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  - Projection
  - Staging
  - Sound
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Product Of The Month: ChamSys MagicQ MQ100 Pro Console

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As the lines between lighting and projection are narrowed, why not have a console that deals with media as well as it does with lighting? The MagicQ MQ100 Pro console from UK-based ChamSys Ltd. sees no reason why a console can't do both well. It integrates with a wide variety

of media servers and has its own internal, basic media engine that allows fast pixel mapping to get large LED arrays up and running painlessly. With a familiar syntax, it is easy to learn and worth road testing, and it was just named a 2007-2008 Projection Product of the Year by *Live Design* (May 2008). It is available for rental or for sale from PRG Lighting.

What It Does

The compact yet powerful console measures 24.6" (625mm) wide × 22.8" (580mm) deep × 7" (180mm) high and weighs 33lbs (15kg). Features include 5,000 cues, 1,000 cue-stacks with full cue-stack control on 10 different playback faders; individual channel timing; fully configurable effects; and onscreen cue editing. The touchscreen windows enable instant access to palettes, range information, and effects for live control.

Chris Kennedy, software director for ChamSys, continues the feature set. "You can have up to 202 playbacks, 3,096 palettes, and 1,000 groups," he says. "The MQ100 Pro features 18 DMX universes, all processed onboard without a need for external network processors. These channels have been tested to run at full speed with all channels fully patched." The console supports Art-Net, Pathport, and Strand ShowNet protocols and is ACN-ready. In addition, there are four direct DMX outputs as well as a built-in high-speed Ethernet switch, with four separate Neutrik EtherCon locking connectors for networking. As with the rest of the console, the Ethernet switch is protected by a UPS. Networking connectivity supports a high-speed fiber optic option.

The Media Engine is a key feature to this console. MQ100 is designed to work with video and controls ArKaos, Catalyst, Hippotizer, Mbox Extreme, Pandoras Box, RADlite, and other media servers. "With eight encoders, each automatically electronically labeled, controlling multiple attribute video systems is easy," says Kennedy. When connected to a media server, the thumbnails can be displayed on the touchscreen to enable fast selection of media clips. The effects engine, large palette storage capability, and fast access to recorded cues and palettes enables the playback of video effects. "We are not pretending to be a media server," adds Kennedy. "If you're going to do a lot of content, and you need high-resolution, then you should use a media server, but if you've got a load of LED sticks or Soft-LED drape that you want to run more than just a standard lighting chase on, then we have the control built-in. We call it a Media Engine, and it's targeted at low res."

Kennedy points out that one advantage of the way the console controls media servers is by using media thumbnails from the media server. "Instead of having to remember DMX addresses, you just press the picture on the screen, and you get that media on the media server," he says. "We have a dedicated window for controlling media servers, so you can select your different servers. You can select your layers on that server, and you can see the media on that server. The key with our system is that you don't necessarily need to have the same media on all the media servers. Soon, instead of having 20 moving lights, you will have 20 moving projectors. We want to give the maximum flexibility for doing live playback and easy programming of the media servers."

How It Came To Be

ChamSys was formed in April 2003 by team of lighting designers, software, and hardware developers. The company started out making free, downloadable software and then, after having it tested in the field, set out to build dedicated console hardware that used that same proven software. The MagicQ console range, launched at PLASA 2004, is Linux-based, and the off-line software versions also work with PC and Macintosh in addition to Linux machines. Launched at PLASA 2007, the MQ100 Pro series is the second generation of MagicQ consoles, featuring a

familiar and flexible GUI, lighting control, media server connectivity options, and built-in media server for LED grid arrays found in the original MagicQs. MQ100 Pro also uses the same software and show formats as the original MagicQ consoles.

Kennedy has a lighting design background, and he designed the software for the console. George McDuff, the hardware designer, also has a good deal of experience, including his work on the ICON console and the front panel of the High End Systems Wholehog 3. "We took advantage of the obsolescence of the Wholehog 2 and added all the stuff that the Hog 2 guys loved," says Kennedy. "We do media like no other console does; we control LEDs like no other console does.

