

Euphonix MC Control | £999

Euphonix combine hardware control with touch-screen operation. *Jono Buchanan* gets touchy-feely...

WHAT IS IT?

An Ethernet-based, touch-screen control surface for Mac

CONTACT

Who: Euphonix
Tel: +1 (0)650 798 6155
Web: euphonix.com

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Fully configurable touch-screen control
- 2 Vast array of different control options
- 3 Ergonomic design facilitates use

There seems to be little doubt that, ultimately, we'll operate increasing amounts of the technology on which we're

reliant with touch-screens. While we were gaping at the iPhone when it was first released for instance, it surely won't be long before such innovation sweeps through greater swathes of consumer electronics.

In terms of 'control disparity', few could argue that a mouse-driven approach to operating computers is an ideal scenario and it's no surprise therefore that control surfaces to facilitate the operation of music software remain in such high demand. Until recently, these were almost all of the 'hardware fader bank' variety, but Jazz Mutant broke the mould last year with their touch-screen, Ethernet-based Dexter console and Euphonix now enter the fray with MC Control. The latter follows in the footsteps of the

impressive MC Mix controller I checked out back in March but crucially, offers access to more control than ever, thanks to its configurable touch-screen. Could this be the missing link between you and your DAW?

First impressions

The unit itself is a sleek affair, whose styling echoes that of MC Mix. This is perhaps most evident on the unit's left-hand side, where a bank of four channel strip faders lie in wait with their associated 'Selection' and 'Record' buttons. Similarly, the right-hand side of the upper surface contains several of Euphonix's instantly recognisable buttons, with the option to switch pages, nudge events back and forth, jump between different banks and even switch applications all present here.

Towards the bottom right-hand corner, a jog/shuttle wheel is surrounded by transport controls, while the MC

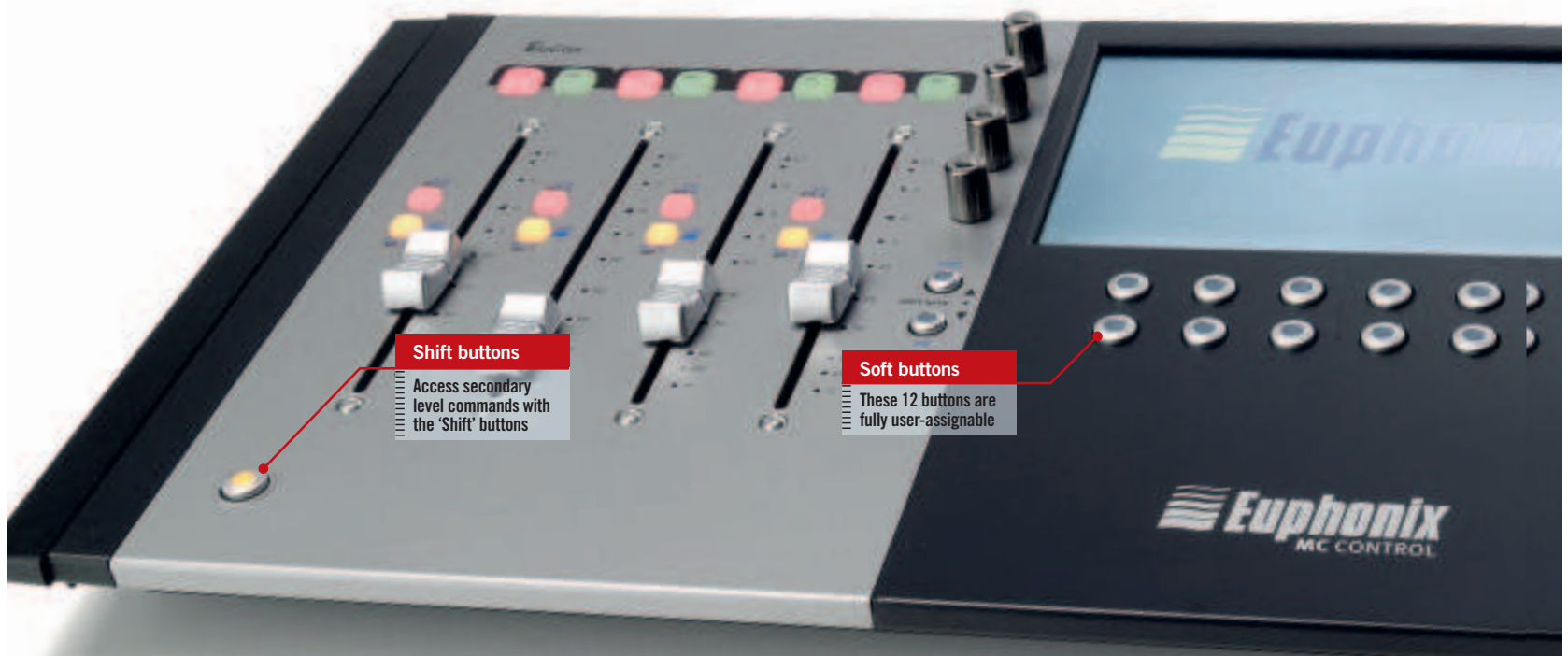
Mix's unlabelled 'Shift' buttons are also present in both bottom left and right corners, enabling access to secondary controls. It's beautifully styled in its own right but, of course, the part which really grabs the eye is the MC Control's central touch-screen, which is flanked by a column of four dials on each side, while two rows of six 'soft' buttons lie beneath. Round the back, you'll find the AC power inlet and the all-important Ethernet connection. As with MC Mix, MC Control is a Mac-only controller.

