

Lexicon MX300 | £299

Stunning Lexicon effects at an affordable price, plus DAW integration too. **Karl Foster** calls the ambience



WHAT IS IT?

Stereo reverb/
effects processor

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 16 editable reverbs, plus mod/delay effects
- 2 DAW automation facilitation
- 3 Max 48kHz, 24-bit performance

Lexicon is a name that looms large in pro-audio circles. Its excellent signal-processing units range far and wide in high-end studios and sound-support systems. Of late, the company has been addressing the needs of project-studio developers with the MX200 and MX400 effectors, offering classic reverb sounds (plus other treatments), in a box that can be controlled from a DAW.

Whether on Mac or Windows PC, the devices can be automated from within the sequencing environment either by VST or Audio Units protocols. A good idea because reverb in particular can be pretty aggressive with system resources. So what better way to unload your processor than by deploying a dedicated hardware solution?

Well, there's now another option in the Lexicon range. It's the 'difficult middle child' by the name of MX300, a 19-inch rackmount, multi-effects device packing a good proportion of the MX400's functionality, but retailing at a smidgen less than £300. Lifting it out of the box, it's clear that Lexicon's reputation for build quality is wholly intact. Solid, metal construction with positive-feeling knobs and buttons inspire confidence, as do the balanced XLR/TRS analogue audio I/Os for hum-negating cable runs.

Mains is via a C14 inlet (kettle lead), so there's no wall-wart or trailing adaptor to contend with, and on the right we've a USB port for computer connection. There's also a footswitch jack socket, so performers might want to consider the MX300 a quality ambient insert, and MIDI In/Thru further enhance control possibilities.

Digital I/O

Surprisingly, digital I/O is via RCA phono S/PDIF – no optical option – so, as you'd expect, this makes for a max digital sampling rate of 48kHz at 24-bit, which is quite adequate for most tracking applications. The widest

(quoted) frequency response is from 10Hz to 22kHz, so whales and bats be wary. But what really matters is how the MX300 sounds and how easy it is to use. There are no concerns to report on either criteria. You can run the unit as a stand-alone device, relying on the front panel's well-laid-out buttons and rotaries. The info from the main LCD screen, and its underlying paging system, is simple to grasp and you've multiple parameter knobs with which to edit settings – a whole lot more intuitive than some manufacturers' 'one-knob-and-button-control-everything' approach. There are 99 presets, with room for another 99 user-devised settings, and creating them is a breeze.

From Plate Reverb to Arena, there's an avalanche of ambience to be had, plus distinct delays (a tap-tempo button features), chorus, phase, rotary, vibrato and pitch-shift. The MX300 can even be applied to dynamics processing thanks to DBX compressor and de-esser facilities. The dual-processor design makes for a healthy variety of configurations. Dual-mono is an option for bumping different effects to separate channels, as are Parallel Dual Stereo and Cascade – this latter by which Effect 1 feeds straight into Effect 2 in stereo.

A DAW-able

The MX300 slots quite happily into a sequencing environment thanks to a USB link to the DAW.

What you can't do is route the audio signal directly to it digitally for on-the-fly processing, as you'd expect from a co-processor. That said, there's still the option to use S/PDIF if you want to keep the signal in the

digital domain. But what you can do is edit the presets via bundled MX-Edit software, which is much easier than working from the front panel.

It means that the MX300 can be controlled via the sequencer for automation of its various parameters. Not only does it free the system of resource-hogging reverb/

effects processing (although you'll need a means of routing the audio to and from the device, such as a hardware mixer), it also offers unlimited program settings. So if the 99 user presets aren't enough for you in stand-alone mode, then you can use your Mac or PC to expand horizons infinitely.





The output is positively sparkling. Often, an effects device is described as 'characterful', in that it adds colour to the sound. Sometimes, the better option is 'transparent', and that's what the MX300 is. Analogue I/O is quiet and clean in operation (Lexicon quotes THD+N as less than 0.0019%). The reverbs, at which it excels, are rich and flexible and the inclusion of quality modulation effects makes the package particularly desirable. Its three parameter-adjustment knobs make editing from the front panel breezy, so you may quickly fill up the 99 user-memory slots (a peculiar number for

opposed to fiddling with front-panel controls. And it works well. Even a signal-processing numpty will soon get a handle on the software front-end, such is the elegance of the on-screen interface, authored for both Mac OS X and Windows PC.

