

Midas' XL8 Digital console or 'Live Performance System', as the company dubs it, was originally reviewed in Audio Media in January 2007 and has since found its way into many a live arena. The XL8 is a modular digital console with a variety of input and output options, multiple redundancies, easy to use control surface, and a digital network system for audio distribution, and can be configured to suit many varied requirements. Midas is renowned amongst live engineers for its analogue consoles, and the XL8 (and its sibling the PRO6) has put the company on a firm footing in the digital world as well. As all software-based projects are basically a 'work in progress', Midas has recently released two software packages at the Frankfurt Musikmesse 2009 which enhance the console's functionality – software version 1.10 for the XL8 and the Offline Editor.

The upgrade software includes many enhancements including several new effects processors (stereo pitch shifter with delay, Klark Teknik SQ1 multi-channel dynamics processor, multi-band frequency-dependant stereo compressor, and a new stereo delay unit with

or XL8 via a removable USB drive. Showfiles created for PRO6 consoles will run on XL8 systems and vice versa – subject to the different system's capacity limitations. "We've been trying to get the Offline Editor going for quite a while – it's pretty much essential these days," says Kelly. "Engineers need to be able to prep shows before they actually get to the venue, and the Offline Editor allows them to speed up the process of that initial setup and, if they're in the middle of a tour, also fine tune certain things overnight and then load the updated version of the show into the console – they don't need to be in front of the desk to do any of the updates. What you see on your Editor is exactly what you see on the console's screen. The setting up of the console for a show can be extremely time consuming, and being able to do this offline saves a huge amount of time for the operator." It's also a neat way of bringing new customers to the Midas console without them having to attend a demo – as Midas' Brand Development Manager Richard Ferriday explains; "We anticipate this free software will introduce the Midas approach to digital mixing to all those engineers who haven't yet had a chance to get their hands on the

STEPHEN BENNETT explores what further benefits Midas' new software updates add to the already powerful and popular XL8.

MIDAS XL8 SOFTWARE VERSION 1.10 & OFFLINE EDITOR V1.10BETA1

Midas XL8 Software Updates

analogue and digital modelling), mix and match I/O devices, and new stereo and surround panning options. But one of the major features of the upgrade, according to Jason Kelly, Technical Sales Manager at Midas, is the new theatre-based automation system. "It's a complete rewrite of the automation package – we've tried to come up with a new direction for our automation that is much more theatre focused and theatre friendly," he says. "The theatre market has some specific requirements, because you're dealing with a much more choreographed show than you are in the rock and roll world. There, you will generally have more 'scene based' or snapshot based automation, where not much will change during a song. In a theatre environment, you're talking about a more complex interaction between the actors and the audio. So having much more detailed control over what is happening with the audio is much more important."

The new software enables the engineer to perform more detailed editing within scenes, but also allows the engineer to add external events, such as MIDI events or general-purpose input/output (GPI) events, as well as internal events within the system. "The software easily allows you to have time offsets, for example," says Kelly. Along with the automation updates, Kelly singles out the new preset library as another major new feature of the upgrade. "This allows the operator or an engineer to build up his own library of pretty much anything on the console, whether that be effects, cues, compressors, gates, or naming sheets, for example, and store that as a preset," he says. "So any console he walks up to, he can load in his presets and everything is basically exactly how he wants it to be."

Midas' other new announcement at Frankfurt 2009, was the Offline Editor for both the PRO6 and the XL8 digital systems. It's a no cost, Mac-based program and sports a graphical representation of the real console on the computer screen. Users can then create or edit so-called 'showfiles' without having access to the desk itself, and these can then be loaded into a Midas PRO6

hardware, as well as making it easy to pre-configure a console before a show."

"Midas has always been at the top end of the pro audio side of things and we've always tried to build the best we can – we've tried never to compromise on sound quality and the user interface – the user experience, as it were," says Kelly. "And there's a lot more to that experience than the layout of the control surface. It's how it reacts with you as you are using it,

what feedback you get. These elements are just as important as the physical aspects of the console. We've tried to take that philosophy into the digital realm – and we also don't see why digital sound quality should be inferior to analogue. Traditionally, our market has been rock and roll and live touring, but we've found that since the introduction of the XL8 and PRO6, new markets have opened up for us and fixed installs has become one of those markets," says Kelly. And as fixed install obviously includes the theatre market, so the introduction of a new theatre based automation element to the already powerful and flexible XL8 is well timed. **AM**



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THE REVIEWER

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