Installation of the EuCon software is required to ready MC Control for use and further setup may be required depending on the application(s) you're intending to use it with. As with MC Mix, if your DAW isn't compatible with the EuCon protocol, MC Control can use Mackie Control instead.

Screen machine

Once the software is in, simply power up MC Control, boot your DAW and away you go. As with our previous review of Euphonix' MC Mix console the installation and 'pick-up' of the controller was absolutely effortless. It just works. The main event here of course is the new touch-screen and after some early problems with an early unit we were quickly and efficiently blessed with a fully functioning, bright clear and gorgeous-looking screened version for our review.

The MC Control is certainly impressively laid out. I tested it with Logic Pro and Euphonix should be applauded wildly for the sheer number



Shift buttons

Access secondary level commands with the 'Shift' buttons

Soft buttons

These 12 buttons are fully user-assignable

Speed of Movement: The Control Challenge

If you're in the market for a controller, what aspects of your DAW are you hoping to assign to it? In other words, is it just that you don't like mixing with virtual faders and a mouse, or is

it that you can't stand actually clicking menus and selecting items from it and would happily abandon the whole concept of a keyboard and mouse if you could? The reason for asking is

that MC Control and units like it set themselves a mighty challenge by offering control over extended feature sets of music applications like Logic and Pro Tools, precisely as these have been designed to run on a computer.

For instance, MC Control will let you call up the menu to select new tracks within Logic with a single click, which is great. However, you can't choose which types of tracks to select (Audio or Software Instrument) or how many, as MC Control doesn't offer alpha-numeric input. This means you

have to use your computer keyboard and if you have to use it here, why not use it to carry out the whole operation?

Euphonix have done brilliantly to code so many of Logic's functions to dedicated buttons but due to the sheer size of modern DAWs, sometimes the only way to see a process through is to revert to your keyboard and mouse. One senses it won't be until computer flat-screen monitors are fully touch-screen that it will be possible to actually drive full DAW functionality from a single 'controller'.



SPECS

Mac: OS X v10.4 or later, G4 with a 1.25GHz or faster PowerPC G4 processor, 10/100 Base-T Ethernet port, 1GB RAM, 100MB of free hard disk space for full installation, display with 1024 x 768 resolution or higher

Ethernet Port for connection to your Mac

Footswitch Port

Screen size:

153 x 92mm

Dimensions:

500 x 238 x 30mm

Weight:

2.5kg

of functions they've transcribed from this program directly into the unit. From the moment you boot a new session, groups of four tracks at a time are controlled directly from the sliders and,

thereafter you can do pretty much anything you like. The knobs around the screen call up specific functions and help drive your editing and at the top level, allow access to your chosen

knob. So, say you then press the 'Channel EQ' one, the frequency, shape, Q and gain controls for each band are then all assigned to their own dial. You can arrow to the left or right through

pages to access frequency bands which aren't covered by the first screen, so getting around is straightforward. Pressing 'Back' takes you back up

Euphonix should be applauded for the sheer number of functions they've transcribed into the unit

as with MC Mix, it's possible to move 'down' through your tracks in single steps, or in groups of four. You can select one of these four tracks as your 'target' track on the screen and

channel's inserts, pan, auxiliaries and the like. Selecting 'Inserts' for example (by pressing the relevant knob), then drops you down a level and maps the plug-ins you have set up, one to each

one level, or you can shift-press this to get back to the 'Top' level in an instant.

