review

Emagic Logic Control / Logic Platinum 5.1.3

Logic has moved along at an incredible pace and carved an enormous niche for itself in the music production environment. The introduction of dedicated hardware control can only strengthen its cause and harden its appeal.

ROB JAMES

IN THE HEADY WORLD of big sequencer packages, Emagic's Logic and its predecessors have always been well up with the leaders. Things never stand still for long in this arena. Hardware controllers are now *de rigeur* for any sequencer/audio package with serious ambitions to remain in the running. Emagic have followed much the same approach to the problem as their opposition. Sensibly eschewing the idea of an in house hardware design, instead they have collaborated with a highly experienced hardware manufacturer to produce the control surfaces and stuck to what they know best, the software.

In this case the chosen collaborator is Mackie. Family resemblance to other Mackie mixers is obvious, in general appearance and colour scheme and also the buttons and V-pots (Virtual potentiometers) raided from the Mackie parts bin. The Penny and Giles touch sensitive motor faders are brand new and will no doubt appear on future Mackie products. There will be three designs. Logic Control and the XP 8-fader expansion unit are available now. The 'Fat Channel' expander will offer further keys, displays and V-Pots and, as the name implies, be used to control multiple parameters in virtual channel strips, plug-ins, and so on.

Integrating the hardware has necessitated a number of changes to Logic software. Dedicated pages have been added for controller installation and set-up.

If more than one Logic Control, XP 8-channel expander, or Fat Channel is attached, the extra units may be configured as left or right sidecars to the main unit, or as independent controllers by assigning them to separate control surface groups. For example, one group might be handling plug-ins while another does mixing duties, a third, instruments and so on.

Logic Automation has had a major overhaul. Now track-based, the fader and hyperdraw elements have been combined. Several automated parameters can be viewed simultaneously, either superimposed or stacked. Smooth automation curves are now possible, freehand or in specific shapes, without recourse to dozens of nodes.

In the Environment, 'Channel Splitter' objects have gone as they are no longer needed. The new automation records data independently of any MIDI information. MIDI automation sequences can still be recorded for specific purposes but the new approach is much better for most applications.

There is a new, 'High Contrast' look, which is mostly an improvement once you get used to it.

Audio track count is up, now 192 from the previous 128. Scrubbing now works with any hardware. Support for REX II, OMFI and Tascam's Open TL keeps Logic up to date with the trend towards more open file exchange.

The arsenal of native plug-ins has been further enhanced by the addition of Stereo Spread, a De-esser, Limiter, Multipressor, Adaptive Limiter, SubBass, DeNoiser, Exciter, Tremolo, Clip Distortion, and Phase Distortion. Of these, the Multipressor is impressive as a mastering, 'louder than everybody else' tool and the denoiser reminds me of a similar feature in Samplitude.

Several of the previous plug-ins have had new parameters added and the reverbs have been further optimised for AMD Athlons. Three built-in subtractive 'virtual analogue' synthesisers make a useful contribution, the mono ES M (ES Mono) bass synth, ES E (ES Ensemble) for pads, and the ES P (ES Poly).

Logic Control is immediately impressive. This looks and feels like a well made and thought out piece of kit. It is slim enough to sit comfortably on an existing work surface but could easily be built-in. The masterstroke is the display 'bridge'. This is set into the surface in a way that is economic with real estate yet draws the eye and makes the surface feel bigger than it really is. More alluring in the flesh than in the pictures.

In a well-sorted system, installation should be no more complex than plugging in and switching on. Unfortunately, my PC is used for reviewing a variety of hardware and software and life was not so simple. Where automatic installation cannot be achieved manual methods are available. Once I had removed a good deal of baggage from the registry, automatic installation worked first time.

During the course of this review, Emagic performed an act of prestidigitation more akin to making the carpet disappear from under your feet than producing the familiar rabbit from the hat.

Apple bought Emagic on 1 July. The bombshell for unsuspecting Platinum users and potential users was the immediate announcement that sales of Emagic's Windows-based product offerings will be discontinued on 30 September 2002. Later, it was also announced there would be a free 'cross-grade' for any existing PC Logic 5 adherents who wish to migrate to Macintosh.

Many other Logic users and I were more than slightly dischuffed by the initial announcements and only very slightly mollified by the 'free' cross-grade offer. As a one time Macintosh advocate and now happy PC user, I do not have a problem with the two platforms co-existing. However, I don't appreciate being forced to invest a fortune in a new computer and peripherals to keep up with the developments that will undoubtedly come over the next few months and years. Many would summise that this can only be of benefit to the competition.

At the time of writing, no announcement has been made about the future of the excellent, PC only, Samplitude DAW package, which is now under the Emagic banner. I sincerely hope this will continue to be developed for the PC and Logic Control.

Superficially, operation is simple. But due to the inherent complexities in Logic, more comprehensive control requires considerable study and practice to get the best out of the combination. This is largely due to the immense number of parameters that can be controlled through the relatively small 'window' of Logic Control. Apart from the standard facilities, Emagic has allowed for user mapping of controller assignments. Almost anything in Logic can be controlled by a suitable choice of key, fader or V-Pot. The display is used to great effect, feeding back information that would otherwise require looking at the PC screen.

Even for the casual user, mixing in Logic is a far more fluid and rewarding experience than ever before.

Among the thoughtful and useful touches, the LCD display options of track name or number, horizontal or vertical metering and the 'signal present' LEDs stand out. There are many more.

