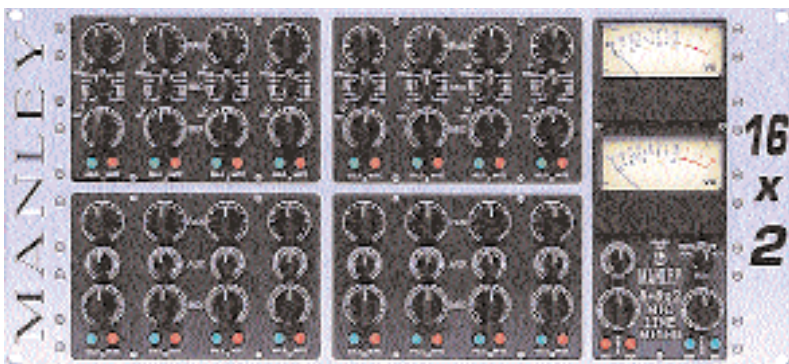


Manley 16x2 Tube Mixer

NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Sometimes you know what you want, other times you have to be told. **George Shilling** receives a lesson in desirability from Manley's modest mixer

WHEN I FIRST RECEIVED the 16x2, I thought, 'who would want one of these?' With no EQ and just one aux, you might wonder... But hang in there; there are three basic flavours available, featuring 16 mic channels, 16 line inputs, or a hybrid '8+8' with eight inputs of each type, which is the one I had for review (pictured). Also, Manley offers a number of custom options. If it doesn't do quite what you want it to Manley will happily make you a version that does—they have already designed a 32x8, and a version with LCR pan pots for example.



Designed by 'Hutch', the 5U-high mixer is in the usual Manley house style, with smart etched quarter-inch thick front panel, thin mesh top and bottom, and conductive plastic pots. In its appearance, the only very tiny let down is perhaps the poorly designed '16x2' logo.

There is a separate power supply box, which is incredibly heavy, due mainly to an enormous transformer. The heatsinks on the rear get very hot during operation, and there is a slight physical hum from the box in operation—probably not a problem if this unit is stuffed behind a rack (it is not rackmountable). A large multi-pin connector on the rear connects a thick cable to the mixer itself; on the mixer end the cable goes deep inside the case through a grommet-strain sleeve without a connector. A rocker switch enables the power supply, and a locking toggle on the front of the mixer switches the power on, lighting the LED on the front of the power supply, and the top vu meter on the mixer. The other meter illuminates after about 20s, as voltages stabilise and relays click into action to enable monitor outputs.

The rear of the mixer is awash with connectors: internally, the mixer channels are on modular boards that can be removed individually. All channel inputs feature hybrid XLR-jack connectors, and all channels feature balanced TRS Direct Output jacks for recording directly to individual tracks. Mic inputs feature insert TRS send-return jacks which allow processing to be applied between the mic amp and the fader. It was deemed an unnecessary feature for the line inputs, so these holes are blanked. The mic inputs are divided into two banks of four, with each bank having a PHANTOM POWER locking toggle switch, preventing accidents and usefully allowing one to

simultaneously use condenser types and sensitive ribbon mics. Among the main section's many inputs and outputs are external inputs that feed into the main mix at unity gain, enabling the chaining of multiple 16x2s. There is a terminal post for linking the solo bus of another mixer. And thoughtfully there are mini speaker outputs for alternative monitoring, switchable from the front, although the unit lacks a headphone output.

At the top of each channel is a large pan pot, with a gain law which reduces output by 4.5dB in the centre like some older consoles. At the bottom is a large rotary gain pot, controlling level to the

stereo mix bus, as well as the direct channel outputs. However, the accompanying illuminating (relay) MUTE switch cuts only the signal to the mix bus, allowing recording to continue—a nice touch. There is also a latching illuminating SOLO switch, which mutes the other channels. Line inputs feature an aux send,

preset as post-fade but internally configurable. Mic inputs feature a stepped gain switched in 5dB steps, and excellent, very tiny toggles for phase reverse (relay) and insert, each of which is accompanied by an LED. Main options are comprehensive, with fader pots and mutes for mix, aux master and monitor, switching for dim, mini monitors, and monitor selection options for mix, mono, external inputs, tape inputs and ext.

Perhaps surprisingly, given the billing of this mixer, the mic amps are not valve. Four valves feature in the mix output stages, but otherwise this is a carefully designed solid state unit. The mic inputs sound as fantastic as the astonishing specs suggest: I did a direct comparison with a well-respected British model while recording electric guitar with a 57 in front of a Boogie, and the Manley instantly sounded stunningly different—far bigger in every way. I used it for vocal, acoustic guitar and percussion recording and it performed exceptionally, always clean, clear and large-scale.

I also took it to do a drum recording into a digital workstation and it was ideal for the job. I enjoyed the simplicity and the lack of onboard EQ perhaps led to more careful mic selection and placement—no bad thing. Of course, the inserts are available, and Manley promises an 8-channel passive EQ at some point in the future.

The unit sounds fantastic—the output (and internal stages) can handle up to 37dBu, and all other specs are equally astonishing. Uses for a mixer like this are endless, from location recording to studio recording, Pro Tools mixing and broadcast. So, who would want one of these? Well, just about everyone I showed it to, and especially me. □

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