

ProAudio Review

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| AUDIOLOT MIXBAY 192-POINT PATCHBAY SYSTEM

The AudioLot MixBay is a fully-enclosed rackmount-standard 192-point TT/bantam-to-DB25 patchbay. The \$1,695 MixBay's four rows of 48 jacks are evenly spaced over a three-rack space front panel, leaving plenty of room for its four extra-large labeling strips.

The top feature of the AudioLot MixBay is the use of mini slide switches that allow for quick configuration (or reconfiguration) of normalization and grounding options on a per-jack-pair basis. The trademarked Quick-Switch configuration scheme was first employed in the 96-point "Mini Shorti" patchbay manufactured by Audio Accessories, who co-developed and manufactures the MixBay to AudioLot's design specifications.

In addition to two rows of Quick-Switches (covered in detail below), the rear of the MixBay sports four rows of female D-Sub connectors – six per row – that correspond to the four front panel jack fields. In a departure from typical patchbays, rows 1 & 3 and rows 2 & 4 are the normalizing pairs.

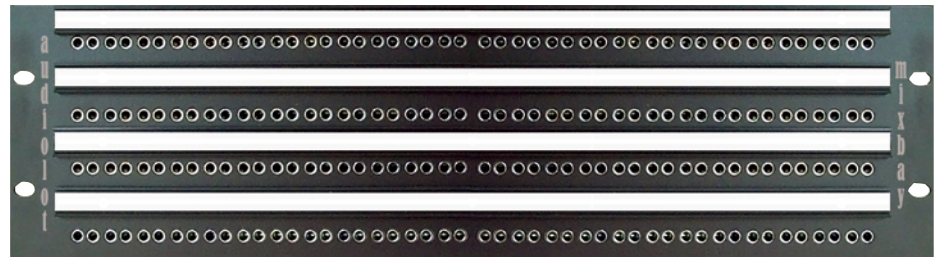
For external connection, the MixBay utilizes the industry-standard TASCAM DB25 balanced analog wiring specification, in which eight inputs or outputs (or custom-terminated combination) are supported per D-Sub connector. Speaking of support, the lower panel of the MixBay extends four inches beyond the back of the three-inch-deep chassis to form a sturdy cable support tray; multiple perforations in the tray allow for a range of cable tie-down options.

As someone who has – from school-age electronic projects through current-era facility installations – wittingly inhaled a disturbing amount of rosin-core solder fumes in the pursuit of professional passions, it was admittedly difficult for me to suppress the DIY gene and get fully excited about evaluating the pre-configured AudioLot MixBay. I don't think I am alone in having encountered ostensibly innovative products designed to make quick

work of laborious tried-and-true methods, when in fact some had the opposite effect by imposing unforeseen limitations and/or forcing "creative" workarounds.

With the above in mind, it gives me pleasure to report that the AudioLot MixBay bears no resemblance whatsoever to the aforementioned panaceas-in-sheep's-clothing. It took almost no time for me to conclude that the MixBay was designed by someone who has a passion for high-quality gear, a solid sense of logic, and has most likely experienced a certain amount of frustration with stock and "improved" patchbays over the years.

As mentioned earlier, at the heart of this



192-point prodigy is its innovative Quick-Switch technology. In brief, two rows of 48 switch blocks (with four mini switches per block) span the width of the MixBay's rear panel. The upper row corresponds to rows 1 & 3 on the front panel, and the lower row of switches to rows 2 & 4. Each block of four slide switches provides control of normalization and grounding configuration for each output/input jack-pair.

Any individual jack pairs can be changed to fully normalized, half-normalized or non-normalized at will, and in a matter of seconds. Likewise, the grounding scheme of each output/input pair can be set to bussed, vertically strapped or fully isolated. That makes a total of nine instantly variable configuration combinations, for those who weren't counting. In its default (shipping) configuration, all pairs are set to be half normalized and grounded to the system bus. Adding to the MixBay's flexibili-

ty, individual ground posts are provided on the rear panel for the four bantam-jack rows for direct connection to physical ground when required.

While this flexibility was enough to win me over, I found several other reasons to like the MixBay, including: the use of high-quality 110-ohm cabling throughout (making it equally useful for balanced analog and/or AES/EBU-spec digital transmission); its full implementation of sleeve normalizing for trouble-free throughput of phantom power; and, though it may seem like a truism, I really came to like the overall concept (and the successful implementation of same) of a fully integrated-by-

design, self-contained solution that provides enough points to satisfy most studios.

I received the MixBay for review at the same time as the SSL X-Rack. The X-Rack's large number of I/O points (especially when configured for mixing) was the original inspiration to develop the MixBay, and they were indeed a perfect match.

Criminally easy Quick-Switch configuration and the use of TASCAM-spec D-Sub connectors for I/O make the MixBay ideally suited for workstation-based audio studios of all sizes, audio/video suites, mobile production and reinforcement and, in general, anyone not capable or interested in custom wiring their own traditional patchbay system from the ground up. Overall, the AudioLot MixBay is a well thought out, well-built and feature-rich patchbay system. For more information visit www.audiolot.com.

– Stephen Murphy