

Schertler Arthur format48

A compact, high-quality, user configurable mixer **GEORGE SHILLING** gets a great sound

Schertler's new Arthur mixer is a modular system whereby you can configure your own high quality analogue mixer from scratch, adding a variety of input and output modules as necessary. You can add pretty much any number of channels you want, attaching extra power supply modules for larger setups. Assembled, the depth is about 19" or 48cm, and each channel is about 3.5cm or 1.5" wide, with a small border at each edge of the assembled mixer. Side panels are black, but wooden ones are optional for impressing your clients. The whole thing is very shallow yet the modules are quite weighty and feel solidly built, although perhaps a bit utilitarian — the pre-assembled Arthur I received had very slight 'panel gaps' on very close inspection, but nothing to worry about — it felt robust.

The review model's modules comprised a Yellow Instrument Input (which is very definitely blue in colour — those Schertler guys are hilarious), four Mono Microphone Inputs, a Stereo Input, a L/R Master and an Aux Master. Also available are the aforementioned extra Power Supply modules in three sizes (power input is on the L/R master, my small configuration supplied by an inline brick), and a ULN (Ultra Low Noise) version of the Mono Mic input. Accessories are available including power supplies, replacement knob and fader caps, and the hardware for assembly. The units are joined with sturdy Allen bolts. All connections are on the top panels of the modules, and with the Insert/Direct Out jacks at the bottom of the input sections, cable management might be required to prevent things becoming untidy.

On plugging in the multi-pin PSU cable, Arthur lights up like a Christmas tree. All the square pushbuttons are lit up; these change colour to indicate status. White generally means button up/Off and green indicates On. But some turn orange when pressed, like P48; PFL buttons turn red, and there are plenty of



dual status buttons that flip between blue and orange. There is method to the madness, but it is all fairly dazzling! Rotary knobs are domed with clear pointers — these save space and are pleasant to use. Meters use large square LEDs.

The Microphone Input module sensibly starts with a (non-latching) XLR input, and immediately below are pushbuttons for 15dB pad, polarity and P48, along with a Gain knob. Gain range is 18 to 60dB, but by pressing the Line/Mic button this becomes -18 to 20dB with an indicated Unity position (not detented though). There is a High Pass filter at 100Hz. Next is a TRS socket which functions either as Insert or Direct Out using the accompanying button. As

the output from this is unbalanced, there is of course a bit less overall level than you would expect from a balanced output. A notch filter ("Reson") comes next with a knob for the amount of cut, and selectable frequencies of 150 or 240Hz, useful for eliminating boomy feedback. Schertler's founder is a double bass player, so this no doubt is borne from practical experience in live situations.

Three-band EQ includes an On button, and fixed High and Low boost/cut, plus a sweepable two-knob mid band. The EQ's treble is pretty sweet. The mid band is reasonably broad and ranges from 250Hz to 3.2kHz. Boosting the low band and countering it slightly by turning up the notch filter and/or activating the high pass filter works well in many situations. Below that is a Unit On button, which when in Off position turns off most of the LEDs on the module. Three Auxes are provided, each selectable Pre or Post, then there is the Pan knob, PFL button, and finally a long-throw fader with three large LEDs which meter post-EQ/pre-fader signal level. The mic preamp is clean and neutral without any harshness, and is clearly a high quality design.

The Yellow Instrument input is similar to the Microphone module except for the actual input section. Schertler have offered standalone Yellow preamps since 2011 including 500 Series versions. There is of course a jack input instead of XLR, and the P48 button is replaced with a 10V button to power Schertler's own series of electrostatic pickups, which means you can connect directly to Arthur instead of using their original preamps. A variable Impedance knob replaces the Line/Mic button for better matching different types of pickup, and a "Warm" button (which is a 2nd order high frequency roll-off from 2kHz) replaces the Resonance filter: it's great for reducing harshness. This input sounds rich, vibrant and engaging, and I preferred it to an expensive boutique valve preamp for my 45 year-old Epiphone semi-acoustic bass with round wound strings which sounded fantastic — deep and solid, but with a great midrange bark.

The Stereo Input features line inputs on jacks or phonos, L/R Gain knobs with buttons for Unity, a single two-band EQ with Low and High knobs, Aux sends as per the mono channels with separate banks for left and right, Mono and PFL buttons and a pair of long-throw faders.

The L/R Master module feeds its DC power input to other modules and has left and right XLR outputs, and TRS sockets for an FX Return and Aux 1 Out, both accompanied by short-throw faders. Twin eight-segment large-LED meters clearly show master level. There are separate On buttons for left and right, and a pair of long-throw faders for left and right. The Aux Master module provides monitoring and talkback, along with access to Aux sends 2 and 3, their outputs provided on TRS jacks. The PFL output can also be used as a fourth send, albeit with fixed level. A TB output allows talkback to be sent to a powered speaker for example. The built-in mic seemed to just be a tiny hole and I'm not sure if it hadn't fallen inside because it sounded pretty dull and telephone-y! TRS left and right control room outputs are accompanied by a volume knob and Mono button, and there is a separate Headphones output with volume knob and a PFL button to route PFL signal to headphones. Generously, small faders are provided for Aux 2 and 3 and also PFL. The Talkback section includes a microphone, volume knob, latching On button and a button to route talkback to Aux 2 — perhaps for use with stage monitors.

Arthur's strengths include the ability to expand the number and type of inputs to suit you. Output options seem a little limited in comparison, and you cannot add things like Alt Speaker switching or surround configurations in present form; the output sections are stereo only. However, further output modules are planned. Arthur is one of those products which makes you wonder why no one else has thought of something similar. It's a great concept and it has been extremely well thought out and executed, with high quality audio paths, and great sounding preamps and EQ. Schertler have built a fantastic and unique product which will surely find its way into all kinds of setups for live, installation and studio use. ■



PROS Modular construction allows you to design the mixer you want or need, high quality audio paths, good layout

CONS Direct outputs are unbalanced and fixed pre-EQ, limited output configuration

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