Panel beaters

Have your cake and eat it, too: Cakewalk Pro Audio users can create or modify existing panels. Steven Helstrip shows you how.

StudioWare panels are arguably Cakewalk's finest feature, enabling you to control and set up track parameters or any MIDI device that responds to CCs (Continuous Controllers) and System Exclusive or MCI commands (Media Control Interface). Panels are included for many popular MIDI devices, from GS synths through to external audio workstations. If you use Cakewalk Pro Audio, it is possible to create or modify existing panels, although to start with we're going to tackle the basics of implementing and using them. Over the past two months in this column we've designed a mixer map for Cubase to control the AWE synth parameters; but how do you go about it in Cakewalk?

☛ **Choose File-Open** and select StudioWare from the file-type pop-up menu; the AWE panel is the first in the list. There are two ways to assign the controllers to any track: either position the track switch, which can be a tad tricky, or right-click in the panel to open the widget property box.

☛ **To record** your movements (known as automation) enable the record icon in

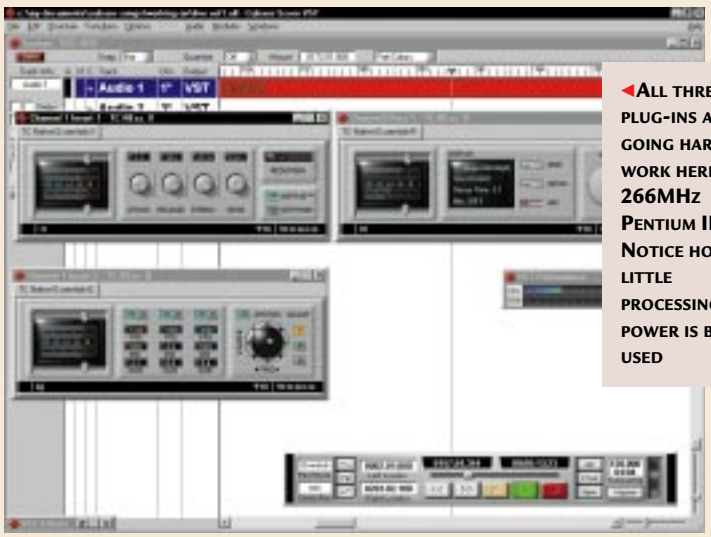
NATIVE ESSENTIALS: X MARKS THE SPOT

RECOMMENDED PERSONAL COMPUTER WORLD

In the August column I looked at the low-cost EasyWaves bundle which included a preset-only reverb and combined EQ, compressor and gate module. TC Works' Native Essentials offers a similar line-up of three separate components: Q equalisation, R reverb, and X dynamics.The accompanying literature boasts that these are the most processor-optimised algorithms to date, so if the TC Native Reverb plug-in is anything to go by, we're in for a treat.

Q features three bands of EQ which can be configured as either high/low shelving filters, notch or parametrics with a +/- 18dB range. Perhaps the most intriguing device here is the joystick controller, which enables you to sweep through the frequency spectrum with configurable gain.

Digital EQs are generally considered to be a tad harsh, or cold, when compared to their analogue counterparts, so TC has come up with an algorithm to smooth the edges. Called SoftSat, it works by applying a soft harmonic distortion and prevents digital clipping. This enables you to boost sensitive frequencies all the way up to 18dB without experiencing undesirable clicks in your audio.



◀ALL THREE PLUG-INS ARE GOING HARD AT WORK HERE ON A 266MHz PENTIUM II. NOTICE HOW LITTLE PROCESSING POWER IS BEING USED

X can be configured as either a soft or hard knee compressor and features automatic gain make-up, bringing material right up to 0dB. This makes off-line normalising redundant and is a great timesaver. Parameters for attack, release, threshold and ratio are offered and SoftSat can be switched-in to provide warmer-sounding compression.

R is based on the Native Reverb package mentioned earlier and offers 18 presets with adjustable decay and mix. There's every type of reverb you could wish for, from room to cathedral ambiences with both bright and dark settings. The quality is stunning for what is effectively a £50 reverb, and long decay times sustain the source material with remarkable detail.

Native Essentials sounds as every bit as good as it looks and could become the standard plug-in suite for users on a budget. It has all the essential ingredients: high-quality effects, minimal processor overhead, flexibility, and great value for money. A demo can be downloaded from www.tcworks.de.

Price £149 (£126.80 ex VAT)
Contact Arbiter Pro Audio 0180 207 5050

★★★★★

Questions & answers

This month's Q&A has one more question than I have answers for. Reader Mike Newell has a problem that has baffled the technical help department down at Et Cetera Distribution, and now myself. He writes:

Q I have a Midi-edge 1 x 4 MIDI interface card which has a Yamaha DB50XG daughterboard on it. This works superbly with both Cubase and Cakewalk to provide superb-quality sounds. However, I cannot use it for digital audio playback so I have tried installing a bog-standard SoundBlaster card. But when I do so, the Midi-edge refuses to work, claiming that whatever port and IRQ settings I use are wrong. I have tried *every possible* combination on the card, using the jumpers. Both cards work fine on their own, but not together, even though they have independent IRQs and port settings. Any ideas?

