

Allen & Heath Xone:4D | £1,499

The original hybrid DJ mixer is back in black. *Marc '01'* gets under the hood of this analogue heavyweight

WHAT IS IT?

Hybrid DJ mixer, soundcard and MIDI controller

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Juicy analogue filters with step sequencer
- 2 Lots of flashing lights
- 3 Double the MIDI of the 3D

Not all DJ mixers are created equal. This is definitely the case with the rather luxurious Xone:4D. Allen &

Heath pioneered the hybrid DJ mixer concept several years ago with the Xone:3D, and since then, a horde of well-specified competitors have emerged to compete. Time for an update. The 'hybrid' concept merges audio, MIDI control and digital audio card technologies into one, allowing DJs to mix using any combination of decks and software, especially Ableton Live and NI Traktor.

On the surface, the 4D looks like a 3D with addition of a nice metallic-black paint job. The layout of controls is essentially the same with a creamy four-channel analogue mixer in the

centre flanked by a pair of MIDI control surfaces. We've already heaped plenty of praise on the stellar qualities of the A&H analogue console, and this continues the tradition in fine form.

There have been some minor changes to the MIDI control section, which aren't initially obvious. First up, there's more space around the dials, which were a bit cramped on the original 3D models.

Sonic charge

Probably the most significant aspect of the upgrade is the all new sound. It still uses the USB 2.0 connection, but it now boasts a very flexible 10-in/10-out configuration.

These are arranged as stereo pairs and the first four pairs are available at

the touch of a button on the line selector of the mixer, as well as analogue outs on the rear. This is a big change from the 3D, which required the user to call up the software based mixer on the computer to make any changes to the configuration.

The recording inputs are fed by the four stereo analogue inputs of the DJ mixer, which offer a choice of either RCA or phono connectors. Alternatively, you can tap the signal from the FX sends, mic input and master output instead of the line inputs. The final pair (9+10) uses the digital in/out and which can be either of the SPDIF or Optical connectors.

This flexible set-up makes it possible for users to bend the Xone:4D to their needs, rather than work around its architecture.

The sound quality is crisp, clear and rounded out by the analogue circuits of the mixer, with the warm three-band EQ and multi-band filter section adding to the appeal. The driver performed well on the test MacBook and could easily sustain playback at the minimum of 64 samples, with audio tracks all playing simultaneously, each one routed to its own analogue output on the mixer. Performance-wise, this is about as good as it gets for latency values.

There was no sign of crackle or buffer glitches, just a tight response for





audio triggering and premium sonic integrity – impressive!

Modulation nation

In the world of DJ mixers, the name Allen & Heath is synonymous with juicy analogue filters. It's been over decade since they first introduced them and in that time, they have been tweaked to perfection. There are two individual VCF's onboard, and these are

the 'one knob per job' design. The nice use of illuminated buttons gives instant visual feedback in the dark so you always know if the filter is on etc, no matter how drunk you get while performing your set.

The LFO has been upgraded so that alongside the default triangle wave, it has a new step sequence mode for modulating the cutoff. This mode requires a couple of push button-hold

The Xone:4D packs a massive amount of function into a luxurious form.

Now that the issue of space around the MIDI controllers has been addressed, this is undeniably the most ergonomic mixer of the bunch. Add this to the uncompromising quality of the hardware, gorgeous backlit buttons and top notch sound quality, what more could you want?

Its competitors have a plethora of effects, but none of them have real analogue signal path or filters

assignable to the X and Y channels of the cross-fader. Each one has a choice of low-, band- and high-pass modes plus rotaries for cutoff and resonance.

This has been sensibly kept well below screaming level, firstly, to keep the music from disappearing altogether into a screaming sine wave, and secondly – to avoid killing clubbers' ears and the resulting lawsuits against DJs that tend to follow suit. Deploying the VCF is simplicity itself, thanks to

style jiggery moves to engage, which can be seen via the three-segment LCD display. The step sequencer is very much like an old-school eight-step analogue sequencer, and uses the eight sliders to set the levels for each step.

