

EUROPE/UNITED STATES

# American analogue in Europe

High-performance, ergonomically-friendly analogue consoles are still in demand.

Simon Duff reports on an American manufacturer finding favour in Europe

For a good few years to come there will continue to be a healthy demand for high-performance analogue consoles, especially in the installation and live events sectors where sound engineers and technicians need to work quickly, at a high level on a variety of consoles with which they might be unfamiliar. That is certainly part of the current thinking and strategy at APB-DynaSonics, the New Jersey, US-based console manufacturer formed in 2004. With a design philosophy firmly rooted in solid construction, high-grade components and modular design for easy servicing, APB has flourished in the US install and regional touring markets.

Owners and managers Chuck



Mark Hornsby and an APB Spectra 32-channel console

Augustowski, John Petrucelli and Taz Bhogal (hence the name APB) have over 65 years of combined experience in console design with leading audio manufac-

turers. "We began our console career as actual end users, including at a regional sound company that I owned and ran, followed by involvement in console

design with Allen & Heath," says Augustowski. "From there we developed and introduced the highly successful Crest consoles, a division of Crest Audio."

The APB range is based around large- and small-format consoles along with audio switching products. The Spectra series are VCA-based and available as 24-, 32-, 40-, 48- or 56-channel versions, with all sizes featuring four additional stereo line-input channels. The ProDesk-4 is a small-format front-of-house console, while the ProRack mixers incorporate a variety of features into 10 rack spaces. The MixSwitch range is a versatile, multichannel combining system that takes up 1U of rack space. Typical applications include selecting between the primary console and back-up console, or between headline and opening act consoles during concert/presentation situations.

In Europe, APB sells through a network of distributors managed in the UK by Andy Simmons of Audio Marketing Services. "With APB-DynaSonics most people know the pedigree of the company, where the founders came from and what they have achieved in the past so this is a good starting point to get people interested in the product line," he comments. "They have a range of brilliantly designed and built, highly featured and competitively priced analogue mixing desks in a very difficult marketplace that is embracing digital technologies left, right and centre, so finding a place for these products is not always easy." He believes that the only way to get customers interested is to do live demonstrations. "Any distributor who thinks they can sell APB products from their catalogue alone doesn't last long! It's a hands-on thing and listening to the quality of the console rather than just looking at a feature list is what it's all about."

Hark, an audio hire company based in east London, covers a variety of music events and specialises in producing high-quality audio for sonic art in galleries – a growing market place. It owns an assortment of APB desks, including a 32-channel Spectra with a high-spec EQ, two ProRacks and one ProDesk. "The ProRack has got so many outputs on it we use it a lot on the surround sound gallery work that we do for clients such as the White Cube, The Whitechapel Gallery, Café Otto and Artangel," comments Mark Hornsby, managing director. "Because it has got left, right, centre, mono, four sub groups and six auxes it has got a lot of outputs for a small desk. So we can do clever stuff for surround sound. We used the ProRack at Café Otto recently for a 10-speaker surround-sound system and it sounded very good indeed."

Hornsby bought his first ProRack five years ago and has subsequently installed one for an audiovisual system based in the main auditorium at The Whitechapel Gallery. "Andy Simmons demonstrated the ProRack to me and I

thought it sounded good. I looked at comparable products in the price range and I thought it was the best. In the Spectra range we looked at a variety of other desks as well and likewise I thought it was the superior product."

Hark's Spectra gets used by a variety of clients including the British Film Institute. In March at the Birds Eye Film Festival it was used to mix a four-piece band playing to a silent black and white movie. At the Green Man Festival last year it was the console of choice, handling FOH at one of the main stages; the French Institute is another regular customer for its music events. Hornsby is optimistic that APB will continue to find a market place: "Whenever somebody wants an analogue console and we let them hear an APB desk they are always really happy to use it."

Holland PA in Amsterdam is a leading pro-audio equipment importers for Drawmer, Crest consoles, EAW and APB.



Chuck Augustowski, APB-DynaSonics

"I particularly like the fact that all of APB's products are designed to have very low phase shift characteristics and a wide bandwidth (approx. -3dB@150kHz on many models) in an effort to make them sound the best they can," says Martien Verdonk, managing director. "Also APB preamplifiers use Burr-Brown devices with the addition of proprietary discrete circuitry. In the Spectra I am particularly impressed by the master section, which is quite comprehensive and even includes a pair of Jensen Transformers for isolated alternate outputs which source can be selected pre or post master levels of any of the consoles' primary outputs."

Looking to the future APB has plans for hybrid products that it believes will take the best of analogue and digital. "That will be quite interesting," says Augustowski. "At the moment we do not feel that the best of digital circuitry can keep up with the best of analogue circuitry. That said I think that once digital matures further I will be a fan and, as many who know me are aware, we have been studying and researching such products for years. Eventually you will see pure digital products from APB – what and when has to stay confidential at this time."

It will be fascinating to see what they come up with. For the moment those looking for a high-performance analogue desk should definitely check out APB. 🐾

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