



Euphonix MC Mix £699 MAC



The new Artist Series from Euphonix kicks off with this slick-looking control surface. Is it as functional as it is striking, though?

System requirements

Mac G4/Intel 1.25GHz CPU, 1GB RAM, 100MB disk space, OS X 10.4, 10/100 Base-T Ethernet port, CD/DVD drive for install

Test system

Mac Mac Pro Dual 3GHz, 3GB RAM, OS X 10.4.11, Logic Pro 8, Cubase 4, Ableton Live

> Whilst the rise of the software studio has been pretty much plain sailing, the hardware control surface has had a much bumpier ride. With a whole generation of us having never even touched a hardware fader, weaning us onto any form of physical gear beyond a keyboard, mouse and, at a stretch, MIDI keyboard could be viewed as a bit of a non-starter. Even so, big names like Digidesign and Mackie are still pushing their mixing control surfaces, so there must be something in it.

The latest company to take the plunge into this area of the market know a thing or two about large-scale remote controls, as they pretty much wrote the rulebook on them with their high-end, digitally-controlled analogue consoles. However, their all-new Artist Series targets an entirely different part of the market, and is more akin to affordable systems like the Mackie Control Universal Pro. Comprising the forthcoming MC Control and the MC Mix that we're looking at here, it's a Mac-only modular system enabling you to combine up to four MC Mix units with one MC Control. The MC Mix can be used on its own, too, and that's what we're doing here. If you're short of

space, money or both, the MC Mix is smaller and cheaper than the MC Control (which costs £999), and has eight motorised faders instead of four. However, it lacks the more complex features such as the touch screen and the more extensive transport controls.

In the Mix

The most striking thing about the MC Mix is its slim design – it feels far more like a laptop with knobs and faders on it than a hefty control surface. Plus, if table space is at a premium, adding the included risers allows it to sit neatly behind your computer keyboard, with the leads hidden underneath. On the subject of connectivity, Euphonix have opted for Ethernet rather than a more common format like USB, FireWire or MIDI. It's not a bad move, although if you're planning on racking up a few units, you'll need to extend your connections using an Ethernet hub. Also, the device can only be connected to a Mac system, although Euphonix say that soon you'll be able to add a PC as a second workstation (you'll still need a Mac on the network as your primary connection point, however).

“Aside from some minor niggles, operation was at its slickest and most extensive in Logic”

On power-up, the MC Mix does a Christmas tree routine, neatly demonstrating that every single button on it lights up in one way or another. But it's also worth pointing out that the faders and rotary controls are touch sensitive, with the knobs also acting as push button switches.

One upside of the MC's Mac-only support is that Euphonix have been able to fine-tune its performance, and this is best demonstrated by its excellent integration into Logic. The underlying system is their EuCon protocol, which enables it to connect to any compatible application, with the MC Mix remapping its controls dynamically as you switch between programs. Just make sure the associated EuControl application is running (it can be set to auto-launch when you boot up), and that any connected EuCon devices become available. However, inevitably, setup varies from application to application – see the *Will my software cut it?* boxout for more on this.

