

by Andrew Roberts

APB Dynasonics H1020

This may be the king of the mid-priced/rack mount mixer class.

By now, most of us should be familiar with APB Dynasonics — the small manufacturer that, in the face of industry-wide digitization, has chosen to embark on a path of building high-quality analog consoles for the pro user. Following the success of the company's large format Spectra series consoles (reviewed in *PAR* March 2007), they have delved into making utilitarian boards for smaller applications. Called the Pro Rack series, this series features a monitor console and a recently released house console called the H1020. To me, the reason for this foray is easy to understand. For every job I have using a 32-channel or larger-frame console, I probably have 10 that are suitable for a small-frame board of 16 channels or less.

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KEY FEATURES

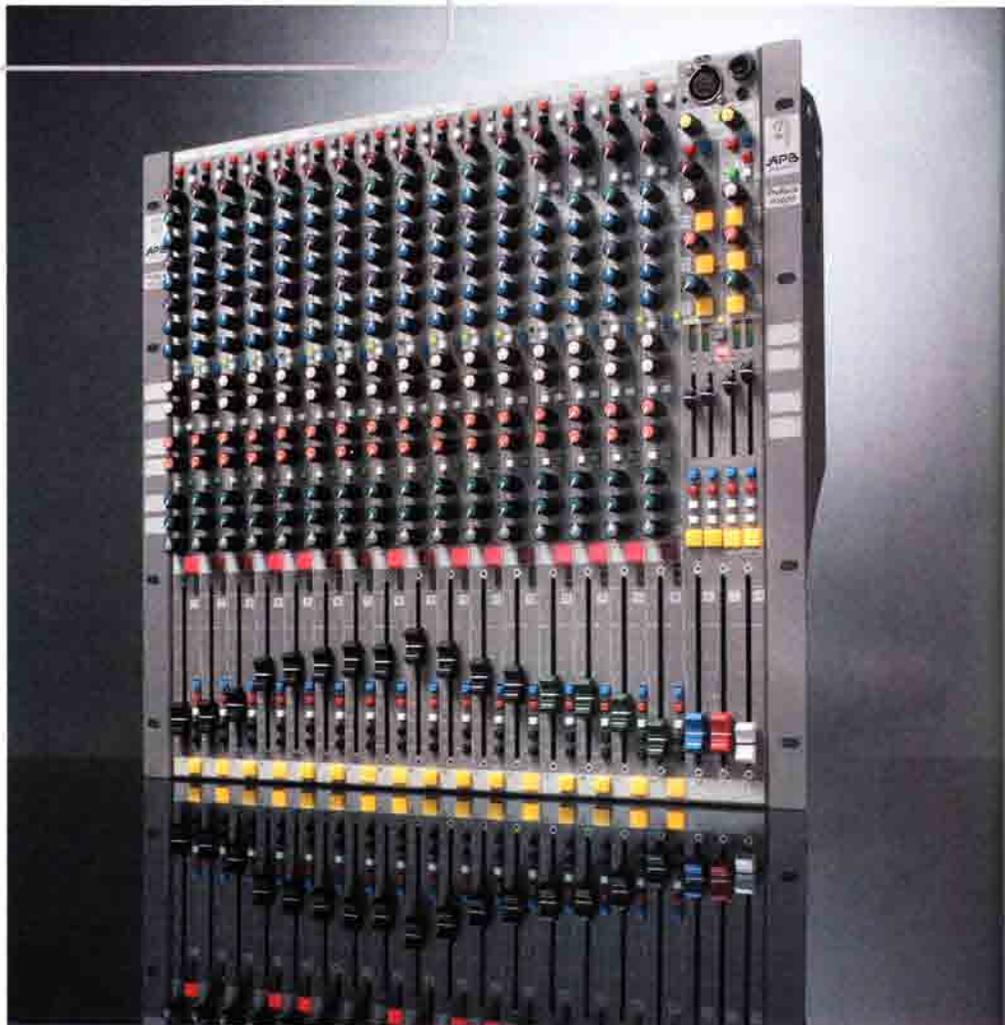
Mic preamps in total; 12 mono mic/line inputs; four dual-mono/stereo mic/line inputs; per channel: phantom power, polarity reverse, mic/line switch, mic pad switch (combo mic/line/pad switch on stereo inputs), variable frequency high-pass filters with 20-400Hz sweep range at 12dB per octave; four-band EQ; six aux sends; L/R, center, and mono mix bus assignments along with additional assignment switches to subgroups 1-2 and 3-4 with balanced XLR outputs, TRS bus inputs and TRS insert connectors; much more.

PRICE

\$3,400

CONTACT

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FEATURES

The H1020 has a rack-mountable chassis with a rotating input/output bay that allows the board to be configured vertically or horizontally. The chassis, being rack-mountable, is 19-inches wide. It measures 17.47-inches (or 10 rack spaces) deep or high (depending on orientation) and it has a maximum depth of 10.32-inches (when the I/O pod is positioned for horizontal use).

