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EXCLUSIVE!

Hot new Allen & Heath
Xone:92 mixer reviewed



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ALLEN & HEATH XONE:92

Four-Channel Install Mixer



EXCLUSIVE!

Words: **David Eserin**

An extensively enhanced successor to Allen & Heath's celebrated Xone:62 club mixer, which acts as a MIDI controller to boot.

AT A GLANCE

Price (fader): £1150

Price (rotary): £1300

Web: www.allen-heath.com

Contact: Allen & Heath 0870 755 6250

Available: Mid Feb, but heavily reserved.

With their brand new Xone:92, Allen & Heath bridge the gap between the product's fundamental purpose as an audio mixer and the provision for control over tools that create or effect the music - all by the magic of MIDI. This enables external effects units such as the Korg Kaoss Pad and even software to be controlled straight from the mixer. This sets it apart from any other mixer available, while quashing any assumptions that this is just a spruced up Xone:62.

What's Changed?

The Xone:92 has been built on continued research and feedback from users of all the Xone

mixers - top DJs the world over including Richie Hawtin who played a major role in the inspiration. The result is a combination of valuable refinements to the Xone:62, technology from A&H's top of the range V6 mixer and a completely new MIDI concept which is perfectly suited for advanced DJing and use in live sets. There are two auxiliary output channels. Two independent LFOs and filters (with cross-fader assignment) and the aforementioned MIDI controllability. The look of the whole mixer is dramatically different to its predecessors with attention to detail such as illuminated buttons and controls. It also has the same sexy VU level lights, cue buttons and switches found on the

Xone:V6. The new lights are clear and bright, while not taking up much room on the mixer or distracting attention. The unit still sits at the same height and depth as most decks and simply looks great, especially with a pair of 1200s.

Filters

There are two separate filters, both with high pass, band pass or low pass settings. Once selected and activated the frequency is controlled with a knob on either side of the cross-fader. The resonance can be increased from 'mild' to 'wild', although we thought it could actually be a little more wild. A&H have >>

considered the heart conditions of installers here and kept it tame; it can also be turned off internally for the super paranoid.

The filters do not have any effect on the signal to either of the auxiliaries, so when applying external effects and using a filter at the same time there is no correlation in the two sounds. The filters cut some of the high frequencies and low frequencies in their fully open state. However, with the resonance up half way this flattens out the frequency levels to normal. One of the greatest things about the filter, apart from its sound, is that the frequency controls can be joined together. They can also be assigned individually or paired to the cross-fader. When controlling both filters using the frequency knob or cross-fader, one channel can be set to a

hi pass filter and the other to a lo pass filter. On one complete rotation it creates a unique ability to mix between tracks using the filters and it sounds wonderfully slick. For example, in a middle setting one channel will have everything below 1kHz filtered out, with everything above 1kHz filtered out on the other.

All channels can be set to either filter and can even be switched from one to the other. By using drastically different settings on each, the DJ can achieve some pretty awesome results. There are also two sine wave LFOs (low frequency oscillators) with a tap tempo feature. The tempo can be doubled or halved. LFO depth can also be adjusted. Each filter can even be controlled by the cross-fader with the LFOs still interacting. >>

CHANNEL LAYOUT

Aux Sends

At the top of each channel strip there are volume controls for each of the stereo auxiliary sends. These can be set to send the signal regardless of the channel volume fader level, cross-fader and filter controls. However, the EQ has an effect over the auxiliary send regardless of the pre switch. Below that is the phono and line switch. The gain on the main channels has a notch in the centre position, almost urging you to set it at that volume. However, it seems to provide the perfect signal at its lowest setting to achieve an average of 0dB. The mic/return channels simply have the equivalent to a volume control on a knob

Equalisation

All channels have four-band EQ for Hi, Mid 1, Mid 2 and Lo. On the main channels these all have a maximum gain of 6dB, which will again please the installers worried about their precious rig. The DJs will be happy to see total kills, but only on the Hi and Lo's – the two Mids have a drop of -30dB. The actual separation of the frequencies is much better than on previous Xone mixers and the extra Mid to the norm really helps smooth some awkward mixes out.

The EQ on the mic/return channels can be increased or decreased by 15dB. This gives greater control over voice and effects which usually require slightly more attention than vinyl or CD and can also be used to alter the sound more radically as part of a performance.