Some might quibble about the sample rate, but then even on-set recordists and film-sound studios rarely go beyond 48kHz (DVD soundtracks are exactly that and it's possible to induce artefacts when downsampling for mastering from a higher sample rate). Others may whinge about the relative scarcity of user memories, but there's

effects could be handy for instrumentalists; the compression and de-essing for the vocalist; but best of all for sound are the glittering and accurate Lexicon reverbs. They're legendary for a reason, y'know.

Further topping includes an easy-to-use front-end, plus the software-editing option, automation from the DAW, sheer flexibility of routing and road-worthy build, but the yummy stuff is the low-low price. Decent-quality, studio-reverb hardware processors with multi-effect capability cost more than a grand not so many years ago. This one's a snip. You could spend a load more on a

condenser mic or even a pair of audiophile headphones. Many musicians and producers aim to keep audio processing all in one box – there are

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MIDI-types used to working in factors or multiples of 128, but whatever).

Analogue routing

Here's the clever bit. Reverberation is a demanding application for even the stoutest workstation. While the MX300 operates as a separate unit from a DAW (as opposed to, say, a TC Electronics PowerCore, which functions as a co-processor), it's possible to add quality reverb to the signal chain through analogue routing and enjoy the benefits of patch-editing via USB. MX-Edit editor/librarian software is bundled, so you can use the workstation to delve into the guts of the machine, as

more than enough for the project studio or modest PA rig, at which this device is aimed. The truly mealy-mouthed might hanker for true co-processor/DAW functionality. But they've probably not looked at the price tag and heard the MX300 at full throttle, or fully assessed how easy it is to use. It's a flexible unit (thanks to the routing options), has truly pro I/O features (although an optical option would be welcome), is built to last and sounds juicy.

Whether you're developing a project studio, a guitarist looking for a fancy rack effect or a live-sound engineer seeking something extra, this unit is a cost-effective solution. The modulation

plenty of multi-effects plug-ins out there and DAW software tends to tote virtual mixing environments. But if you're the sort to deploy hardware solutions for processing needs, typically work with a hardware mixer and need a simple and effective digital reverb in the rack, then the MX300 is an excellent bet. It may not support super-sample rates of up to 192kHz, but who goes that high anyway? And it only has 99 user memories, but that's excessive for most.

This is a desirable step on the Lexicon ladder for performers, singers, live-sound engineers and studio types. Not so much the middle child as the star performer. **FM**



FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD



VALUE



EASE OF USE



VERSATILITY



RESULTS



Slots into a studio or stage set-up seamlessly and ladles oodles of Lexicon goodness on to your mixes.

SPECS

Analogue in:

2x balanced TRS

2x balanced XLR

Impedance: 50kOhms (25kOhms/channel unbalanced)

Level: +4dBu nominal, +24dBu max

A/D conversion: 24-bit, 48kHz, 128x oversampling

Analogue out:

2x quarter-inch TRS

2x XLR male

Impedance: 2kOhms balanced, 1kOhm unbalanced

Level: +4dBu or -10dBV nominal

Analogue performance:

Frequency response: 10Hz-20kHz +0dB/-0.5dB

THD+N: <0.0019% 10 Hz-20kHz

Dynamic range: >109dB (A-weighted) A/A

Crosstalk: typical <-80dB 20Hz-20kHz

Digital I/O:

Dual RCA phono

Format: S/PDIF 24-bit, 44.1 or 48kHz

Freq response: 10Hz-22kHz +/-0.5dB @ 48kHz

Interfaces:

USB 1.0 for MX-Edit program in VST/AU

MIDI In/Thru and footswitch

Weight

2.63kg

Dimensions

438 x 44 x 162mm

ALTERNATIVES

Lexicon MX400

£499

Quad-processor design, 17 Lexicon reverbs and has seven signal-routing options. As ever, it can be controlled by USB, handles surround sound and has balanced audio I/O. Some retailers are discounting heavily, so you could pick one up for less than a brand-new MX300.

lexicon.com

TC Electronic M350

£135

Less pricey multi-effects processor offering delay, mod and compression. Both VST and AU compatible for DAW environments, 15 stereo reverbs, a quintet of delays and all rendered at up to 48kHz, 24-bit. There's no wall-warwt and you've 99 user presets to invade.

tcelectronic.com