is also planning to release an off-line editor for the Si3. This self-contained suite runs on a PC or laptop, and allows configuration of the console which can then be downloaded to the desk, saving precious on-site set-up time.

VISION

Andy Trott, the president of Soundcraft and Studer, joined the Harman Pro Group six years ago, and has been key to the development of the new line of digital consoles and the essential merging between Soundcraft and its sister brand, Studer.

Discussing the Si3's introduction, he said: "Pre-launch visitors expressed delight that at last someone has brought in a mid-range priced desk, complete with a large amount of integral I/O and new features, that looks and feels exactly like an analogue user interface."

At the time Trott joined the team, Soundcraft was a well-respected manufacturer of analogue consoles, ranging from the small Spirit Notepad, to the flagship touring desks like the Soundcraft Series 5. But with greater demand for digital solutions, the company knew it would have to shift focus sooner than later.

"We faced the same challenges that so many technology-based businesses face: 'change or die' — so we developed a strategic 10-year road map and set ourselves an aggressive target of remodelling every part of our business in order to compete with the very best digital technologies emerging in our markets, and our parent company, Harman International, backed us all the way," said Trott.

"We're now a very different business to what we were five or six years ago. We have projects currently engaged on researching and developing new digital mixing solutions at every key price point across all our markets. I'd like to say it's been a great journey, but that suggests we've arrived at our destination... and we're not even halfway there.

"Our plan is still a 10-year plan, just rolled on a few years. We're now looking at technologies no one could have dreamed of at the start of this journey."

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