

By Nate Sherwood &amp; Mike

# DJ CONTROLLERS & AUDIO ANALYZERS

This month we test a DJ controller and take a quick tour of audio analyzers. Nate Sherwood checks out Stanton's "DaScratch," while our audio guru Mike Klasco makes his way around two audio analyzers.



Stanton's SCS.3d offers easy control over most DJ software.

## Stanton SCS.3d

In 2008, Stanton Magnetics created quite a buzz with its flagship SC System product line. The company's newest edition, the SCS.3d (aka DaScratch), is a touch-sensitive MIDI controller designed to integrate seamlessly into today's most popular DJ and production software.

Upon receipt of this futuristic-looking controller, I was instantly drawn to the ergonomic layout, solid build quality, and the compact design which would easily accommodate any cramped DJ booth. Before we talk about the hands-on usage of this unit, let's break down the physical layout. From a birds-eye view, DaScratch features three main sections. The top portion contains two touch-sensitive sliders (one for Gain, one for Pitch Control) and a Mode Select section where the DJ can jump between FX, Looping, EQ adjustments, etc. The center of the unit boasts a 4-inch circular touch pad which can be used in three different modes. The touch surfaces are built on Stanton's StanTouch platform—the surface is extremely accurate and can recognize multiple finger movements simultaneously. The bottom row of the controller contains four traditional buttons used for controlling Play, Cue, Sync and Tap functions.

The left and right edges of the SDS.3d have a flush magnetic strip

which can to lock multiple SDS.3d units firmly together. This allows any user to design their own custom interface by connecting an infinite number of units together. The back of the unit has a removable plastic cage which protects the USB input. The unit is powered via this input, so it is not necessary to have an external power supply.

Initial setup of DaScratch was pretty simple. To ensure that everything works perfectly, I'd suggest making sure that you're running a compatible version of your DJ software (not all versions are compatible). It's also suggested that you install the Stanton's revolutionary software fittingly titled DaRouter. This intuitive little program acts as the brain for the SCS.3d by using "Bome's MIDI Translator" to communicate information between your computer and the controller itself. This feature provides visual feedback to the DJ; whenever a fader for button is triggered, the LEDs on DaScratch will flash accordingly. This means that the DJ knows exactly which signal is being sent to their DJ software in real time. DaScratch could be used with generic MIDI mapping; however, this limits the mode functions and the visual feedback.

As soon as I started to demo the unit, I was immediately impressed

with the comprehensive preset options which come preloaded into DaRouter. Presets are included for: Traktor DJ Studio; Traktor Scratch; Serato Scratch LIVE; and Ableton Live. Other presets are readily available via the Stanton web site as well. Getting everything set up is as easy as selecting the Traktor setup via the software and simply loading the TKS file in Traktor. Instantly, every control is mapped out for playing tracks, working effects, manipulating the EQs, and using loops. There is no individual MIDI learning needed.

Toggling between different Modes is extremely straightforward. Stanton has put a lot of effort into designing the controls for DaScratch. A prime example is the functionality of the two individual faders. The gain fader is designed to work in absolute mode, meaning that it follows your exact finger motions. Conversely, the pitch control fader operates in relative mode, enabling much more precise adjustments. The central StanTouch surface can operate in three different functions. Circle Mode acts as a virtual jog wheel and is perfect for scratching and scrolling through songs, Slider Mode works exactly as a traditional three-band linear EQ, while Button Mode is a clever option for triggering loops and samples.

There is also a Deck button which is used when the DJ is using a single SCS.3d. By depressing this button, you can quickly jump from Deck A to Deck B with ease. Being that the volume faders are controlled via DaScratch, there is no need for an external mixer. As far as the actual response of the SCS.3d, I was pretty impressed. Although there is a noticeable amount of latency, its rather minimal. Being able to jump from deck to deck while working the

effects and EQs for each deck independently all from one tiny unit is amazing.

I tried mixing manually as well as using the internal SYNC function in Traktor. I feel that DaScratch works best when you let the program do the beatmatching for you. Mixing with a touch-sensitive fader is fun, but it definitely takes some getting used to. Basic scratching worked fine, but as soon as I started to get a little aggressive with my fingers DaScratch couldn't quite keep up. But let's face it: This controller wasn't meant to replace a high-powered turntable; it's designed to manipulate digital files and act as a virtual controller for multiple functions. And it does that, perfectly.

I really loved the visual feedback provided by the SCS.3d. In my daily DJ setup, I'm accustomed to having a basic user-assignable controller, which can be pretty boring at times. Seeing the individual lights switch from blue to red, and watching the jog wheel flash luminescent blue really helps the DJ see what's happening, especially in a dark club.

Overall, the SCS.3d is a great option for anyone looking for a compact and rugged controller. It's basic enough for any novice to understand, while the advanced features and selectable modes would appeal to a veteran jock. This is one of the first controllers I've ever used with visual feedback, and it's a fantastic feature that more manufacturers should incorporate.