"The software is very modular," continues Kennedy. "At the same time, we try to make it so you can step up to the console, and you really don't have to understand the complex advanced options. You can access lights, get programming, and be done. We have the complexity in the lower layers. It is there if you want it, but you don't have to use it. Unlike some other consoles that require you to spend time setting up your screens, with MQ100, you can be patching and controlling lights and writing cues within two minutes."

What's Next

Even easier media control with the MQ100 is a direction for future development at ChamSys, as Kennedy explains. "We have the Media Wing coming out that is a playback/programming wing with a split T-bar fader that allows you to mix between different video layers when you are controlling media servers," he says.

What End Users Have To Say

Matt Mills of Lighting Programmer Inc. (www.lightingprogrammer.com (http://www.lightingprogrammer.com)) is lighting designer/programmer for 3 Doors Down and Nelly Furtado. He used the MQ100 Pro for a 3 Doors Down New Year's show in Las Vegas. "I was very happy with the console," says Mills. "I decided to take the console without any real training — a MagicQ crash-course but at the gig. I learned a lot in a short amount of time. The console just made sense. I really liked how easy it was to cut and paste cues. I like to build cue-stacks, and a lot of times, cues will repeat themselves. The MagicQ made it very fast to build cue-stacks once I got the foundation laid." Mills would like to have "another touchscreen. I've been behind grandMAs and Hogs for a while, and I got used to having two or three touchscreens." (MagicQ Pro now supports multiple touchscreens.) "The way the MagicQ console integrates with media servers is amazing. This is a big step in the right direction, especially since there are so many media servers on the market today."

UK-based lighting designer David Amos (www.davidamos.com (http://www.davidamos.com)) chose the MQ100 since he came from a Wholehog background. "The MagicQ has taken the good bits of the Hog 2 and improved on them in many ways," he says. "For example, you can actually read the touchscreen. The MagicQ interfaces very well with ArKaos, which I use often. I like the bitmap generator, an easy way to get good LED looks. First and foremost, however I use the desk because the customer support is so good. I have always been able to get the desk to do what I need it to, and if I can't, there is always someone on the end of the phone to help. New personalities have been written and always emailed within the hour, should I need them. I have used the MagicQ on a range of shows from corporate award ceremonies, to a Prada party in Valencia, and a number of large scale music shows." Another feature that Amos really likes is "the way it is so easy to create your own custom effects."

Lighting designer/programmer Nick Ho of Zeolite Dezigns based in Singapore has been using the ChamSys MagicQ line for a few years. Starting with the MQ PC Wing and MQ PC software and progressing to the MagicQ console, he says, "I had been programming with Hog and Avo for a few years, and I was looking for a portable console, and it had to be easy to learn." For Ho, there are a few features he really likes, including the "live mode, where you can change the effect timing live and do a lot of live busking with palettes. Most of my shows don't have enough time to program detailed cues, so I will program a few faders for effects so I can change the effect instantly." He would like to see "more physical faders. I know that you can add the extra wing, but some programmers that I know prefer to have more faders on the console itself."

Lighting programmer/director Esteban Caracciolo has been using MagicQ consoles for over two years. "It is one of the most stable pieces of equipment I have used," he says. "I can do 18 DMX universes out and 12 protocols. The way it networks — the way it is ready for the future as technology comes to be — is what I find most interesting about it." The one feature that really sets it apart for Caracciolo is "the way that it controls media — the fact that it has a dedicated window for it and that, if every protocol was prepared, we could read thumbnails for up to 50 different media servers at the same time." He also likes "the way that it manipulates media for someone who finds it complicated. On servers, you have to be somewhat computer-savvy, but on this desk, it just lays it out for you. In front of you, it is just another fixture." Caracciolo concludes that he finds it impressive "having that power in a compact unit and having the ability to do virtually the same thing as I can do on every other console for a much lower price. Inside this little package is a lot more than people realize."

For further information, visit www.chamsys.co.uk (http://www.chamsys.co.uk) .

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