In this way, the MC Control is straightforward but in others, it's less so. For instance, at this 'Top' level default screen, one of the dials is for 'Pan'. As it's a rotary dial, you'd assume that by turning the dial, the pan position would modify but it doesn't, until you enter 'pan mode' by pressing this dial first. Then, 'Pan' switches from being the second dial down on the right hand side to becoming the first dial on the left and, thereafter, works. Somehow, this doesn't seem as intuitive as it might.

Getting all soft

Dials aside, it's the virtual buttons on the screen which are designed to do your bidding and there are tons of them! In Logic, there are seven screen pages of buttons in the 'Track' sub-menu alone, with up to 24 coloured, labelled buttons



Transport

Your fingers soon get used to this fanned transport control

Access all areas

Jump through tracks, edit pages and even toggle your open applications from here

Jog wheel

Move through your track and make easy edits here



ALTERNATIVES



Jazz Mutant Dexter
£1,900

If touch-screen technology rocks your world and you've got a generous bank balance, say hello to Dexter. Effortlessly converting from a fader bank to sets of switches, this remains the Aston Martin of controllers.

jazzmutant.com



Mackie Control Universal
£900

The latest incarnation of the controller which really kick-started the whole process. Don't be fooled into thinking this is merely a glorified bank of faders – there's loads and loads of control packed into this box.

mackie.com

per page. These include 'File' commands such as 'New', 'Save' and 'Close', the opportunity to open specific editing windows like the Mixer Environment or note editor and others to take control of automation, for instance. These examples are the tip of the iceberg however – I could easily exhaust my word limit simply listing the functions Euphonix have mapped so that the MC Control is ready to use straight out of the box.

Below the touch-screen itself, two rows of six 'soft' buttons access additional commands such as 'Tool'

selection. As with computer keyboards, experienced users need to learn where specific commands are by feel and this is more easily done with a physical button than with a touch-screen, virtual one. The screen is user-configurable so if you don't like Euphonix's layout of buttons, you can create your own, as you can see from the grabs.

MC Conclusion

The MC Control is a seriously good controller and the sheer range of functions over which it can offer control puts it head and shoulders above most

of the competition. In this sense, if you're sold on the idea of getting away from your mouse and keyboard, this is precisely the kind of controller you should be checking out.

Some functions are much more straightforward to access and change, while others are as, or more time-consuming to operate than they might be via a mouse and keyboard. This isn't a criticism but an insight into the challenge Euphonix have taken on by packing so many functions into MC Control. Credit to them for meeting the challenge head on and, in most ways, delivering the goods. **FM**

Application Support

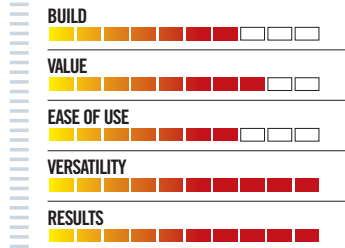
Like MC Mix, MC Control allows you to hot-swap between programs by pressing the Application button. Like pressing 'Apple-Tab', this then lets you cycle through your open applications and, upon doing this, it quickly becomes apparent just how much information is passed from your Mac to

the MC Control. For instance, if you select the Finder, you'll find the MC Control's touch-screen buttons let you create new folders or jump to the 'Find' control, among other things. I inadvertently selected my Mail program and was amused to discover that the buttons allowed me to

select 'Forward' and 'Reply' commands, as well as 'Print'. Accordingly, MC Control may have a wider appeal than the music technology industry.

I can see this controller being a bit hit with video editors and graphic designers for starters and, no doubt, in the wider creative industry too.

FutureMusic VERDICT



A hugely impressive and versatile control unit with the added 'X factor' of that touch-screen.

