



Steinberg PC MAC CMC Series £136-£168

This new range of modular controllers for Cubase combines futuristic looks with focused technology, but does it actually get the job done?

➤ With their new CMC Series of MIDI controllers, Steinberg have eschewed the all-in-one, do-it-all concept adhered to by most control surface manufacturers in favour of a modular approach. Comprising six USB bus-powered control surfaces designed to integrate tightly with their Cubase DAW, Steinberg are hoping the range offers enough variety to tempt even diehard mouse jockeys out of the box.

CMC-TP Transport Controller

The Transport Controller features a series of buttons for shuttling the playback head around the arrange page, making navigating projects a breeze. The touch slider can be set to control jog, shuttle, scroll, zoom and tap tempo, and sliding and pinching it perform separate operations. Being so small, it's easy to place the controller among your other gear, giving essential access

to the transport play, record, stop, loop and locator buttons from anywhere in your studio.

CMC-FD Fader Controller

The Fader Controller boasts four faders and buttons for selecting channels in the Cubase mixer. Up to four FDs can be chained together. The faders are touch sliders with an impressive 1024-step resolution, and tapping them solos or mutes the selected mixer channel. As well as displaying the current fader position, the LEDs can be set to meter mode, showing the (coarse) volume level on each selected channel.

With only four faders onboard, the mixing usefulness of a single FD is questionable. Chaining four units together is a different matter, but at almost £700, you could buy an iPad and all manner of excellent controller apps instead. Also, you can't randomly place your

finger on a strip and adjust the fader position relative to it; the FD's two operation modes (Catch and Jump) require you to look away from the screen to use them. We'd like to see a third, 'relative' mode added in a firmware update.

CMC-AI Controller

The AI Controller's central feature is the AI Knob, also found in Steinberg's CI Series audio interfaces and CC121 controller. It can be set to operate as a jog wheel, master volume control, or to control whichever Cubase parameter is under the mouse pointer. The knob can also select presets in the browser, and the four buttons at the top can be assigned to key commands.

CMC-CH Channel Controller

Claiming to be the "hardware equivalent of the eminently powerful Cubase channel section",



“The controllers are well-built, but the more generic units are pretty pricey”

the Channel Controller gives hands-on access to the channel setting of the currently selected instrument or audio track – volume fader, pan pot, solo, mute and automation buttons, etc. Everything works as advertised, and the eight Shift-modifiable assignable keys are handy. The ‘e’ button, which brings up the VST instrument GUI, is a bit pointless without the QC or AI units, though, as you have to use the mouse to actually edit the parameters it reveals.

CMC-QC Quick Controller

The Quick Controller is probably the most versatile of the bunch. Its main feature is an array of eight continuous rotary controllers that can be used to control most Cubase parameters (such as the channel equaliser and plug-ins – bundled and third-party) or reconfigured entirely via a software editor to transmit MIDI data to

Good connection

Although they can be used on their own, the real power of these controllers lies in using several of them together. The Channel and Quick Controllers make good partners for mixing duties, with the Transport and AI controller ably backing them up for auxiliary tasks such as project navigation and master fader adjustment.

If you do decide to build yourself a CMC Series command deck, you might want to investigate the optional frames that Steinberg offer for housing multiple CMCs.

The CMC Studio Frame 4 can hold four controllers, while the CMC CC121

Extension Frame houses two controllers plus Steinberg’s CC121 control surface. As attractive as these racks are, they’re certainly not essential, particularly given that each controller comes with a plastic clip for joining them together, albeit in a rather rudimentary fashion.

One significant issue when running multiple CMC units is that each unit requires its own USB port. The astonishing lack of USB daisy-chaining means that you’ll probably also need to factor in a USB hub. You’d think Steinberg would at least have built hubs into the two frames...

any DAW (although with the vast majority of the surface taken up by Cubase-specific buttons, buying the QC for use with anything else would be a strange move indeed). Particularly useful is the intuitive QC mode, which enables the knobs to be linked to any controls within Cubase at the click of a mouse. Eight user-assignable function keys are also onboard. Of all the controllers in the range, we reckon that this is the most generally useful – it offers a good range of bread-and-butter functionality.

CMC-PD Pad Controller

The Pad Controller comprises an MPC-style bank of 16 drum pads that can be used to trigger any MIDI-receiving hardware or software. The pads have the same look and feel as all the buttons used throughout the CMC Series, but they turn out to be extremely sensitive and playable, with the backlights changing colour according to stroke velocity. The velocity curve is highly configurable and can be set per pad. Each column triggers the same note at four configurable fixed velocities when 4Velocity mode is enabled – useful for step recording. As a simple percussion controller, the CMC-PD does a good job for a reasonable price, and being openly MIDI-compatible, it could actually serve as a viable option for non-Cubase users, too.

Taking control

All of the CMC controllers (bar the FD and PD) include buttons covering various default functions, such as transport control or dialog handling. These buttons can be configured in Cubase to trigger key commands or open windows and dialogs of your choosing, which is a much more useful feature than it might at first seem. Assign a few of your most frequently used key commands to the CMC buttons and you immediately feel the benefit in terms of workflow. Note that each CMC unit comes with the cutdown Cubase AI 6, although we’d imagine anyone buying into the CMC Series will already have a full version of Cubase.

Overall, the CMC Series is a mixed bag. The controllers are well-built and the buttons and sliders are suitably responsive, but the more generic units are pretty pricey next to the competition. For us, it was all about the Transport, AI, Pad and Quick Controllers, but that lot alone would cost well over £500, and by and large

they only work with Cubase. We wouldn’t go as far as to say that they represent bad value (they certainly *look* quite expensive!), but their modular design makes investing in several of them potentially more expensive than just buying a single multifunction controller. Steinberg’s own CC121, for example... **cm**

Web www.steinberg.net

Contact Via website

Info Prices – CH, £136; PD, £136; QC, £160; FD, £168; TP, £136; AI, £136;

Alternatively

Steinberg CC121

cm133 » 9/10 » £380

A great choice for Cubase with an AI Knob, fader, 12 knobs and buttons

Mackie Control Universal Pro

cm121 » 9/10 » £1050

Take comprehensive control of your MCU-compatible DAW

Verdict

For Some very useful units

Modular setup

Flexible configuration

Decent build quality

Compact design

Tight integration with Cubase

Against No USB daisy-chaining

Fader Controller not much use alone

A brave concept from Steinberg that, while not being made entirely of win, certainly has its commendable aspects

TP Transport Controller: 8

FD Fader Controller: 5

AI Controller: 8

CH Channel Controller: 7

QC Quick Controller: 7

PD Pad Controller: 8