

# Soundcraft Si Performer 1

## Digital Sound & Lighting Console

With the new Si Performer range, for the first time ever you can control lighting and sound from the same desk. But what's it like to use in practice?

MIKE CROFTS

The Soundcraft Si Performer has grabbed a lot of attention since its launch as the first digital audio mixing console to incorporate DMX lighting control. Initially offered in formats with either 24 or 32 mic inputs, called the Si Performer 2 and Si Performer 3 respectively, the range has recently been expanded to include a more compact model, the Si Performer 1.

In a single sentence, the Si Performer 1 is a fully featured compact digital audio mixer with a maximum of 80 inputs available to mix, with onboard Lexicon, BSS, Dbx and Studer DSP, and incorporating a single universe of DMX512 lighting control. It's a genius

**"It's hard to find anything not to like about this console..."**

idea, and though it's not intended to run the lighting at major events, it certainly has the potential to provide an all-in-one show-control solution for smaller venues and travelling performers.

Soundcraft have taken a lot of trouble to emphasise that the Si Performer is first and foremost an audio console,

and it's not intended to replace sophisticated dedicated lighting controllers. Audio quality is what the Si Performer is all about, and given that the mic preamps are the same as those used in Soundcraft's larger Vi consoles, and that the built-in effects processors are by Harman stablemates BSS and Lexicon, it's off to more than a flying start.

First impressions are that the Si Performer 1 is a very compact unit, being of 19-inch rackmountable width (it comes with detachable side pods to facilitate this) and roughly square in footprint, although there's nothing about the main surface which looks cluttered or cramped. All the physical controls are 'proper-sized' buttons and knobs with ample finger space in between, which is important if you're living with a desk for any length of time. The general surface layout follows what has more or less become standard for small digital mixers, with a large 'channel strip' section with instant-access parameter controls in the top-left area and an LCD screen over to the right, which is used for configuration, detailed parameter adjustments and so on. The



### Soundcraft Si Performer 1 £3600

#### PROS

- Knob Bubble Pin, obviously.
- Top-quality compact digital console with excellent audio performance and great flexibility.
- Excellent-quality Lexicon and BSS effects included.
- Fast scene memory store and recall.
- Good, clear, easy surface to read and drive.
- DMX lighting control as standard!

