

Right Out Of The Box

By Larry Hall

Live demo of a Mackie Onyx 80 console

When Mackie contacted my regional sound company, HAS Productions in Las Vegas, about taking a look at a new Onyx 80 Series live console, there was originally some question as to its place in the market.

While I first got the impression that I would be seeing a console more in line with the requirements of larger live shows, in reality I found the Onyx is actually a solid tool for club, church and small live applications. And ultimately, it's a very good thing that the company is providing a quality component at a very affordable price for a very large segment of the sound reinforcement market.

HAS Productions has been around for more than a dozen years, and over that time, we've slowly but surely built to the point of being very busy, year round, in serving our region. It's hard to define the most significant core of our business – we work with a ton of one-off concerts, are primary and secondary providers at festivals, handle a fair share of corporate, and do a lot of work with several Vegas showrooms as well. One leads to another, and all

we do is keep the quality as high as possible regardless of the application.

Within that context, here are my experiences with the new Onyx console, used over the series of 10 different events in two weeks.

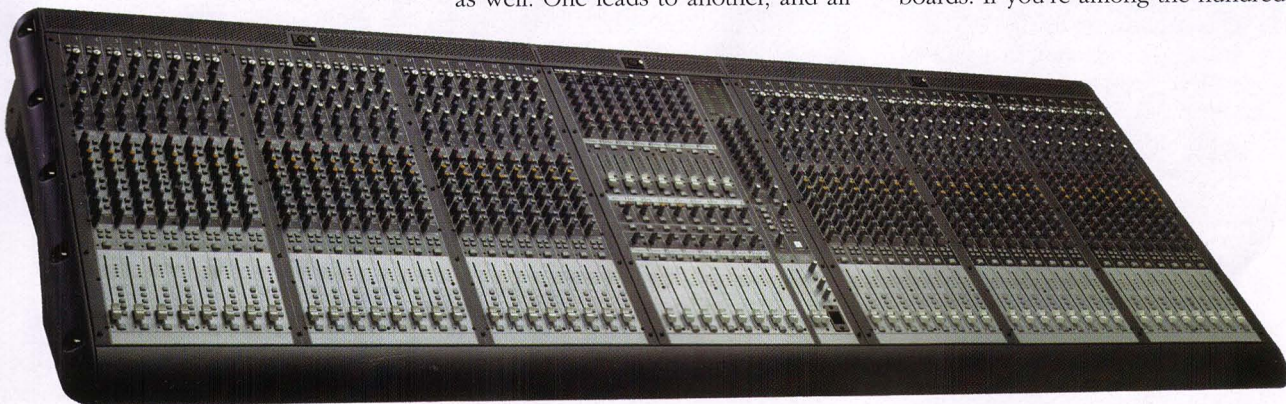
Mackie provided us with the 48-channel model Onyx 4880, the largest frame size available in the series. (It's also available in 24-, 32- and 40-channel versions.) Almost immediately after it arrived at the shop, we got busy with the unpacking. Right away, we knew we were looking at a console different from what we were getting with the look and feel noted above as being for uses of "less ambition."

This is not at all to say that the console appeared sub-standard in any way. Quite the contrary, the quality seemed commensurate. Rather, it's the "apples versus oranges" understanding we all develop as to what a product is designed and intended to do.

After unpacking, the first thing we did was turn it on and plug in a couple of microphones. As far as the feel/action of the consoles faders and knobs, it's similar to past Mackie boards. If you're among the hundreds



Larry Hall and a view of a Mackie Onyx 4800 that he put through its paces for two weeks at 10 events.



Test Drive

of thousands who are comfortable with this, you'll be pleased.

Overall, Onyx is laid out well, and there's nothing confusing. You can go immediately into "plug and play" mode, and we did just that. Taking it to its first "official" use as a monitor console for a local show by the Georgia Satellites. There were five mixes on stage and my engineer Alex Fletcher was extremely happy with the console. And, no complaints from the band.