The H1020 has 16 input channels with 12 being dedicated mono and four channels configured for mono/stereo use. All of the board's 16 channels have XLR inputs (in fact, the stereo channels have two) and feature preamplifiers based on the renowned Spectra series desks.

The dedicated mono channels also have 1/4-inch line input jacks, a TRS insert jack (for unbalanced send and return) and a TRS jack for direct output (selectable as pre-fader, post-insert, or post-fader). These mono strips have individual phantom power switching, a mic/line switch (to allow for line level

input on XLR), polarity reversal, a pad switch (-26dB) and an input gain control. The mono strips are outfitted with a powerful EQ section that features a variable high-pass filter (20-400Hz), a high frequency control (+/- 15dB shelving at 10kHz), a sweepable hi-mid (400Hz-8kHz with a fixed Q of one octave and +/- 15dB), a sweepable low-mid (80Hz-2kHz, +/- 15dB, fixed Q), and a low frequency shelf (+/- 15dB @ 60Hz). The EQ section (except for the high-pass filter) is engaged by depressing a pushbutton.

The Aux section on the mono channels features six sends that are tied to a "pre" switch by pairs (1-2, 3-4 and 5-6). There is also a master switch to toggle the whole sec-

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tion's (1-6) pre setting between pre-fader and pre-EQ. Additionally, sends five and six can be coupled to form a stereo pair with one knob becoming the pan and one dedicated to volume for the pair.

The channel control section of each mono strip features a pan control, a large mute switch (internally illuminated), a six-segment LED meter, a 100mm fader, assignment buttons (Mono, Center, L/R, 1-2, and 3-4) and a large PFL switch (also internally illuminated).

As mentioned earlier, the Stereo channels on the H1020 have dual XLR and 1/4-inch inputs. They also have 1/4-inch direct outs but are lacking the inserts seen on the mono strips. As would be expected, these stereo channels feature a scaled-back EQ section (with only one sweepable mid control [200Hz-6kHz] but the same HPF, low and high controls) but, surprisingly, it has dual input trim controls, dual-mono/stereo source switches, a phantom power switch and a polarity reversal switch. This allows the strip to truly function as either a stereo line strip or two mono mic channels (except that one will be without use of the polarity reversal). The stereo strips have a similar Aux section to the mono channels (with a mono sum of the left/right signal feeding the auxes) except that aux sends five and six are only capable of controlling one side of the signal (5 left, 6 right) when in stereo mode. The channel control section of the stereo strips is virtually identical to the mono channels except that the LED ladder is broken into

two 3-segment ladders (for left and right) and the pan control is replaced with a balance control (for stereo line use) that reverts to a pan control when the strip is used as a mono channel.

The Master section on the H1020 is home to three 100mm master faders (Mono, Center and L-R) with corresponding LEDs to indicate signal present. Just above this main

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fader bank is the sub-group section. There you'll find four small faders with assignment buttons and PFL buttons. Above the sub-group area are four 8-segment LED ladders. These can show level at the Main busses (M, C, L&R) or, with the push of a button, the four sub-groups. The L-R ladder also shows signal whenever a PFL button is depressed on the console. Just above the Sub faders are the Aux masters. Each of these six rotary controls has a corresponding AFL solo button (internally illuminated like all the PFL buttons on the desk) and a solitary signal LED. The board has a full-fledged monitor section

with source selections, headphone outputs (both 1/4-inch and eighth-inch), headphone level, a monitor output control (great for feeding a cue wedge) and a stereo alt output. There is also a four-pin light socket and an intensity control.