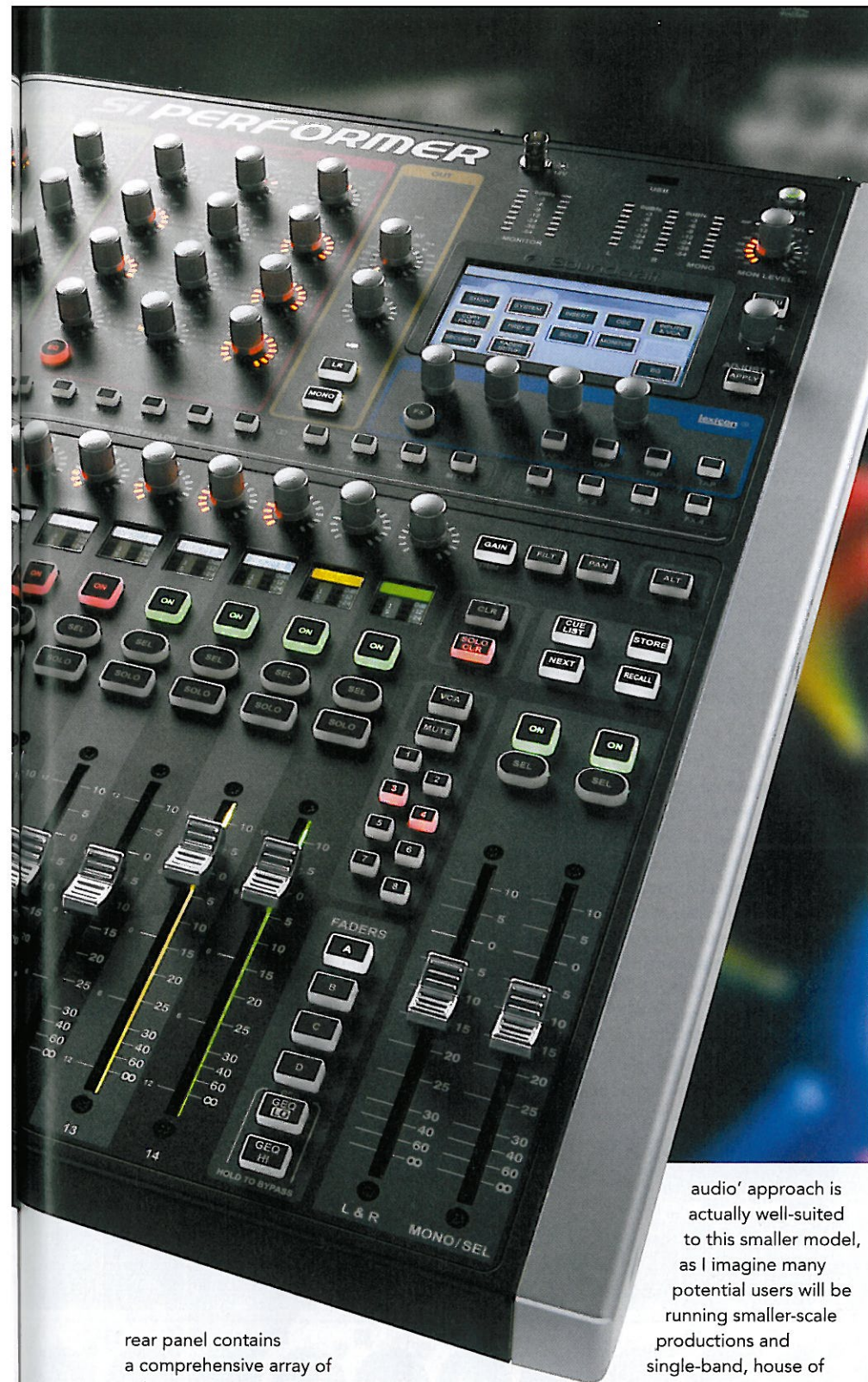
#### CONS

- I really couldn't find one! Although I would love a user-customisable FaderGlow one day...

#### SUMMARY

An easy-to-use, great-sounding console with many useful features — including, uniquely, DMX lighting control.





rear panel contains a comprehensive array of in/out connectivity (both analogue and digital), and a noticeable difference between this I/O panel and the one on the similar-looking Si Expression mixers is the presence of a second optional module slot — as well as, of course, the DMX socket.

### Performance Piece

We've covered other small-format Soundcraft mixers in a lot of detail, so forgive me if I take certain features and functions as being understood — there's a wealth of information on these products to be found in both the *SOS* and the Soundcraft web sites. A 'basic

audio' approach is actually well-suited to this smaller model, as I imagine many potential users will be running smaller-scale productions and single-band, house of worship or AV setups rather than large, complicated shows.

If a future expansion is called for, the mix bus, processing and output side of all the models is the same, which should make trading up a painless process.

Looking at the Si Performer 1 as a straightforward audio mixer in a little more detail, there are 16 mic preamps with local XLR inputs, patched by default to the first 16 of 20 available mono processing channels. Because the Si Performer 1 only has room for 14 channel faders on the top deck, two of these channels will, if used, have to be

on another fader layer, but there's no restriction on assigning whichever mic inputs you like to any fader on any layer. Any mono processing channels not used for mic inputs can be assigned to mono line inputs 1-8, effects returns, or the left/right channels of the AES standard digital input. All channels are fully endowed with all the usual functions such as a high-filter, four-band parametric EQ and comprehensive dynamics — and, as with other Soundcraft digital products, the processing engines run all the time so utilising more processing doesn't place any additional load on the engines. The attractive and useful FaderGlow feature doesn't actually light up mono input channels (unless two channels are linked together, in which case they happen to be the same colour as DMX master channels) but the LCD info strip comes up with white letters and they are clear, bright and easy enough to read in dark or daylight. As an aside, I'd really like an option to customise the FaderGlow assignments and colours so that I could make any active channel light up, including the mono inputs, such that 'no glow' would mean that that fader was not assigned to anything or the channel was disabled... but that's just me.

