Lynx Aurora(n)

GEORGE SHILLING explores a reborn converter and sees the light with 32 channels

The Lynx Aurora in various guises has long been highly regarded and praised by audio professionals (notably including high-end mastering houses) as a great sounding converter, priced competitively compared to other 'high-end' options. This brand new version represents a ground-up redesign of the concept, and a rethink of its presentation. The Aurora(n) is a modular converter, interface and stand-alone recording system. Now conceived as a 'platform', the 1RU box includes interchangeable 'LSlot' expansion cards and I/O modules, with the implication that as technology changes, further options will become available.

Current options for connectivity are USB, Pro Tools HD (or HDX), Thunderbolt or Dante (Ethernet), with I/O numbers of eight, 16, 24 or 32. The review model was equipped with Thunderbolt and 16 I/O across two A8IOE cards, each with a pair of DB25 connectors for the inputs and outputs. You can fit three to five expansion boards. There are 8-channel Analogue I/O and 16-channel Digital I/O expansion boards currently available, with plans for mic preamp and analogue summing cards. The LM-DIG digital I/O module provides 24-bit AES/EBU connections on Yamaha digital I/O pinout 25-pin D-subs. However, you cannot buy an Aurora(n) without an analogue board, and only a single LM-DIG is supported per Aurora(n). Word Clock on the rear (1 in 3 out) and two Headphone connections on the front (each with dedicated volume knob) are standard. Also on the front is a bright, colourful and clear 480 x 128 TFT LCD display for metering and menu system, controlled with stylish illuminated rubber silicone triangular buttons and a scroll wheel. Notably, there is a microSD card slot. This allows recording of up to 32 channels of broadcast WAV files at any standard sample rate. This could be used for 'confidence' recording during production, and can turn the Aurora(n) into a standalone recording device. You can play back single or multitrack recordings to the Aurora(n) outputs — useful for installations or performances needing live playback. You can use microSD-XC cards up to 2TB.

Circuitry is passively cooled so there are no fans — just plenty of venting. Rack ears are sturdily reinforced so this should withstand mobile or tour usage. A new generation of AD/DA chips is utilised, boasting -113dB THD+N and 119dB dynamic range. The clocking claims to be 'mastering grade' with new technology they call SynchroLock II, claiming a 300,000:1 improvement in jitter and a five second lock time. With the three Word Clock outputs this makes a useful master clock for devices downstream.

Recording

The friendly, helpful User Manual tells you all you need to know to get working, with more information available online. Setup for Thunderbolt use was a breeze; you need to download a single Mac installer and this sets up the Core Audio driver and places the simple Lynx Mixer app in the Applications folder. Restart the computer and you are good to go.

Mains power for the switching power supply is connected via a standard IEC socket. The unit is fired up with a front panel rocker switch which activates some reassuring relay clunks and brings the front panel to life. Boot up is quick. A red-illuminated Record button is for setting the microSD recording into action; some setup is required before doing that. There is also a Play button for obvious purpose. Up and Down buttons' functions include Take selection and navigation of certain menus; their colour changes to indicate which mode they are in. The main display shows either colourful horizontal stereo input and output meters for channel pairs, or (toggling with the Meters/Exit button) vertical meters for all (16 channels in the case of the review model's configuration), along with essential sample rate, clock, and Take information. Counters tick over during record and playback (forwards and count-down for the latter).

A Phones Source button enables selection of any pair of Analogue Inputs (16), Thunderbolt Outputs (16) or SD card playback channels (32). Function brings up a Functions menu, you can toggle through the 10 items and press Select to get into them. These include Clock Setup, Analogue Trim, Routing and so on, and also microSD Record Setup and Sessions file management. You can record from Analogue Input or Thunderbolt Playback channels, electing to record 2, 4, 8, 16 (or 32 when expanded) channels, and which bank of eight to start from. Parameters and selections are adjusted using the Rotary Encoder which has a light clicking feel, and can be pushed to Select. Operation is straightforward, logical and I found everything easy to navigate. The most fiddly bit is naming Sessions (effectively folders) and Takes, one letter at a time.

Onboard SD recording is a great idea and with the forthcoming microphone preamp module I can see this being a wonderfully convenient one-box mobile rig. Unsurprisingly, the sound quality is superb, and with such flexibility of I/O and interfacing the Aurora(n) makes for a terrific modern A-D/D-A solution. �

resolution/VERDICT

PROS All-new design for this popular interface, modular design makes upgrades straightforward, onboard microSD recording and playback, in-built software mixer.

CONS microSD Record Setup a little fiddly.

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