

Roland Systems Group M-48 Personal Mixer

Powerful, Scalable Individual Monitoring for Studio or Live

Whether in studio or live settings, providing performers with control of their monitor mixes increases productivity while positively affecting the musical outcome. Roland's new M-48 personal mixer makes this possible via a networked system that receives audio and power via simple, single-cable Cat-5e interfacing. The system comprises the compact yet full-featured M-48 mixer and the S-4000D splitter, which allows you to string up to eight M-48s along a network, with up to 24-bit/96kHz resolution. You can integrate additional S-4000Ds and M-48s to create larger systems supporting up to 256 mixers. These two components ride on the backbone of the S-4000 (\$7,995) digital snake, which is essential to the M-48's operation. The mixers can be set up stand-alone by using a PC and the free S-4000RCS software, or partnered with the RSS V-Mixer, in which case the PC is not needed.

The M-48's feature set is deep, including 8+8 banked rotary encoders with panning, solo, 3-band EQ, an auxiliary input and built-in ambient mic with separate volume controls. There are also a record out and dual headphone outs (1/8- and 1/4-inch) with basic EQ and limiting. The two line outputs are fed by the aux bus or headphone outs, and include an adjustable lowpass filter. Other extras include a 5-segment stereo output meter and a built-in reverb that you can apply to any group.

Let's Mix!

I was able to test the system by itself (without the V-Mixer) in a medium-sized live venue. Setting up the individual mixers was easy: The

included mount fits securely on a standard mic stand and features a removable headphone hanger and accessory tray. The test venue already had the S-4000D in place feeding a Yamaha PM3500 at front of house. After updating the digital snake's firmware, connection was as simple as plugging the S-4000D into the snake's REAC output and then running Cat-5e to all of the mixers. The Cat-5e connections are on sturdy barrel connectors, negating concerns over failure after many setup/tear-downs.

Upon opening the S-4000RCS software on a PC laptop connected to the system via RS-232, the system immediately recognized each of the five M-48 mixers—all which have a unique ID—on the network. After that, it was simple to rename the individual mixers to reflect the performer using it and then design some custom mixes. This is one of the best parts of the system because the world is your oyster: You can be as complex or as simple as you'd like. Each M-48 gets all of the same 40 source channels as inputs. In the software, you can then assign these 40 sources to the 16 stereo groups for each M-48 individually. After assigning sources, you can then dial in the levels and pans as needed.

The M-48 is actually a 40-channel by 16 stereo group by dual stereo output mixer, so all of the submixing to the individual groups is done as custom mixes inside each M-48.

The system sounds great and throughput is rocket-fast: The FPGA architecture makes latency a non-issue. While limited, the reverb is usable and a nice extra. The proof in the pudding was the reaction of the

players in the band. Instead of settling for a mix from monitor land, the musicians could get exactly what they wanted in their wedges or in-ears. The guitarist commented that he could play easier and with more detail because he could hear exactly what he needed to perform. The bass player said the room sounded better because of reduced "trash" in the wedges that in the past would clutter up the stage feeds.

Personal Mixing Nirvana

Roland designed this product to work in a wide range of both studio and live applications. The system is impressive in its design and implementation, easily meeting the needs of stage or installed settings such as a church or recording studio. The only real fault I found was a lack of a channel polarity switch in the software or on the box, which would be nice in an over/under-miking scenario. Also keep in mind that the S-4000 digital snake is an essential part of the network, so figure that into the price. Other than that, the M-48 personal mixer is a beautiful system that sounds excellent, and is full-featured, flexible and scalable. It may just be the answer to your distributed mixing dreams. ■

Kevin Becka is Mix's technical editor.



Each M-48 on the network can be assigned custom mixes.

PRODUCT SUMMARY

COMPANY: Roland Systems Group
WEB: www.rolandsystemsgroup.com
PRODUCT: M-48 live personal mixer
PRICE: \$6,995 (M-48/S4000D bundle includes five M-48 personal mixers and a S-4000D splitter/power distributor)
MINIMUM SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Roland S-4000 digital snake (\$7,995), PC computer (if no V-Mixer is present)

PROS: Setup via PC (software included) or RSS V-Mixer. Easy integration into wedge or in-ear systems.
CONS: No per-channel polarity-flip control onboard or in setup software.