



Hercules Hits Mark 2

By Anthony B. Barthel

Agile controller/soundcard gets even more flexible

I've worked with Steve Sharp a number of times and I'm always impressed with his mixing skills. Part of his toolbox includes a Hercules DJ Console, which makes sense since he's the demo guy for that company. I've also had a Hercules controller but it just didn't float my boat, for whatever reason. There are a few key differences between Steve and myself, starting with the ability to masterfully mix music, but also including the fact that he uses a Windows computer with Virtual DJ software whereas I prefer a Mac with MegaSeg.

Enter 2007 and a new Hercules DJ Console—the Mark 2. Available as either a Windows-compatible or Mac-compatible model, the Mark 2 sports upgrades to some of the control surfaces as well as a general makeover. There are also more inputs to the unit as well.

The Hercules DJ Console is essentially a mixer, software control unit, and sound card all packaged in one affordable and compact package. It comes with a lid and a carrying strap

so you can carry the thing around like a notebook computer. Portability and affordability are part of the charm of this device, but some DJs have said it doesn't carry the appearance of a professional-grade DJ tool. The Mark 2 definitely addresses that issue, while adding key functionality as well.

At the recent Mobile Beat Conference I was given a Hercules unit to try out, and I did just that, starting with a full weekend's performance schedule. In a word, I was very impressed. I found the overall feel and precision of the unit to be comparable to that of a pro CD player.

Believe Your Ears

Here in the U.S. the name Hercules is associated more with one of Eddy Murphy's characters in *The Nutty Professor* than with computers, but over in Europe the company is famous for high-quality sound cards. The first thing I noticed both with this new console, as well as with its predecessor, is that the sound quality from this device is outstanding. Even my tin ear appreciates the difference in sound quality between the Hercules DJ Console, for example, and my iMic or Gigaport sound cards—it's that noticeable. You connect this device with either 1/8" stereo or RCA jacks to whatever's making it loud—your amp, powered speakers, etc. The other end goes to a USB connection on your computer.

Refreshing Mix

The uninitiated will probably be surprised at how agile the Hercules DJ Console is. As mentioned, its most obvious function is as a control surface and sound card for that DJ software in your computer. For many, just using a mouse and a keyboard to mix music doesn't cut it, so the DJ Console adds some familiar buttons to the mix so that DJs can use software as they would a dual CD player.

The DJ Console can also accommodate your traditional line-level inputs or even your turntables, via RCA inputs on the back. In other words, you could use the Hercules Console to mix the output from your dual CD player or turntables or even iPods® with the audio from your hard drive-based files. Accessing each with buttons

on the top of the unit, you can really go nuts connecting all sorts of sources for tuneage.

But wait, there's more, as the TV ads say. On the front is a 1/4" mic-level input with its own volume control. If you push the volume control button, the mic's on. Software settings also allow you to duck the music volume or just leave it as is. On the opposite side is a 1/4" stereo headphone-out with a deck assign knob.

For a little device, there's a lot going on in the DJ Console. You could theoretically dump all your gear and just show up with a notebook computer, a mic, and a Hercules console, and you're ready to rock, which is their whole vision. Add other sources and you've got even more possibilities and even greater flexibility.

Virtually Tactile

While the Hercules DJ Console comes with Traktor, from Native Instruments, I'm not a big fan of that software. One of the nice things that computer-based DJing has done is to accommodate various styles, and my personal preference is MegaSeg when playing back from

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Hercules DJ Console Mark 2

I/O Specs

- * 2 stereo outputs (4-channel)
- * 2 stereo inputs (4-channel)
 - Line level (for CD players)
 - Phono level (for turntables)
- * 1 microphone input
- * 1 headphone output for monitoring
- * Powered by the USB bus

System Requirements

- * Processor: Pentium 3 / Athlon 800 MHz or higher
- * USB 2.0 or USB 1.1 port
- * 256 MB RAM or higher
- * Windows XP

MSRP: \$399.99 (STREET PRICE LESS THAN \$300)
WWW.HERCULES.COM



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"It is an incredible honor to be voted 'Best Dance Music Retailer' and 'Best Dance Music Specialty Retailer' at the prestigious Winter Music Conference's IDMA ceremony," said Beatport CEO Jonas Tempel. "As a competitor amongst some of the industry's top players, it legitimizes Beatport's success in these fields. Since our launch in 2004, Beatport has worked hard to become one of the top online electronic music retailers and now, thanks to this great honor, we're being recognized in the community as well."

For more about Beatport, go to: www.beatport.com.

Hardware Going Native

Native Instruments has launched a number of initiatives to make their Traktor software more accessible. The first is a new controller compatibility program that will make it easier for DJs to find the best possible performance controller for their Traktor-based setups. Selected digital DJ controllers are now labeled to be "Traktor Ready" or "Traktor 3 LE Included." As part of this program, Traktor 3 LE is now shipping as the standard DJ software with a wide range of digital DJ controllers from renowned manufacturers.