MIKE NEWELL
g1hgd@aol.com

***A** In theory there is no reason why you cannot get these cards working in the same PC and I'm convinced somebody, somewhere has already done so. After all, they're not an unusual combination. If anyone can help, or has a suggestion, please contact Mike.*

Q I am confused about sub-woofers. What are they, and is it worth getting one if I am interested in composing and listening to music on my PC?

A ATKINSON

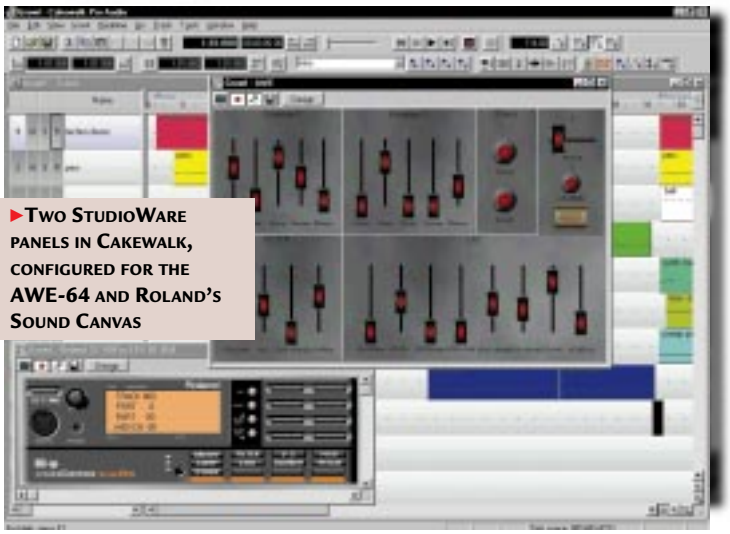
***A** A sub-woofer is a loudspeaker that is dedicated to reproducing the very lowest sounds that we can hear; anywhere from 20Hz to around 200Hz, depending on the model. Many of today's so-called multimedia speaker systems comprise a sub-woofer that is designed to sit on the floor, and two "full-range" satellite monitors which should be positioned at ear height. When producing commercial music it is important to have accurate sub-bass monitoring to get a feel for how the mix will sound in a club or arena environment, but really, investing in a sub-woofer merely for home use is sheer indulgence. However, if you need deep and powerful monitoring, which can greatly enhance video and games too, a sub-woofer could be just what you're looking for.*

Q My son uses his computer to construct music using Digital Orchestrator Pro, a Turtle Beach Tahiti sound card and the Yamaha DB50XG daughterboard. He is experimenting with the MIDI effects and, according to him, there are 50 of them. But he seems unable to find a description of what they do or how to use them. Where can he find this?

NILS ANDREAS ERSTAD

***A** There's some useful information on Yamaha's XG web page at www.yamaha.co.uk/xg/reading which explains all there is to know about accessing and using effects.*

▶ VISIT YAMAHA'S XG WEB SITE FOR INFO ON EFFECTS, SPECS AND XG PRODUCTION TIPS



▶ TWO STUDIOWARE PANELS IN CAKEWALK, CONFIGURED FOR THE AWE-64 AND ROLAND'S SOUND CANVAS

the panel and continue to record as normal. The icon to the right, which looks like a mini-fader, turns on the widget update to play back your movements in realtime.

☛ **It is often useful** to group widgets to allow you to control, for example, the volume of multiple tracks simultaneously. Groups are created by selecting two or more widgets with the Control key. Any widget can then be used as the "master" fader and all grouped widgets will move, relative to their start and end positions. They are defined by positioning a widget with the shift key: if the entire group is closer to the maximum value, you also set the maximum value for that widget, and vice-versa.

☛ **Crossfades** can be achieved by setting widgets off in opposite directions. First, select the two faders and position them at their mid point; create the group and move both to their highest position. Then, with the shift key, drag the second fader to its lowest position and move the first fader to *its* lowest position without shift. Finally, with the shift enabled again, drag the second fader to its highest position, and hey presto!

Piece of cake

Panels which include complex graphics can really grind slower machines to a halt, particularly when it comes to screen redraws. So, in order to disable graphics, add the following line to the [WinCake] section of the Cakewalk.ini file:

```
PanelsShowBitmaps=0
```

PCW CONTACTS

Steven Helstrip *can be contacted via the PCW editorial office (address, p10) or email* **sound@pcw.co.uk**