

MY SOUL AWAY

With a number of one nighters, and cabaret shows with no rehearsal, the potential for chaos in running a memory system is vast! But the Gemini was equally at home on long runs or with 'off the top of my head' one-nighters. Three facilities impressed. Firstly, one of our shows had previously done a preview tour, using the same system, and the ability to configure the same control channels to a new set of dimmer numbers via the electronic patch made the original plot very portable; the original channel numbers were preserved within the much larger rig in Edinburgh. Secondly the special effects are just that. Multiple fades with concurrent effects, all stimulated by the press of one button was a sight to behold, although one cynic did comment that it would be much easier simply to flick a switch to produce lightning flashes. He had a point, for the special effects did take a little time to set up, but the end result was much more convincing. And finally the sheer simplicity of blind plotting onto submasters made the busked cabaret so easy, it being possible to run the board very much like a manual preset board, but with 8 presets! And of course there is then the option of recalling these states onto the red or green playback and even dumping them onto disc during the show if required. It is the lack of immediate blind access to channels that has made the idea of a memory

system without a manual wing in a small touring house such as my pied-à-terre in Oundle something of a non-starter, and this system goes a long way to answering the problem. Equally I have yet to be convinced as to the wisdom of unleashing inexperienced pupils onto a non-manual system; I speak from an educational standpoint rather than any other, but that is another story.

There were a number of things that we felt could be improved on Gemini, none of which related to the basic philosophy of the system. Three examples. We felt that the mem-to-disc and disc-to-mem pushes were too close to each other and poorly protected against accidental use. (Thus ALWAYS leave the keyswitch at 'O' and the disc out of the drive when not in use – a good policy anyway.) It would have been nice to have the reverse patch as standard display (ie in the order channel:dimmer) which would make the allocations on the back-up so much quicker. The time match information is buried in the depths of the VDU, and how much easier it would be to have the time match LEDs as on the M24. And more little gripes besides, none of which detract from what is an excellent and easily used system.

We also had considerable trouble with the board's ability to ride the notoriously dirty mains of the building, but our affection for and belief in the board was much

improved when the representative of a major rival, also in the hire business during the Festival, was very cautious as to whether the products he could provide would fare any better. Eventually the mains was trimmed by a combination of an RS surge protection plug and a hefty data saver. I suspect that the latter did most of the work, and in future, in that building, we will always specify such a device, no matter which board we are using.

And next year? Why not come to George Square and see. It is after all a major venue, if not THE major venue, on the Festival Fringe, and we always like to meet comrades in arms over a glass of 80 proof. ■

We have asked our Controls Product Manager, Andy Collier, to comment on Mr Hanley's interesting article:

We have been overwhelmed by fan-mail for the Gemini, and Mr Hanley's interesting article expresses the enthusiasm voiced by other correspondents. We reply to all comments received from users after detailed consideration, and I should like to answer Mr Hanley's three examples here.

It is not possible to corrupt a disc or the memory by pressing the wrong disc transfer button if the correct operational discipline is adopted: Ensure the memory is locked unless you are recording a cue or setting up an effect; protect the disc from over-recording by setting the tab to the 'disc-safe' position as soon as a copy of the memory has been made; always remove a disc from the console

after use.

The patch system operates by referring dimmers to channels because dimmer numbers are fixed (there are 384, numbered 1-384) and this system prevents any errors in setting up caused by selecting the same dimmer to several channels, and also it enables the geographic channel number facility (any of the 180 channels can be numbered from 1-999) to operate logically.

Although the time-match LEDs were a requirement of the original design of M24, subsequent improvements in the operational philosophy reduced the importance of matching the faders to the running fade time in order to adjust the speed of the fade. With Gemini, 'time match' LEDs are not necessary because:

- To increase or decrease the speed of running fade with the playback in the 'use time' mode, the faders are set to a speed slower than is shown on the VDU. This does not have to be an accurate setting, since the intention is to adjust the speed by reference to the stage effect rather than to the VDU.*
- To take over a running 'use time' fade manually, the fade is paused as soon as the manual button is pressed, and the fade may be completed without matching, by passing the faders to one end and gradually moving them to completion.*

I shall look forward to hearing about Mr Hanley's next encounter with Gemini – if his soul is returned in time!



stored two different tones, one 800Hz signal and one 1.5kHz signal. When the 800Hz signal was played back to a special device it would close a relay and the relay closed the external fade function on the M24. At every place in the show where we wanted a change in the light we recorded an 800Hz signal on our audio channel. The 1.5kHz signal closed the No. 1 button on the keyboard.

In the beginning of every show a 1.5kHz ensured that each show would start with memory 1. A sort of reset function. In the middle of the programming the M24 began to act strange. Sometimes it refused to respond to any command. We also got all kinds of error messages. These problems were always cured by disconnecting the mains plug and then connecting it again. Then the M24 ensured us that 'self test ok'. We kept working through the night unplugging the mains many times. Finally at 6 in the morning we had got our 84 cues into the memory and then we dumped the memory on tape. I slept two

hours in one of the cars, quite comfortable. At 8 o'clock I phoned to the Swedish Strand agent in Stockholm where I had rented the M24. In one hour they arranged with Quartzcolor laniro in Rome so that I could just do a change at their office in Milano.

The excellent motorway all the way from Turin to Milano (150 kilometres) has distance signs every kilometre of the way. Quite boring. The journey took place in a very nice SAAB 900 turbo 16 that SAAB wasn't too happy to lend me because it was an exhibition car. Believe it or not, the car far exceeded the top speed told in the handbook. Back in Turin again we hooked the new M24 to the rest of the equipment and dumped the program into the memory and then we could run the show at once. The whole thing worked for a whole day. The M24 locked itself and didn't respond, the slide show wasn't showing the right slides at the right time, the tape recorder delivered a signal full of dropout and bulbs in the projectors blew five or six at the same time.

After one hour or two we found that the mains we had to the stand could vary between 212 and 228 volts during the day. There were also a lot of spikes and the most important thing, the frequency sometimes dropped to 42Hz. A mains supply filter was the answer and the fastest way to get one was to fly one from Stockholm. When we had the filter everything was running as it should. No problems at all. It worked every 6th minute, 12 hours a day in 14 days. During that time the show was a big success and Italian television filmed the show and also the M24 twice. How many M24s have been in the evening news twice in one week? ■

Editors Note

How often this is the story! If you have memory system problems check the mains wherever you are in the world. 999 times out of 1000 that will be the source of the trouble.



ab 9000 Turbo 16