MX – Did You Know?

You may be one of the hundreds of people all over the world who chose MX (or Mantrix MX) memory control desks for their smaller scale shows. Since its introduction a year ago, MX has proved its early claims of flexibility and reliability, and we have been very pleased with the complimentary comments received from many users. One of the results of our dialogue with them is a wealth of operational short-cuts and tricks which can provide additional features not included in the operators' handbook.

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Here's a list of the ten most useful operational hints which get the best out of your MX system whatever its channel capacity.

1. Pulsating light effect

If you record an effect with 1 step (either a group of channels or a scene with levels) you can get a smooth on-off pulsating effect by setting the effect type to 'cycle'. To get a firelight effect set the same effect to run as a 'flicker'. A 'chase' will give a regular on/off flash.

2. Programmable effect attributes

Many people are not aware that the 'type' and 'direction' of an effect may be selected and hence recorded at any time during the recording of an effect. Then, when running the effect, you only have to select it and press GO. The effect type may be changed later, when selecting or running the effect, without changing the recorded type.

3. Effect Editing

This is very powerful on MX. The easiest way to edit an effect is to pretend you are re-recording it. Press RECORD, followed by the effect number. you wish to edit, and you will find that the MX has put you at the last step in the effect. [Hint: this is a quick way to find out if an effect has been recorded or not: for an un-recorded effect you will see step 1].

Using the +/- keys you can now run through the effect seeing which channels or scenes have been selected for each step. You may add or delete channels, or change the selected scene using the flash buttons at any step. The step number is shown on the display.

4. Copying and combining scenes

Set record mode to OUTPUT in the Record Scene menu. Bring up the selected scene(s), channels etc, and press the required flash button to record the combination. You may also capture effect steps in this way.

5. Solo mode

With flash level set to 0, any flash button gives a flash to blackout facility.

6. Remote power cycling

MX retains its state, including running effects and fades when powered off from the mains (ie not using the on-off switch). This can be very useful if you want to turn a preset show on and off remotely. It will also maintain its MIDI state, allowing a sequenced MIDI show to start remotely.

7. Sequencing to tape track

If you want to cue a set of scenes from a tape track, record the scenes, and then record an effect with each step as one of these scenes. Record the effect as type AUDIO/MIDI. Make sure the effect type in the SETUP SYSTEM Menu is AUDIO, not MIDI. Record standard AV tones on your tape track, connect the tape machine to the audio input, and each tone will cause the effect to advance one step. Note that the effect will not actually start until the first tone, allowing you to start the show from blackout, if required.
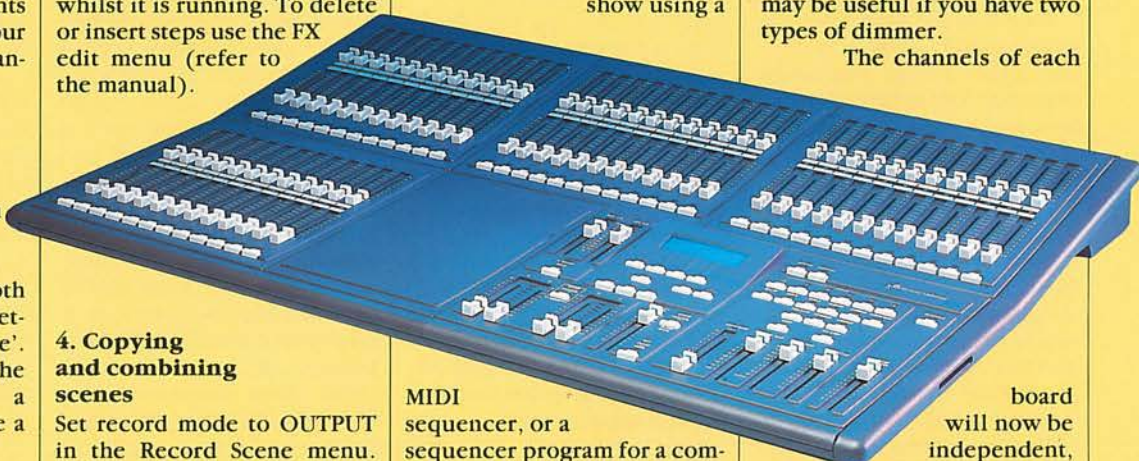
You may need to set the audio level fader quite low to eliminate tape noise. Note that this will work in conjunction with (6) above for canned AV shows.

8. Remote cueing or show recording via MIDI

It is extremely easy to record a show using a MIDI sequencer, or a sequencer program for a computer such as the Atari ST. In either case the cost can be less than you might think.

You don't have to understand all the MIDI codes that MX produces, just connect MX's MIDI OUT to MIDI IN of the sequencer, MIDI IN of MX to the sequencer's MIDI OUT. Set the board into MIDI OUT mode (SETUP, CONFIG, I/O menu), set the sequencer to RECORD and do your show. (You will need to have recorded the scenes and effects that you want already). Every time you press a key (with the exception of the menu controls), or move a fader, MX sends out a code to say what has happened, and the sequencer records these.

At the beginning of the recording it is advisable to press the SYNC key on the menu. This sends out a complete snapshot of the state of MX, so that when you replay the sequence the board is in exactly the right state.

Set the board into MIDI IN, press PLAY on the sequencer and your light show will be faithfully reproduced with fades as you recorded them, effects etc.

9. Channel Expansion using MIDI

This expands the capacity of your MX system by using several desks each controlling a different sequential group of channels, all mastered from one desk. Connect the MIDI OUT of your master MX into the MIDI IN of your slave MX. Set the master into MIDI OUT mode as above, and set the slave into SLAVE mode. You will need to connect the relevant dimmers to each system. You may run the different systems with different multiplex standards which may be useful if you have two types of dimmer.

The channels of each board will now be independent, but all master controls (A/B, C/D, Grand Master, FX controls and submasters when in scene mode) will be controlled by the master board.

If you want to slave more boards, there is no logical limit. Connect the second slave's MIDI IN to the first slave's MIDI THROUGH. You can carry on doing this until the signal gets too distorted, which in practice will happen after 3 or 4 units are slaved. However proprietary MIDI buffers (which are very cheap) can be used to buffer the master's signal indefinitely.

10. Memory card information

Anything stored on a memory card by one MX can be used by any other MX even if it has a different channel capacity. For example, a show is recorded on a 12 channel system. If played back on a 24 or 48, just the first 12 channels will be used. Similarly the first 12 channels of a 24 channel show may be accessed from a 12 channel board.

[Editor's note: If you have developed any ingenious tricks with your MX, please let us know. Published ideas will receive a *Lights!* T-Shirt.]