

Mackie Onyx 820i Mixer

by Eric Price

It was a dark and stormy night when the mysterious vehicle pulled up in front of my house. A stranger stepped out of the vehicle carrying an intriguing looking parcel – an ominous big black box. OK, so maybe it was actually a sunny day. The stranger, well he was a driver for FedEx, but to be fair, he was a stranger to me.

The ominous-looking big black box? It was real, at least. Though I knew nothing about its contents, I soon discovered it held a truly baffling mystery – the sort of mystery this intrepid reviewer thrives upon, the sort of thriller he will not cease probing into until he ferrets out the entire elusive truth!

What was in the box you ask? It was a new Mackie Onyx 820i Mixer and Pro Tools M-Powered. Until now, sworn rivals, now seemingly working together. Whose diabolical handiwork was this? What does this mean for consumers? When will this be available for purchase? For the answers to these intriguing questions and others, keep reading the next exciting paragraphs in "Who's Afraid of the Big Black Box?"

After some serious amateur sleuthing, I am now prepared to reveal my findings...

First off, Mackie is releasing a new series of FireWire Onyx mixers in 8-, 12-, and 16 x 2-channel configurations along with its new flagship 16 x 4-channel mixer featuring full 16 x 16 channel streaming for complete DAW integration.

Depending on the configuration, the new mixers come with a varying range of features. On the smaller mixers are three or four Onyx mic preamps and a 3-band British-style Perkins EQ. The 8-channel mixer, lacking faders, boasts only rotary knobs. The larger configuration comes with eight Onyx mic preamps and a 4-band Perkins EQ. The flagship mixer of the line has 16 Onyx preamps, 4-band Perkins EQ, and 60 mm faders for each channel exclusively. It also features a 4-channel bus as opposed to the 2-channel bus found on the other mixers.

A quick aside about the Perkins EQ: the name refers to Cal Perkins, design engineer for Mackie who worked out the best features from some of the sweetest,



most musical British EQ designs from the '60s and '70s. He was able to take the best qualities and incorporate them into Mackie's circuitry making the EQs very flexible, affordable, and most importantly, very musical.

Complete with sturdily-built construction, the entire line of mixers feature 24-bit/96 kHz FireWire connection, 48 V phantom power, and a talkback microphone. All are rackmountable. On the smaller units, the rackmount kit is optional while on the flagship mixer, the rack-mount kit is included and it possesses a rotating I/O pod.

The unit I received was the 820i with an 8-channel arrangement and three mic preamp channels, channel three being either a mono or stereo channel and channels 5-6 and 7-8 being stereo line channels. The FireWire sent to the computer is switchable pre/post EQ on each channel, and there are two auxiliary channels available to you as well. The aux sends on all mixers are individually switchable pre/post fader.

Secondly, and more intriguingly, were the other contents of the black box: a copy of Pro Tools M-Powered, a ransom note-style instruction sheet, and a DVD with a humorous video featuring a man and his dog. The man in the video, with a stocking over his head and a pitch-altered voice, was detailing the fact that Pro Tools M-Powered would interface with the new Mackie mixer lineup.

It would seem, via this kooky vi-

ral marketing campaign, that Mackie had engineered its own driver and circumvented Avid (Pro Tools' parent company)'s copy protection, thereby breaking the stronghold Avid had over its software and driver pairings – freeing up Pro Tools to be used with the Mackie. By the way, the new mixers still work fine with the other DAWs on the market like Cubase, Sonar, Live, and others. One final note here: the drivers will not work with the former line of Onyx mixers.

It would appear this chain of events was not sanctioned by Avid. How well this sits with the company remains to be seen. As for its operation, it worked smoothly and flawlessly with the Version 1 driver provided on the DVD.

It was interesting to be able to use the Mackie interface with Pro Tools M-Powered. The mixer itself performed admirably, as expected. Mackie's reputation for clean sound, solid construction, and smart design were present and accounted for.

So, my amateur criminologists, there we have it. Our questions have been answered and the case is solved. For more details about the case, visit Mackie at www.mackie.com. The video and documentation are available to be viewed on the Gearslutz forums at www.gearslutz.com. Enjoy the clues!

Eric Price is mourning the loss of Michael Jackson, an amazing talent, may he rest in peace. He may be reached at eric@gepconsulting.ca.