Stanton is continually rolling out new presets, and it has made a commitment to make DaScratch a universal controller which will appeal to DJs and electronic musicians alike. In the near future Stanton plans to allow open source programming for DaRouter software, so anyone

can create a custom preset designed for their individual performance and production needs. Selling at \$249 (MAP), the SCS.3d is a wise investment allowing the ultimate personalization at a reasonable price tag.

### Audio Analyzers

Many DJs and certainly all club techs/installers would like to have the equivalent of a telephone test set, a Swiss Army Knife for field use—a way to check how loud your music is, to measure frequency response, and maybe more. Think of a handheld device that could be mounted to the DJ booth, or if you really got attached to it, hang from your belt.

The least costly audio test instrument would be the sound-level meter and you can pick a basic, but workable meter from Radio Shack for \$45 or so. You won't impress anyone but your girlfriend with this, but you will be able to check sound levels. Obviously there are more expensive and more accurate sound meters, but I think a hand held 1/3-octave analyzer is money better spent.

I have been playing with a handful of mobile audio analyzers for various purposes. These handheld units include a mic and are battery-operated. They cover the full hearing bandwidth and most break it up into 1/3-octave bands—that means you have about 30 bands covering 10 octaves. This bandwidth and resolution is fine enough for most adjustments you might make on an equalizer.

**Phonic:** The palm-held PAA 3 has a monochrome display and a mic, and it's readily connected to your laptop. The audio analyzer provides the tools needed to set up any sound environment. With its 31-band real-time spectrum analysis, the unit has SPL (sound level) meter, line meter, internal noise generator, EQ-setting program, microphone calibration and speaker phase (polarity) checking abilities.

For testing the response of a speaker, the noise generator output is sent to the sound system and the output is shown on the unit's display. EQ, electronic crossover points, and other adjustments are then made. Alternatively, the included CD test disc can be used for the signal source that eliminates the umbilical cord to the sound system for walking the surrounding areas.

The PAA3 connects to any desktop or laptop. On a large screen, the output display is quite impressive and I suggest you wear a white lab coat when you show off your new gizmo. The PAA3 runs for seven hours on four AA batteries and has a street price of \$399.

**Neutrik Test Instruments:** NTI is a long established brand of acoustic

test equipment for field and installation applications. A few years back NTI, launched the Minstruments product line with its Minirator MRI for field use. The MRI handheld (\$215) provides an analog audio generator setup, for monitoring and troubleshooting of analog audio systems.

For our survey, NTI's newest compact acoustical analyzer, the ALI (about \$1,000) includes a combination of acoustical and electrical features, although the existing MLI products can be upgraded with firmware to ALI capabilities. As with some of the other handhelds in this survey, the ALI's functionality is more than 1/3-octave response with the goal of an all-in-one tool for sound and systems contractors, and installers.

The real time spectrum analyzer (RTA) features selectable 1/1- and 1/3-octave bandwidth. The RTA simultaneously provides real-time single band SPL and Leq measurements. Leq, by the way, is the average sound level over time. So if a club manager—or the neighbors—wants you to drop the sound level, then taking the Leq over an evening and taking it again at the lower level would be



**Phonic's PAA3** boasts SPL meters and EQ calculations.

a good way to document your new quieter efforts.

Even if you are not ready to jump in by spending a grand, the Phonic units are a painless entry at few hundred dollars—it's a little more than what you might expect to pay for just a decent sound-level meter. Depending on what kind of work you do—club, mobile, installations—these test instruments can come in very handy and they're well worth the investment.

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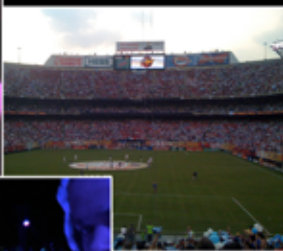
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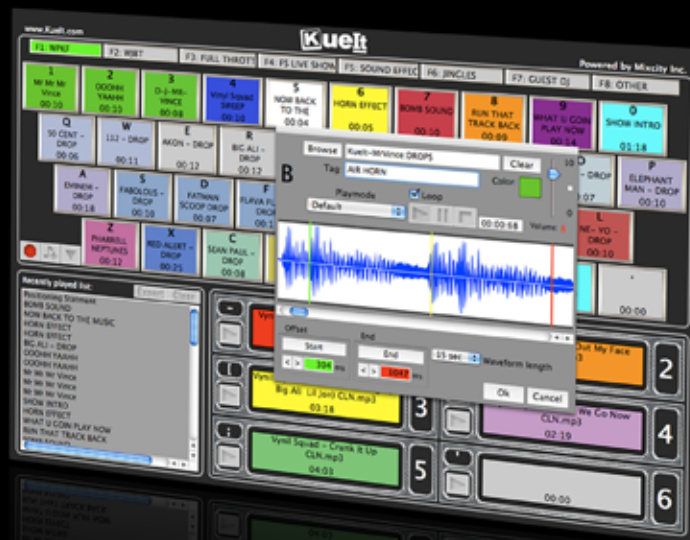
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