In this relatively early software version there are still a number of anomalies; screens in Logic Control Setup that don't display properly without re-sizing windows and so on. There is also the occasional quirk with the surface control, meter switching only seems to affect the Logic Control, not the sidecar whereas other display changes work quite happily across both. Some of the less vital parameter changes are a bit reluctant to 'take', needing repeated key presses. For

Channel strips and XP

For all intents and purposes, the XP is a Logic Control with the master and control section sawn off. The 8-channel strips on each unit are identical. Engraved notches help associate individual strips with the two-row by 55-character LCD display. Each strip has a 100mm Penny and Giles touch-sensitive motorised fader followed by a Select key, Mute key, Solo key, small green signal present LED, Record/Ready key, and V-POT with annular ring of red LEDs to indicate position. A particularly nice touch is the single LED at the six o'clock position. This indicates the centre zero point otherwise obscured by the knob. The knob is also a switch, which, among other functions, returns the controlled parameter to its default setting, for example to centre when the V-POT is in pan mode. The signal present LED is a real plus and reacts to audio and MIDI.

Logic control adds master and control sections, each of which is further sub-divided graphically into function areas.

The master fader controls the master fader level in Logic's mixer if a master volume object exists. Above the fader, invoking the Flip key mirrors the V-Pot function to the faders or, when used with Shift, swaps the function of the faders and V-Pots.

The Global View key is graphically linked to the 8 keys in the Global View section. These determine which 'class' of object will be viewed: MIDI tracks, inputs, audio tracks, audio instrument, aux, buses, outputs, or user-defined.

Next up are Channel and Bank, left and right keys which simply move what is displayed and controlled on the surface, one strip at a time or 8 strips at a time, across the virtual mixer.

Six assignment keys switch between track, send, pan/surround, plug-in, EQ and instrument modes. Beside the LCD display in the well, a two-digit red LED alpha-numeric shows what mode the controller is in at any given moment. Two LEDs indicate if the next, multi-digit, red LED display is showing SMPTE time or bars. Last on the right is the Mackie trademark 'rude solo' light. Essential since it is perfectly possible to hide an active solo off the visible surface.

The final area starts at the bottom with a nicely

example, changing the meter display from vertical to horizontal or off.

A new demo song accompanies Logic 5 and insists 'Logic is easier'. Well, it is marginally more penetrable than before with more 'self configuration' but this remains a stunningly complicated and powerful software suite. This is not necessarily a criticism since what Logic attempts to achieve, and largely succeeds in achieving, is by its very nature a highly complex set of tasks.

As a long time devotee of the KISS (Keep it Simple, Stupid) principle I cannot help thinking Emagic could do more to make Logic friendlier. On the other hand, it provides an unmatched degree of control, in terms of parameters, precision and configuration.

Logic and other top sequencer packages are all blessed with the 'feature bloat' seen in office software suites. Now we have all these desirable features, perhaps the time has come to make a virtue out of simplicity. To some extent the office suites already attempt this with templates and 'wizards'. I see no reason why similar ideas should not be applied to these sorts of packages.

The demo song also proclaims: 'Logic won't leave you alone!'. Despite the wide choice of software available to me, I often find myself drawn back to Logic. This is partly due to some of the excellent plug-ins but also the now much improved hyperdraw automation.

Logic Control transforms the experience and makes the whole package feel more professional. I am sure that the Fat Channel sidecar will further enhance the sensation.

It should also go a long way towards simplifying operations that are positively arcane at present. As users become familiar with Logic Control and Emagic gain in experience with the new hardware, future software versions will no doubt streamline the synergy between the two. ■

weighted jog wheel, Scrub key and cruciform cursor keys with central Zoom key. Main transport controls are chunky and feel positive. If you wish, there is a setting that causes a relay inside the Logic Control to click whenever a transport key is pressed. Seven keys above the main transport controls deal with markers, nudge, cycle, drop, replace, click and solo, mirroring the equivalent Logic transport control window functions.

The next two rows are divided into three blocks. Modifiers are Shift, Option, Control and Alt, used, as you would expect, in conjunction with other keys to provide several functions from the same key.

The Automation block contains Read/off, Write, Trim, Touch, Latch and Group keys. Trim and Group are currently non functioning. The others should be self-explanatory. These keys affect only the selected channel unless invoked with the Option key.

In the Utilities block, Save, Undo, Cancel and Enter enable housekeeping functions to be undertaken from Logic Control. Once a project has been saved or a recording named, subsequent saves can be performed from here without returning to the computer keyboard.

Above the Global View row, 8 function keys perform a variety of duties, the most obvious of which is switching between screen sets. Finally, below the Assignment display a key switches between display of parameter Name or Value or, if used with Option, toggles between track name and number. The last key toggles the time display between SMPTE and BEATS.

Power supplies are external but in-line rather than the dreaded wall-warts. A pair of MIDI sockets and three jacks for footswitches are all the connections necessary and provided.

Each Logic Control unit requires a separate hardware MIDI input and output, no daisy chaining is allowed. Theoretically, 64 or possibly even more controllers can be connected to a single system if you have a large enough desk and purse.

PROS	**Low profile, professional feel; the sunken display; V-pots, especially the null indicators; transforms working with Logic**
CONS	**Too many functions per control; occasionally slow to accept commands; Logic is still over complex**

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