The factory default layers can be freely reconfigured, and the 14 'channel' faders can be assigned to control any input, return or mix bus (including DMX masters!) with the exception of the main LR or mono buses which have their own dedicated faders. Switching between layers is a matter of pressing buttons A to D as appropriate, and I love the smooth fast motorised fader movement and the really useful channel LCD screens (the 'scribble strip', if you will) which make it practically impossible to lose track of what's being controlled at any moment in time. This feature alone is making me start to think seriously about moving on from my own much-loved but now slightly out-dated digital console. Provided that the Performer is currently in an appropriate layer control mode, the faders can also be flipped to control the onboard graphic equaliser — in other words you can only flip to controlling the graphic EQ whilst in a mix-bus layer or output channel selection to which the graphic can be applied.

### Fade Away

Digital mixers must necessarily re-use the motorised faders for a number of





» functions, and one of the most common is the 'sends on faders' method of creating auxiliary mixes, where a mix bus is selected and then the Sends On Faders button is pressed, whereby the channel faders become aux sends until the Sends On Faders mode is exited. It's quick, obvious, and works a treat — but there's a definite risk of forgetting to exit SOF mode and trying to adjust the front-of-house mix, which of course only results in changes to, say, one of the monitor mixes — which can be intensely annoying. The Si Performer offers a much neater way of controlling the mix buses by a system the makers call TOTEM, which stands for The One Touch Easy Mix, which sounds good to me. There is a row of dedicated mix-bus buttons numbered 1-14 and a single press on any of them will re-focus the fader section on that particular mix bus, with all non-associated functions and controls (throughout the whole surface) appearing 'dead' so that only the correct mix sends can be adjusted. It's a safer and simpler way of operating, and I really do like this thoughtful and practical design.

The Si Performer contains the expected control functions such as VCAs, mute groups and output assignments, but it's worth pointing out that everything is easy to use, and if you find yourself alone on an island with this console without the manual it's pretty easy to figure the functions out anyway. So long as it's not

passing live audio to a live system you can go ahead and press as many buttons and turn as many encoders as you like to discover what they do, and no harm will ensue. Outboard connectivity is another high-scoring area for the Si Performer 1 — I remember using an Si Expression and being somewhat disappointed that I couldn't use a digital snake from the stage and record direct multitrack audio at the same time, as there was only a single-option card slot. The Performer consoles have two card slots, so this and indeed many other options are available using suitable cards for connecting Dante and MADI and such. Harman's HiQnet network-control protocol makes wireless connectivity available, and there's a well-featured remote control app, called ViSi, available for download.

### Lighting Talk

One of the most innovative aspects of the Si Performer is the ability to control a single universe of DMX lighting directly from the console, and although it's a huge forward-thinking design step the application of this feature is very simple, even if the user (like myself) has only a basic understanding of the DMX protocol. There are four individual DMX layers, which are accessed by holding the Alt button when selecting a fader layer (buttons A-D), and the DMX master

### Alternatives

No other range of audio consoles incorporates DMX lighting control, but if you don't need that, check out Soundcraft's Si Expression series, Allen & Heath's Qu series, Presonus' StudioLive AI consoles, the Yamaha 01V96i and Behringer's X32.

controls can be assigned to faders in any of the standard 'audio' control layers and included in scene-memory programming, which is how I suspect this feature will be most used. An interesting point here is that audio board ops tend to regard the unity position of fader travel as 'full on', whereas in the LX world you push it to the top of the slot, so if audio bus masters and DMX masters are presented together on the same fader layer some of them may well just look 'wrong' to an audio engineer. It's possible, as with most other functions, to exclude the DMX side of things from scene memory changes, so in effect the lighting control side is both completely integrated with the audio control and yet completely independent — so using the Si Performer's wireless control capability, a second operator with the ViSi app should be able to control the lighting whilst the sound engineer looks after the audio. The possibilities for future development of these features are extremely interesting!