Hardware controllers that are labeled "Traktor Ready" are guaranteed to be fully compatible with Traktor 3, and to meet certain quality and functionality requirements. For every "Traktor Ready," a configuration file for Traktor 3 is available, allowing users to get started with their controller and Traktor with minimal setup efforts.

DJ controllers that also carry the label "Traktor 3 LE Included" go one step further. They also include a copy of Traktor 3 LE that is preconfigured for instant plug-and-play performance. Traktor 3 LE offers two decks with high-quality time-stretching, an integrated mixer, performance effects, loop and cueing functions, a powerful track database, and seamless Beatport shop integration. Traktor 3 LE is an ideal way to enter the world of digital DJing.

Current "Traktor 3 LE Included" controllers are the Behringer BCD 3000, Hercules DJ Console



MK2 Mac Edition, the Numark Total Control, and the Vestax VCI-100, among others. Traktor 3 LE is also included with the AUDIO KONTROL 1 interface as well as the forthcoming AUDIO 8 DJ interface from Native Instruments.

The "Traktor SCRATCH Certified" certification program will enable selected premium DJ mixers with integrated audio interface to fully integrate with the company's upcoming vinyl-controlled DJ system. The certification will ensure that these mixers will work in perfect harmony with Traktor SCRATCH. Owners of certified mixers will also be able to purchase a special-priced Traktor SCRATCH Upgrade Kit, which upgrades the mixer into a high-performance DJ system that is ready to be hooked up to a computer, turntables, and CD players. "Traktor SCRATCH Certified" mixers currently include the d.2Pro and d.4Pro models from Mackie, and the Zero4 and Zero8 mixers from Korg.

Go to www.native-instruments.com for further details.

Getting Crafty

Mixcraft 3, an extremely easy to use multi-track music recording software studio, has been released by Acoustica. Version 3 is a major update to the Mixcraft recording studio software. Mixcraft 3 offers a host of powerful new features, including a newly redesigned modern interface, automatic remixing with tempo detection, and support for Acid™ and Garage Band™ loops. Mixcraft 3 includes a library of dozens of Song Construction Kits and sound effects, with styles as diverse as country, blues, hip-hop, rock, metal, punk and reggae. Also included are sixteen high-quality audio effects such as EQ, compression, reverb, and delay.

Acoustica also offers DJ Twist & Burn™, a song manipulation program that lets you warp, bend and mix your music. Edit and trim the latest singles and remix them with oldies-but-goodies for weddings, raves, or whatever. In addition to automatically detecting the exact tempo and key of the song, it will also create precisely beat-synched fades from song to song. If you are into karaoke, just click the automatic vocal remover feature. More on Acoustica's products can be found at www.acoustica.com.

Look for review of these Acoustica programs in an upcoming issue of *Mobile Beat*. ■

PRODUCT REVIEW

a Mac. That doesn't mean Traktor's bad, it's just not my thing. So, I plugged the console in, installed the control panel software, made a few adjustments, and I was up and running. Easy-breezy.

While Hercules' previous device offered the same sound quality, I didn't feel that there was the precision in the control surface, but that could have also been how my software choice interfaced with this hardware. This time around, the controls responded as quickly as any dual CD player I've used. Hercules has definitely improved the feel of the buttons.

I also like the way the large jog wheels work on this device, and how their functionality is customizable by some software. With the control panel, you can also turn their function on and off. I found that they were very precise and gave me more control over my software than I previously enjoyed, especially for finding cue points or for editing loops. Some software also lets you use

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them for scratching, but my momma told me scratching was best done in private.

Apparently, those Europeans like sliders for volume control and knobs for tempo, but one of the nice things is that you can re-map the keys, which I did. Again, this is where software-based DJing-rocks—in the sheer flexibility of your playback tool to accommodate your preferences. After the adjustments, the sliders worked just like the sliders on my old CD player, allowing me to adjust the tempo of the song. There are also treble, mid, and bass control knobs and pitch bend buttons for each playback side.

One of the more innovative things about this device is the large knob in the middle, which can actually act as your computer's mouse. There are also left- and right-click mouse buttons below that so your hands spend more time close to the mix, rather than fishing around for your computer mouse.

About the only thing I didn't like about this device is that it's not 19" rack mountable, but that's not what it's intended for. The intention is that a DJ can bring his or her notebook computer and the Hercules DJ Console to a performance and easily setup and plug in and be ready to go. Still, I think there would be a huge market for a 19" rack mountable version of this device. I'd certainly buy one for my compact slant rack system, especially with the precision, quality and responsiveness they've engineered into this newer model. But, even without that form factor, I can say without hesitation that love the Hercules DJ Console Mark 2. ■