Handily, the sequencer also smooths out the transition between each step so that it slides between the points, keeping your effects flowing and the tap tempo buttons sets overall the speed of the sequence.

And we know it's easy enough to add a couple of Kaoss pads to the sends on the Xone, if you're not satisfied with the already impressive effects.

The new refinements and multi-channel soundcard make it a more powerful beast than the 3D, especially for live recording/sampling/ playback with Ableton or using the internal FX sends of Traktor to spice up a live mix.

Aside from the minor criticisms of the MIDI channel/template selection (see *Nuff Dialage!* box), this is a pretty faultless piece of gear that feels like a total tool for next generation DJs who want it all now. **FM**

Nuff Dialage!

The third slice of action comes by way of the copious selection of MIDI controllers. The twin banks straddling the main mixer provide the same kind of familiar feel as using a pair of decks would. All faders, switches, dials etc are very high quality, smooth turning, and no wobble – spot on!

There are two MIDI modes – one geared for Traktor, the other for Ableton. Switching between presets (and

MIDI Channels for that matter) requires a restart and little bit of button pressing. This may contribute to the reason why A&H are marketing it as a 'personal' mixer, since powering down is not an option for a club install at any time during the night. Next, load up one of the MIDI maps/templates into the software of your choice and you are ready to go. In use, it's a real winner. There are more than enough buttons and faders

for the average situation, and the addition of dual layer more than doubles the amount of messages from 105 to 227.

The CD-style jog dial lends itself to similar tasks in Traktor, including track searching and shuttling. In Ableton, it can be used for scrolling through clips.

The last two features which round it out as a pro's-choice are the start/stop button and the MIDI timing nudge, which helps Ableton users mix in time with vinyl/CDs.

Verdict

Okay, so its main competitors might have a plethora of built-in effects, but none of them have a real analogue signal path or filters.

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD [Progress bar: 10/10]

VALUE [Progress bar: 8/10]

EASE OF USE [Progress bar: 9/10]

VERSATILITY [Progress bar: 10/10]

RESULTS [Progress bar: 10/10]

The ultimate in quality hybrid mixing, and the only real choice for the analogue enthusiast.

SPECS

DJ Mixer
Inputs: 4 multi-input stereo channels: RIAA preamps for turntables on three inputs, (channel 4 is Line/Line). Soundcard output routing switches for each channel, Mic input: XLR with 2-band EQ

Outputs: Master (XLR), Both (RCA), Headphone monitor with mix/cue control: 3.5mm and ¼" sockets

FX sends: 2 pre/post selection (internal on FX2)

FX Returns: 2 Stereo

EQ: 3-band total kill EQ: 6dB to off

Filters: 2 x analogue VCF LP/BP/HP with resonance and LFO

LFO: Depth control, Tap Tempo & 8 step sequence shaper
 BPM counter and Tap Temp

X-Fade: Dual Rail VCA
 Cross Fader +Curve Adjust

Soundcard
 USB 2.0, 96kHz / 24-bit, 10-in/10-out, 4 x stereo analogue out on mixer, Stereo Optical/SPDIF in/out

MIDI Controller
Faders: 8 x 60mm linear faders
Rotary pots: 16 x detented
Rotary encoders: 10
Switches: 50
Jog wheels: 2 with 4 micro switches

Illuminated push switches: 8
 Dual layer function with 227 MIDI Messages
 MIDI In/Out/Thru & Game Input

ALTERNATIVES



Ecler EVO5

£1,099

Digital DJ mixer with a 10-channel FireWire sound card, plenty of on-board effects and solid build quality. Lots of customising potential but using it as a MIDI controller means sacrificing DJ mix channels.

eclerdjdivision.com



Korg Zero 8

£1,049

Another multi-channel hybrid mixer. Equally at home in the studio or in the clubs. Bags of effects and Kaoss-style XY pad plus plenty of channels for audio and MIDI control.

korg.co.uk