

Mackie 2404-VLZ3 Four-Bus Analog Mixer

“Comparably small considering it’s so feature packed,” *PAR*’s reviews editor highly recommends the 2404-VLZ3; it’s a well-built bargain of a 24-channel/four-bus live mixer.

Nearly at the top of its range – in Mackie’s proven, top-selling VLZ3 Series of analog mixers (only the 3204-VLZ3 is bigger) – the 2404-VLZ3 is categorized by Mackie as a “compact” product.

Yet, from an operational perspective, it could feasibly be considered next to the company’s other 24-channel, four-bus mixer, the “mid format” Onyx 24.4 Bus (which I reviewed for *PAR* a few years ago: <http://www.proaudioreview.com/article/2540>). Like the 24.4, the 2404-VLZ3 is built purely for live audio; comes with multiple built-in features that eliminate the need for more than a few weighty rack unit spaces (with features that are not found in the pricier Onyx 24.4 Bus); and, like you would expect, is built to last like a Mackie.

Features

The 2404-VLZ3 comes with 20 XDR2 microphone preamps. According to Mackie’s specifications, each XDR2 offers 60 dB maximum gain, less than 0.0007 percent total harmonic distortion (THD) — overall mixer THD less than 0.005 percent — and handles line-level signals up to +22 dB. Phantom power is provided universally, via a rear panel on/off switch. Each amp (except those on channels 17-20) also offers a -20 dB pad.

I/O is comprehensive: XLR inputs for channels 1-20 and talkback input; XLR outputs for main left and right, and mono (with back-panel adjustable output); quar-

ter-inch inputs and outputs elsewhere (channel inputs and TRS inserts, group inserts, aux inserts and sends, group outputs, phones output, as well as left, right and mono monitor); USB; and RCA stereo I/O. Channel, subgroup and master faders are all 60mm in length.

“Per channel, six line-level aux send controls are adjustable from mute to +15 dB of gain. Sends 1 and 3 are pre-fader; Sends 3 and 4 are switchable pre/post fader; and sends 5 and 6 are switchable between the 2404-VLZ3’s two independent FX1 and FX2 channels and post fader output, effectively engaging or disengaging the internal effects units.

The 2404-VLZ3’s last two “strips” — 21/22 and 23/24 — are stereo channels; feature identical aux send/return and bus-

sing schemes, but accept line level only; offer no insert point and no low cut; and provide four-channel EQ. Notably, channel 23/24 also offers a USB switch, providing EQ-able, “bus-able,” and mixable stereo playback; engaged, it overrides the channel’s normal input and FX.

Regarding USB, subgroup or main L/R signals can be routed to your DAW for on-location live recording; and plug-ins can be used live by using the 5 and 6 aux busses via the master section’s USB Out dual buttons: Channel 1-2 to USB out can toggle between Group 1/2 or main L/R, while Channel 3-4 to USB out is either Group 3/4

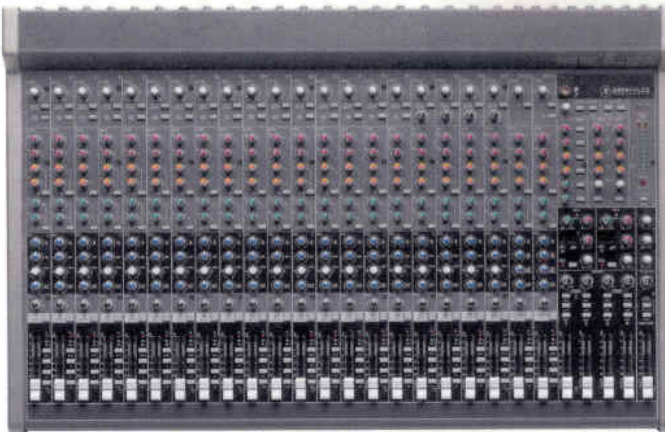
or Aux 5/6. That’s a very cool and useful feature.

The aforementioned effects channels feed two identical Mackie RMX+ 32-bit effects processors, what I believe is the 2404-VLZ3’s most “value added” feature. Each features 24 presets: a dozen reverbs including plates and small to huge spaces; a gated reverb; chorus and chorus reverb combos; doubler; tape slap; six

delays of various parameters (warm and bright, 150 to 350 ms); Chorus + Delay at 300 ms; and Reverb + Delay at 200 ms. The main interface per effects channel is a rotary/push knob that selects both preset and offers tap tempo.

Four channels (17-20) offer handy “one knob” (variable threshold) compression, as do the mixer’s four busses, providing a total of eight channels of compression for 2404-VLZ3 users. Compression ratio is set at 6:1 with a soft knee. I first saw (and subsequently used) this simple, yet quite useful, feature a few years ago in the product of a Mackie competitor, and loved the thoughtfulness of a manufacturer including multiple built-in, down and dirty transient controls.

The package also includes Mackie’s



live review

Tracktion 3 digital audio workstation software (Mac/PC).

In Use

The 2404-VLZ3 I received for review was used for a number of live gigs, including a high SPL, five-piece R&B/Blues band set with plenty of microphone and line inputs, recording/playback via USB and RCA I/O, and more. I was able to dial in a rather detailed, carefully constructed mix — with no outboard gear whatsoever.

Specifically, I found that the HDR2 mic amps are clean, with a pleasant character and completely usable. The channel EQs — while lacking the flavor of the Onyx Series' Perkins EQ — offer well-selected frequencies and sounded good even with heavy-handed EQing. Having not one but two effects engines, featuring great-sounding parameters with

tap tempo input, allowed otherwise OK mixes to become deep, wide and very interesting listening experiences for audience members (several told me so). And the eight compressors proved to be very useful; the four channel and four subgroup comps seemed to be just the right amount (though a few more channel comps would surely be welcomed in future versions).

My one minor complaint with the mixer is that I had to alter my input list in order to most appropriately utilize the four channels featuring compressors. Restricted to 17-20, each channel I chose to compress (i.e., kick drum) was suddenly down at the other end of the mixer and out of my normal workflow. No doubt that this is a minor quibble, but it is one that will most likely affect every user of the 2404-VLZ3 in a slightly different way. I quickly got over it.

Summary

I've used a lot of Mackie gear over the past 15 years or so — mostly by choice but also because it just seems to be everywhere you go (and gig). And, upon close examination, the 2404-VLZ3 sounds and appears to be built to the same quality, fit and finish standards as the best Mackie gear ever built. This mixer is a solid workhorse you won't regret buying.

For today's giggering/schlepping and small- to mid-level live music club markets, the 2404-VLZ3 makes a whole lot of sense. It's well built, lightweight and relatively small considering it's so feature-packed. Its many components sound great. It's entirely intuitive. And, most importantly, it's a bargain considering all of the above. I highly recommend it.

Price: \$1,149

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