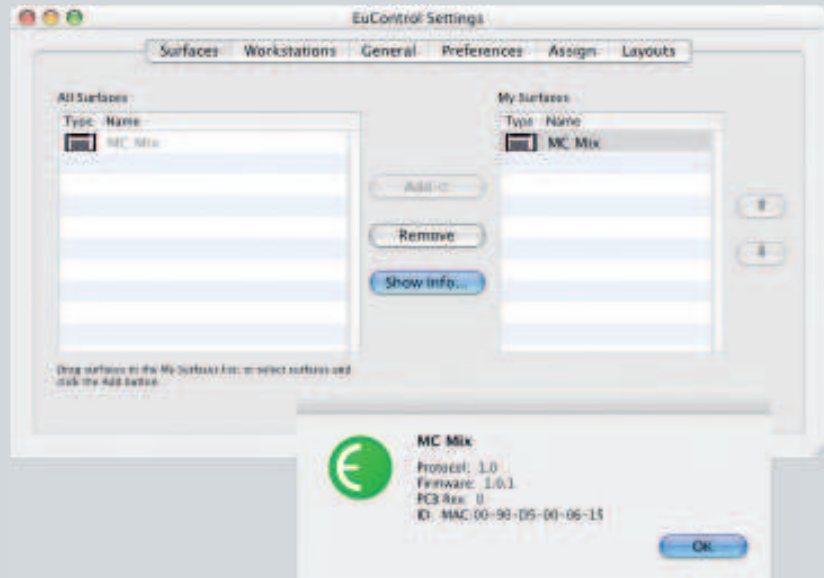
Familiar story

On the operational front, the MC Mix is very easy to get to grips with, and will feel familiar to anyone used to other surfaces. Important functions such as inserts, pan, EQ and auxiliaries are easily accessed using the selector keys at the left-hand side, and because both fader and rotary encoders are touch-sensitive, channel selection is automatic. Even so, they've included a manual channel selector (and if you want, you can deactivate fader pick-up in the preferences). Other channel-specific buttons include a record activate button, on (ie, mute), solo and additional on and select switches. The second on switch typically acts as a bypass for whatever you've got active (insert, auxiliary, EQ, and so on).

Dig a bit deeper and you'll discover alternative ways to view your data, including channel mode, which lays out the inserts of one channel across all eight rotary encoders. Alternatively, activating flip mode enables the faders to control plug-in parameters. However, getting the most out of the MC Mix requires an understanding of the detailed OLED display strip. Beyond the obvious (level meters, track naming,



Configure the MC Mix to work with Mackie Control- and HUI-compatible systems in the preferences window



Will my software cut it?

As we've said, the EuControl app helps the MC Mix to work with OS X applications. However, the method of support within those apps does vary. The documentation indicates that the MC Mix works with Logic, Cubase, Ableton Live, Pro Tools (HD/LE and M-Powered), Final Cut Pro, Soundtrack Pro and Digital Performer. An impressive list, but check out the setup PDF to get things working properly.

Because Logic Pro directly supports Euphonix's own EuCon protocol, the level of integration is greater, and the resolution of the controls (when compared to MIDI-based systems) is also higher.

Nuendo and Cubase are also EuCon-aware, but even so, Cubase requires pretty much the latest version and also an additional Adapter from Steinberg's site.

For non-EuCon-aware apps, the MC Mix supports the Mackie Control (Soundtrack Pro, Final Cut Pro, Live, etc) and HUI (Pro Tools) protocols. Setting up involves activating each program by dragging it into the Euphonix MC part of the System Preferences, and connecting things up in each app's preferences. For non-EuCon aware apps, performance is dependent on how well those programs support the relevant protocols.

parameter values, and so on), this gives you vital data about what mode you're in and therefore which parameters are controlled by the faders and knobs. In Logic, you'll also find that you can even search and launch new plug-ins.

Nice and easy

Producing a cross-application control surface is always going to be a bit of a challenge. However, the MC Mix has avoided many of the pitfalls. The fact that the buttons are at most dual-function, with two easy-access shift buttons at the bottom corners, means there are no confusing sub-menu features to hunt through. And it's also nice to see a controller that's compact enough to incorporate into a busy desktop.

But as ever with control surfaces, their success relies on integration with the host. Over the space of a couple of weeks, we updated the EuCon drivers three times, and this eventually led to good operation in Cubase. We also had success using the Mackie Control protocol, although you have to bear in mind that typically there are less available controls than in a EuCon-aware application. Unsurprisingly, aside from some minor niggles, operation was at its slickest and most extensive in Logic, and we're certainly looking forward to trying out the MC Control too. **cm**

Contact artist@euphonix.com
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Alternatively

Mackie Control Universal Pro
cm122 >> 9/10 >> £899

Mackie's latest control surface uses a long-established protocol that's supported by a multitude of apps

Digidesign Command 8
N/A >> N/A >> £910

If you use Pro Tools, the Command 8 is very much built for the job and also includes monitoring outs and MIDI

Verdict

For Great integration with Logic
Slim and stylish
Good build quality
Precise knobs and faders

Against Requires EuCon-aware app for best performance
Currently Mac-only
Inevitable teething problems

If you're a Logic user, this could be precisely what you've been waiting for, although the level of support in other apps is still maturing

8/10