LEXICON MX400

Hardware reverb an irrelevancy? Not when it's a Lexicon and as cheap as a plug-in.

Text: Brad Watts

►There are a handful of manufacturers on the planet whose names have become synonymous with reverb recreation. Two that immediately spring to mind are TC Electronic and to a lesser extent, Eventide. Both are heavyweights in the field of time-based processing and reverberation. However, one outfit rules the reverberant roost without question – and that outfit would be none other than the irrepressible Lexicon.

The company released their first digital reverb in 1978. At $7900 the Lexicon 244, with its four programs, became an 'affordable' alternative to the digital EMT250, which cost about twice that figure. Despite the fact you could buy half a house for that sort of cash in 1978, the 244 made a lot of friends very quickly. Lexicon reverb was on the map and subsequently became one of, if not *the* choice, in professional reverb. Since that time, Lexicon has continually broadened its product line to include reverb processing for the budget conscious.

The latest in the Lexicon 'low-end' is the MX400. It's a single rackmount unit offering two completely separate stereo processing paths. The MX400 comes in a couple of flavours: the MX400 and MX400XL (the latter offering XLR analogue connections rather than TRS jack I/O). The MX400 is the bigger brother of the previously released MX200, and offers double the horsepower and I/O of that unit. It's essentially two MX200s in a box. Courtesy of the multiple I/O, Lexicon has also programmed the unit to function as either a stereo or a surround processing unit.

Looking at the rear of the unit, along with two sets of balanced stereo I/O you'll also find a pair of S/PDIF RCA I/O connectors, Midi In and Thru ports, an IEC power input and a standard USB connector. Lexicon has a tradition of providing remote operation of its systems – the most notable example being the LARC (Lexicon Alphanumeric Remote Control) remote first seen with early 244XL systems. Even the budget-oriented MPX and LXP lineage provided comprehensive editing via Midi. So while Midi control is possible with the MX400, it's a more elegant proposition to use the supplied control software via USB. This software provides control over all MX400 parameters when in either stereo or dual-stereo mode. Incidentally, the software is called MX400 rather than MX-Edit as the manual suggests. (MX-Edit is for controlling the MX200 – should you find yourself a tad confused between the manual and downloading updated versions in the future.)

SOFT/HARD CONTROL
The control software is offered as both a standalone application or as an AU or VST plug-in: AU for OSX and VST for Windows. Unfortunately I had no joy getting the surround version of the MX400 AU plug-in past Logic Pro's stringent AU validation regime. Regardless, the stereo and mono incarnations of the plug-in worked without any problems and I reverted to the standalone program for access to the surround functionality. The best thing about the plug-in versions of the editing software is that all your settings are retained within your session file. For those without a VST/PC- or AU-compatible DAW, such as ProTools, you're compelled to use the standalone version. Fortunately, this app will also act as a simple librarian, allowing backups of single programs or the entire memory to be saved to your CPU's hard drive.

Around the front of the unit is where the actual hands-on editing occurs. You'll see from the accompanying photo that there are no surprises – useful metering, and buttons and knobs where they need to be. Editing is quick and a doddle to execute.

Architecturally, the MX400 has quite a lot on show. Each of the two processing sections provides two effects engines, each with an identical endowment of algorithms. The choices represent all the typical reverb and delay arrangements along with time-based effects such as flanging, chorus and pitch-shifting (thanks to the shared Harman Pro Group status, there's even a dbx dynamics algorithm included). Check the sidebar for a full listing of the available effects.

NEED TO KNOW

Price
$1299

Contact
Jands
(02) 9582 0909
info@jands.com.au
www.jands.com.au

Pros
It's a Lexicon.
Two fully-featured processors in one rack unit.
Piece of cake to drive.
TRS or XLR options.
Lots of processing for the dollar.

Cons
Limited to 44.1/48k digital operation.
Software still needs a little work but is functional.

Summary
Take not one, but two discrete dual-engine Lexicon processors for virtually the price of one, then throw in surround functions in on the deal… This really is cheaper than software when you hear and compare the difference.

EFFECTS

Reverbs: Small Hall, Large Hall, Surround Hall, Small Plate, Large Plate, Room, Chamber, Gated Reverb, Reverse Reverb, Vocal Hall, Vocal Plate, Drum Hall, Drum Plate, Ambience, Studio, Arena, Spring

Delays: Studio Delay, Digital Delay, Tape Delay, Pong Delay, Mod Delay, Reverse Delay, two-tap Delay

dbx Dynamics: Compressor, De-esser

Assorted Effects: Chorus, Flanger, Phaser, Tremolo/Pan, Rotary, Vibrato, Pitch Shift, Detune

The MX400 'LARC': All settings are saved with your song files when editing on the MX400 is performed using the AU plug-in controller.

The effects engines within either A or B processors may be configured in a variety of ways: dual mono, cascade, parallel, split mono and plain old vanilla stereo. Stereo mode reverts each engine to a single engine with greater editing capability via more parameters. Both 'sides' of the MX400 arrive with 99 preset programs and 99 user-definable program positions for your own edits. In surround mode where both A and B 'sides' are combined, 25 factory presets are provided with 25 user memory locations. Pretty much anything can be changed such as how programs are recalled (immediately or requiring the Load button to be pressed), BPM or millisecond delay time display and various options for bypass functionality. Analogue output levels can be set for +4 or –10 voltages so you'll integrate the MX400 into any style of rig. (Be aware, however, that the unit is strictly 44.1/48k so if you intend to use this device digitally, don't feed the box 96k. Analogue I/O is the only workaround here.) Two routing options are possible in surround mode: either two in/four out or as a four in/four out device.

I'm pretty certain an appraisal of the sound quality of the MX400XL is almost superfluous apart from pointing out that it sounds like Lexicon reverb to me. Admittedly it's not quite 480L territory (I've never heard the 960L) but it does have that solid depth you'd expect from a Lex. Someone once mentioned to me that they thought TC reverb sounded real, while Lexicon reverb sounded how you want reverb to sound – full, lush and dripping in character and ambience. Lexicon has come up with the goods yet again, adding enormous versatility and plug-in control to the package. For me it's certainly a box to consider. ■