

Yamaha SPX2000

Its distant ancestor, the SPX90, virtually wrote the book on affordable digital multi-effects processors and today there can't be many equipment racks that aren't graced by the presence of a SPX990 or other SPX unit. **JON THORNTON** says Yamaha's new box has a lot to live up to.



THE SPX990'S SUCCESS is attributable to many factors – its size, cost, performance and ease of operation among them. Despite this, it was beginning to look and sound a little dated in comparison to newer competition. And if we're honest, there were always some things about the user interface that were downright irritating along with the lack of any digital interfacing. You have to ask whether Yamaha has managed to address all of these issues and remain true to the SPX family values.

Some answers are evident as soon as you get the unit out of the box. Similar in size to the SPX990, the SPX2000 is just a little deeper, and the back panel sports AES-EBU inputs and outputs on XLRs, together with a BNC input for external TTL Word clock. Sample rates from 44.1kHz to 96kHz are supported, and A-D and D-A conversion is 24-bit. So that's that sorted then.

Balanced, stereo analogue I-Os are also provided on XLR and 1/4-inch jack, and can be switched to accommodate +4dBu and -10dBV nominal signal levels. Completing the back panel line up is a USB port and the usual pair of MIDI sockets. Price is UK£849 inc. VAT.

The front panel manages to be reassuringly familiar, yet sufficiently different to indicate that Yamaha has thought long and hard about the user interface. Next to the input level controls are dedicated switches that allow switching between mono input and stereo input modes, and for making the LED meters show input or output level. No more jumping into obscure menus for these, then. Clear, dedicated backlit indicators are also provided to indicate clock source and sample rate.

An initial tour through the presets reveals that although the trademark dual digit LED display has survived this latest evolution, the data entry wheel has gone the way of the dodo. In truth, you don't really miss it – once you remember the trick of holding down both directional keys to speed up the rate at which parameters change. Cycling through the preset bank also shows up one of the SPX2000's trick new features – the colour of the backlight for the main display cycles through more colours than a 1970s disco floor. Far from being tacky, though, this feature is surprisingly effective. Yamaha has chosen to assign a distinctive backlight colour for each main category of effects – red for modulation effects, yellow for delays, for example.

Once you understand this, it makes locating the type of effect you are looking for very quick.

But it is in the sound that the biggest advances have been made. While the names of many of the presets will be familiar, it is clear from a first listen that they have been substantially overhauled. The jewels in the crown here are the Rev-X algorithms employed in some of the reverb presets. Newly developed from Yamaha's efforts in high-end reverberation units, these algorithms help to bring the SPX2000 sonically bang up to date. Halls are rich sounding and reasonably detailed, but it is the room reverbs that really shine, and ooze character and depth of field. Early reflection programs are also impressive in their realism and general usability.

Other effects types on offer will be familiar to users of Yamaha's DM2000 and O2R96 consoles, bearing a great similarity in terms of types and applications. The usual modulation effects, pitch changers and delays are all present, supplemented by some newer additions, such as amp simulators, dynamic filters and a multiband compressor/limiter that should enable anybody who so wishes to do really horrific things to their stereo mixes. And for those who crave the grainier audio quality and simpler algorithms of earlier models, Yamaha has included a 'Classic' bank of programs with a selection of said 'vintage' effects.

One thing that hasn't been carried over from earlier SPX devices is the notion of pre and post processes that can be applied to the main effect. Again, this isn't really a limitation, as the type of processes that may be required, such as compression or EQ, are generally now available in the main effect.

Which brings us nicely to editing, and here Yamaha has made some significant steps. Once a preset has been recalled into the unit, it can be edited simply by pressing the parameter button. This allows the user to step through and alter the core parameters for that preset – and nine times out of ten these are the parameters that you need to access. This streamlines the process of editing immensely as it saves scrolling through every parameter on offer. Should the more esoteric parameters need attention, pressing a Fine parameter button can access them. An illuminated Compare key allows comparison between the original and edited version.

System-wide functions are accessed via a series of utility menus, and together with the usual clock, input type and MIDI functions, there is also the facility to restrict certain functions to prevent accidental changing of parameters or settings.

Overall then, the unit is even easier and more intuitive to use than its predecessors – and this is without the forthcoming software front end that will allow editing and control of the SPX2000 using a PC and the USB port on the rear.

All of which adds up to a unit that is more than worthy of the SPX name. Yamaha has clearly taken its time and thought hard about this device, which adds up to progress without losing sight of the strengths of the originals. Most certainly a future classic. ■

PROS Breadth and quality of reverbs and effects; ease of use; clear and informative user interface.

CONS Some effects may be a little too 'workmanlike' for some tastes; not a lot else.

EXTRAS Designed to provide editing, librarian and remote control functions for the



Yamaha DM2000 and O2R96, Studio Manager V2 retains the ability to control and manage all console parameters from a computer via a graphic interface. It

adds 50 new features including the capability to run six new add-on effects, which use Virtual Circuitry Modeling. Available next year.

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