A couple of days later, we supplied the Onyx board for use at the Fremont Street Experience in downtown Vegas. Specifically, it was used as a replacement for the usual front-of-house console used to mix live performances (local and national acts) there five nights a week, which needed a repair at our shop.

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This was where we noticed the very smooth, transparent signature of the Onyx mic pre-amplifiers. The head of sound at Fremont Street, Roddy Paul, agreed with us on this assessment. He also noted that in every situation, the board offered more than a reasonable amount of headroom.

One of the most notably cool things about the console not often found with others in this price range is that it includes EQ on both the sub group and aux outputs. While this wasn't overly elaborate, it does offer three bands as well as a sweep.

I find this feature quite useful for monitor world, when a musician requires a change in his wedge. The EQ change can be made on the output EQ of the console, rather than having to do it on the channel strip.

One thing to note is that outputs

Onyx 4800 - Just The Facts

Channel Strips:

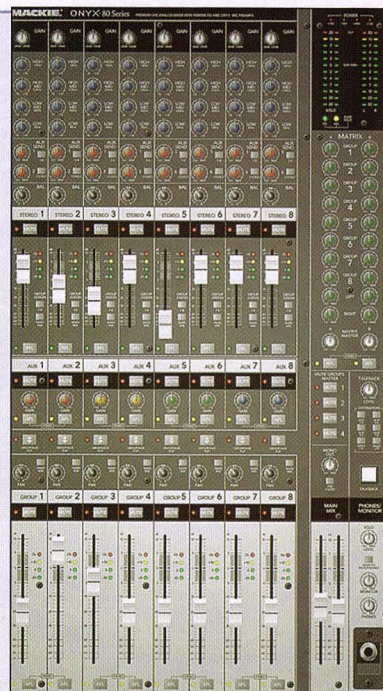
- Mic preamps on all 48 channels
- 4-band Perkins EQ with hardware bypass
- 48-volt phantom power, mic/line, 100 Hz high-pass, polarity switches
- 8 auxiliary sends with pre/post switches
- Aux stereo link feature for IEM
- Direct utputs on DB-25 connectors (8 channels per)
- 4-segment LED
- Long-throw 100mm faders
- Mute and PFL solo switches
- Balanced XLR mic and 1/4-inch line inputs

Master Section:

- 8 stereo aux inputs with 4-band fixed Perkins EQ and 4-segment LEDs
- 8 aux send masters with balanced I/O and mute, AFL solo
- 8 groups with 100 mm faders, balance I/O, main mix assign, pan, mute, and AFL solo
- 8 aux master/group flip switches
- 10 input by 2 output matrix
- 4 mute groups
- Balanced XLR talkback mic input with routing
- Dual 100mm main mix faders
- Phones/monitor section
- Main mix to monitor/phones switch
- Power indicator LEDs for power supply rails

Power:

- Supply is 100-240-volt, AC, 50-60 Hz
- Optional redundant power supply



The Onyx 4800 master section

are TRS (1/4-inch), also common on consoles in this price range and something I'd like to see upgraded to XLR-type. These outputs required us to put "turnarounds" on everything. Mute groups were also fairly "analog" sounding - not my cup of tea.

The biggest suggestion I'd make is to include a redundant power supply with the console - there was not one with the console we were supplied. (And indeed, this is just an option, not standard.)

I've been using a comparably priced console from a competing manufacturer. In our inventory for more than five years, this board has only needed to be repaired once (and this was a minor fix). So a big key for Mackie will be to insure that the new

Onyx consoles can match this type of track record, no small feat given certain brutal conditions that are a fact of sound company life.

When manufacturers design the biggest, best and most expensive for the upper 10 percent of our industry, some of them seem to forget the needs and price points of the remaining 90 percent. In this regard, hats off to Mackie. They've remembered us, done their homework, and have responded with something that makes sense. ■

Larry Hall continues to "fight the good fight" as the head of HAS Productions in Las Vegas, a sound company he's built from the ground up, starting as a fledgling musician working the local Vegas casino circuit. Reach him at HallAudio2@aol.com.