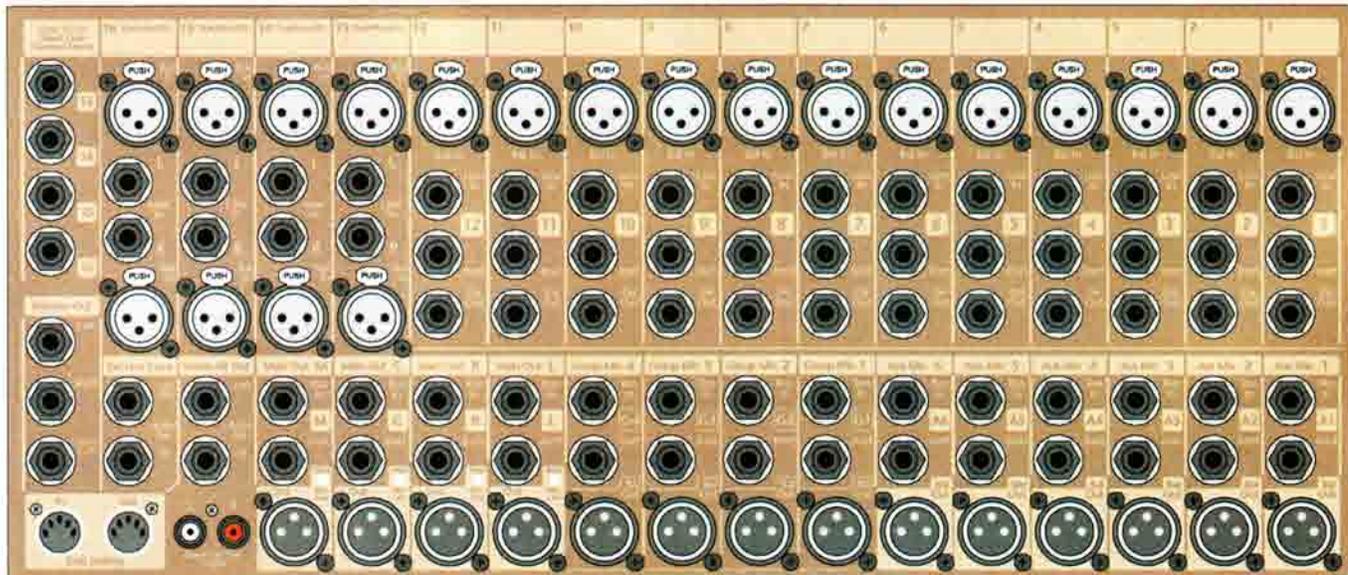
As mentioned, the input/output bay can rotate ninety degrees to facilitate vertical or horizontal (or in between if you have a slant rack case) use. All of the console's main, group and aux outs show up on XLR. All of these connections are mirrored to the inputs. That means that they are turned upside down so that the release tab on the cable's connector will be pointing down and you won't have to try and squeeze your fingers between that and adjacent insert jacks (all of these outputs have them). All of the group masters also have TRS jacks for Bus inputs (handy when linking consoles). Speaking of linking, the H1020 has solo linking jacks (in and out) for linking multiple consoles and maintaining a solitary monitor point (headphones on the master desk).

IN USE

Based on my previous experience with APB's Spectra board, I had great confidence that this desk would sound and work at a level befitting professional use. So, armed with that confidence, I put the board to use.

My first adventure was a speech by Presidential candidate, Senator Barack Obama, to a group of hundreds of supporters. The venue was a two-story open area in an art museum complete with lots of marble surfaces. The Senator's good mic technique (using a handheld wireless with a hyper-cardioid capsule) and the APB's pristine sonics

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A drawing of the H1020's rear connections.

and powerful EQ (as well as a slew of distributed loudspeakers) combined to yield very intelligible results despite the surroundings. Sending autonomous feeds for things like press or a recording deck was a breeze with the H1020's many outputs and routing options.

Later, I used the board on some shows with a dance band that had a house mix and three monitor mixes. Just like my experience with the Spectra console, I was amazed by this console's superior sonics. I strongly suspect that there is not a console in this class, with this feature density, that even comes close to sounding as good as the H1020 does.

My last use of the H1020 was as a dedicated monitor console. This was a performance by gospel singer Martha Munizzi, and she was performing with a keyboardist, three backup singers and pre-recorded tracks. We found that the console was adept at handling the wide variety of signal levels coming into the desk and it processed all that incoming material and spit it out as five great-sounding wedge mixes with a cue wedge. While not as visually impressive as larger analog or digital consoles, this APB makes up for lower channel count with excellent functionality and stellar sound.

SUMMARY

Like a fine German automobile, the APB H1020 has been meticulously designed by people that know what users need. From rugged input and output jacks, to the variety of "pre" settings, to the powerful channel EQ, to the mirrored output connectors, to the adjustable lamp, this console is as well thought out as any I've seen — regardless of frame size. Add to that the board's superb sonics, and you have a killer combination.

My only gripes are that the AC power connector is in an awkward place that seems ripe for accidental disconnection. I would suggest putting a strip of gaffer's tape near the connector to prevent this from happening. Also, the high and low frequency controls on the channel EQ aren't labeled with frequency points. That's something that guest engineers would probably appreciate. Lastly, what happens when you jam so many features into such a small amount of space? You lose the place for your board tape. The modest buffer at the top of each channel strip was too narrow for my 1/4-inch tape but that's a trade I'll make any day as the rewards far outweigh this minor inconvenience (there is a small amount of real estate where a grease pencil could work).

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Overall, the H1020 is, like its larger sibling the Spectra, a remarkable board. It exudes a very rugged feel and at every turn, is a pro piece. I own a high-end, small frame console and a couple other mid-priced rack-mount consoles and, to be candid, think that the H1020 is likely the king of this class. At \$3400, it isn't cheap. For the feature set and sound, it is an incredible bargain. Worship house installs, nightclubs, schools, and sound reinforcement providers from local to international are great candidates for this board.

Andrew Roberts is owner of Rockville Music Service, a live sound firm, in Washington, D.C.