

ARX MSX 32

Trevor Cronin 'arx up' to commend an Australian innovator.

ARX recently celebrated its 20th Anniversary of professional audio product manufacturing. This wholly Australian-owned company (based in Melbourne) has grown from humble beginnings into a leading exporter of pro audio gear. This success is mainly due to the consistent development of 'clever' products that offer a unique combination of features. The products ARX produces have gained a good reputation internationally as sturdy workhorses that are fine sounding and easy to use.

The ARX MSX 32 is yet another of these 'very handy machines'. The unit is housed in a sturdy 2U steel chassis that contains eight channels of actively buffered ultra low noise microphone/line splitters. Each channel input has four (electronically balanced) XLR output splits – two outputs on the rear labelled Main and Monitor, plus two more – A and B – on the front panel. There are also individual –20dB pad and 48V phantom power switches on the front, each with its own LED indicator. The phantom power uses a clever 'pop free' system that works by ramping up the voltage over a two-second time period. This helps prevent the speaker-destroying, eardrum-damaging spikes that are commonly associated with this function – and it's the first product I've come across with this feature.

A PFL button and a six-LED ramp (to the right of the front panel outputs) are used to graphically monitor the input of each channel. A 'clip' LED alongside each input further indicates when you're approaching signal overload. An internal headphone amp is also used for 'in the cans' audio monitoring. When using multiple units, rear panel connectors are linked to enable monitoring of all inputs from one unit. A typically canny ARX feature is also included on the front – by depressing the 'Link' button (which illuminates a red LED) the preceding channel's input is routed into that channel. Activating all seven 'Link' buttons will give you 32 outputs from a single input and this is where the MSX 32 gets its name.

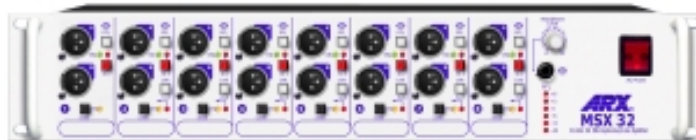
The gain of each channel can be individually set from 0dB to +40dB (in 10dB steps) via small rear-mounted DIP switches. This makes it possible for the splitter to output a line-level signal from a mic level input, thus the MSX 32 can be used as a microphone preamplifier, if necessary.

Inside and out the unit is well made using high spec components such as gold-plated Neutrik XLR connectors. More advanced user options are available internally. You can jumper-link the inputs to main the main outputs (handy when adjusting the unit's gain without affecting the level to the main output). A ground lift on XLR pin 1 can also be activated on each output when required. Output transformers can also be fitted as an optional extra.

My production company, Sound Around, has used the MSX 32 for over six months now and in that time has performed flawlessly. The only annoyance encountered

has been in trying to adjust the gain on the rear of the unit during a sound check. The DIP switches are right near the main input and output XLRs and when the unit is fully plugged up these switches are nearly impossible to see, let alone access and adjust. A simple recommendation for the ARX designers would be to mount the gain switches on the front panel with all the other controls and, better still, use an incremented pot to adjust the gain.

The output signal from the unit is crystal clear and will put the front end of any high-end analogue mic pre on notice! I compared the MSX 32's audio quality with a personal favourite of mine – a Midas X42 rack unit – and I'd have to say that the 32 produced cleaner results. The MSX 32's electronics are based around a highly regarded Analog Devices



chip. The way in which the MSX 32 allows you to monitor I/O greatly aided in speedily rectifying faults with inputs. "It's loud and clear here, must be at your end!", was heard to confidently come out my mouth on more than one occasion.

We used the unit in a number of applications. From its primary intended use as a splitter to feed front of house/monitors and recording systems at a live concert; to split a broadcast feed to various operators; and even in the recording studio as a microphone preamp. All of the people involved commented on the clean sound. In rooms where there has been a history of induced noise problems when using splitters, not a single buzz was heard. ARX has produced a fine product that has become a real problem solver. It compares very favourably with anything that is currently available on the market and has a set of features that makes it innovative and supremely practical.