I used the Si Performer 1 for a few live rehearsals in my studio space, and I took it along to use on a live gig with a function







The gloriously named Knob Bubble Pin feature lets you keep an eye on one parameter's value while tweaking another.

band. I was expecting it to perform faultlessly, and it met my expectations in every respect, being extremely quick and easy to set up (which pleased the event organiser) and producing a particularly warm, full vocal sound courtesy of the onboard Lexicon reverb processor (which very much pleased the female lead singer). The effects are easy to dial in and control, and although detailed parameter adjustment is there for the asking I made only minimal changes to the basic call-up settings, trying out

a combination of room reverb and stereo delay (and of course having a laugh with the pitch shifter, which I'm afraid had to be done).

I didn't get the chance to use the Si Performer in a theatre show, but I did use the scene memory to store band settings and tried out a few quick changes to see how easy it was.

All the audio I/O — including, of course, that DMX control output — live on the desk's rear panel.

Simply pressing the Store button saves the scene and the Next button recalls the next scene in the cue list straight away. If you're a bit ahead of yourself with your scene selection, pressing Alt and Next together will step back through the list. To make quick changes within an existing scene there's an Update button on the touchscreen, which is safer than using the store button as that simply adds a new scene on to the end of the existing list.

### Keeping Up

One of the many joys of digital equipment is the potential for upgrades and improvements without having to change any of the hardware itself, and as the Si Performer 1 was delivered prior to the latest firmware revision I downloaded the necessary files (and instructions) from the Soundcraft web site. Firmware version 1.6 fixes three minor bugs and introduces additional capability including extended solo modes, preamp control for BSS Soundweb London networked interfaces, a pre-dynamics global bus send option, support for ViSi 2.1 features, and my personal favourite, which rejoices in the name of Knob Bubble Pin. Rising above the obvious 'you can get a cream for that' comments, if you've played with an Si Performer you'll be familiar with the screen pop-up that shows absolute values and a graphical reflection of whichever parameter you choose to adjust with a rotary encoder (for example, frequency band parameters within the EQ section). Until now, this pop-up only stayed on screen until something else was touched, which wasn't always too convenient and necessitated re-tweaking the encoder

slightly to bring back the display. Now, a little pin graphic appears which, when touched, forces the parameter pop-up to remain on screen until unpinned by a second touch. Useful, and nicely named.

The firmware update process is really simple, and takes only a few minutes — having placed the downloaded files in the root directory of a USB drive, all you have to do is access the uploader function (all the instructions are in the Read Me text file) and the process is more or less automatic.

### Time To Say Goodbye

I will soon have to pack the Si Performer 1 and return it to its UK distributors Sound Technology, and I'll be genuinely sorry to part with it, especially knowing that if I had the thing for a year I probably still wouldn't have exploited its many capabilities. It's the sort of handy, go-anywhere live-sound tool that just fits so well into all kinds of applications, and it's a pleasure to use. It's hard to find anything not to like about this console, although I'd probably go for the Performer 2 or 3 simply because it would be better for theatre shows where I need lots of radio mics on the same layer. Occasionally the console demonstrated that it's more intelligent than I am and wouldn't let me switch straight to where I wanted to go, but it was always for a good reason, like if I was in the wrong layer for the function I was trying to access, or more commonly if I hadn't fully completed a parameter edit or assignment before trying to return to the home menu screen.

A major attraction of the Si Performer 1 will surely be for single operators (AV comes particularly to mind) who need to control both sound and light, and up to now have needed two separate consoles. *Voilà!* Here it is, all in one box. Soundcraft have packed a staggering level of functionality and performance into this diminutive console, and the more I use it the more I appreciate what it can do — I shouldn't be surprised if the original design brief was something along the lines of 'think of everything you can possibly include for the size and price, and go build it.' ■■■

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