There's a wide Q (frequency width) for cut and a narrow Q for boosting, which prevents accumulated gain. Needless to say they sound great, but it's a shame there isn't the ability to punch the EQ on and off as on the 62.

Talkover

There's a switch below the EQ on the mic/return channels which activates the talkover function; again this is a three position switch. In the middle the sound is off, flick it towards you and the channel is on

full. Push the switch back and the channel is on but the main mix is brought down by 20dB. This enables perfect control and use of external effects to get a really pronounced sound above the dry signal. It can also be used for mic talkover, but there is no reduction gain control and it's not automatic, ie. as the volume of the return or mic changes it does not automatically reduce the main mix at those times. Finally, the switch flicks back to the middle position when released.

Faders

All the faders are incredibly tough while remaining wonderfully smooth in operation and have new slimmer knobs attached. The cross-fader has been upgraded from the 62 with the addition of curve control. This allows everything from a long, smooth mix to a very sharp curve for chopping in and scratching, a facility many DJs had complained was lacking on previous models. There's about a 2mm lag before the sound kicks in on the sharpest setting, but the action is intuitive and precise.

Channel Assign

There are two three-position switches for each channel (main only), the first sets which filter the channel will be passed through and the second assigns the channel to either end of the cross-fader. There's a set of lights above the cross-fader that indicate if a channel is assigned, but it doesn't signify to which side.

Hidden Features

Levels can be set inside the unit to suit a particular installation and to avoid damage to any PA equipment. The unit can also have some 'ears' bolted on the side to mount it in a standard 19in rack space. The internal settings are described in the manual and include the ability to reduce the filter resonance and even turn it off completely. The phono inputs can be switched to line level. Even the gain can be deactivated on the main channels. As default the mic channels are not routed to booth or record, but this can be changed, but to both only.



Sander Kleinenberg on the Xone:92

"It's a great and solid looking machine. The new features are a welcome improvement to the already exceptional sound quality of Allen & Heath's mixers. If you look at price, sound and versatility, I would say that this unit is at the top of the current game.

"I was pretty impressed by the change of how the High, Mid and Low range is better handled by this mixer. Previous models used to cut a frequency dead right at the end of the frequency. Now with the new steps it's much smoother and better to handle.

"However, if there's one complaint, I talked with the engineer of the mixer for a while and told him that I would like to see the tab function for the MIDI clock to be changed to an automated one."

Cue Control

A&H have not only surpassed themselves with great control over cue for each vital part of the mixer, but managed to inject some humour in there too – albeit unintentional. The volume knob actually goes up to 11 compared to every other numbered volume knob which go up to ten – how Spinal Tap. Nice work! On a more serious and pleasing note, the Xone:92 has two headphone outputs (small and large), so you won't be stuck out if you lose the adaptor. The output can be set to hear the music before the effect of the cue and after. Split monitoring changes the master VU meters to display cue and master separately. Each channel is selected by an illuminated push button. When no channel is selected for cueing, the main mix is played through the headphones. The two auxiliary channels can be selected for monitoring and the cue channel can be blended with the main output to check the mix.



Connections

Each of the four main channels has both line and phono inputs on RCA. The two auxiliary sends and the returns use jacks. Mic inputs are XLR only. The master section has two independent Mix outs - one on XLR and one on jacks with separate volume control. The booth output is also on jacks and can be muted and even set to mono. There's also the standard MIDI output port and a record output on RCA.



The inspiration for the Xone:92

Initially, Richie Hawtin worked with A&H to modify his Xone:62 – creating his ‘62 CTRL’ which was, in part, the inspiration for the Xone:92. With invaluable help from his father Michael, and cooperation from A&H designer Andy Rigby-Jones, Richie built the most advanced DJ mixer and live controller in the world. Richie: "We changed the mic channel EQs into the same ones on the normal line/phono channels, then added cross-fader assigns to all the channels and a second auxiliary send for more EFX. Then my father and I added the second

series of modifications that you can see on the left-hand side of the mixer. We replaced the fader and EQ knobs with new MIDI control knobs and faders. We added extra buttons and mounted a MIDI input jack for using a foot controller/switch for further controls. The final assortment of MIDI added was; six rotary MIDI knobs, six on/off MIDI trigger switches, two toggle on/off MIDI switches (with LED feedback lights), MIDI fader, MIDI LED activity light and MIDI output jack on the rear of the unit. A few other things were added, but that was the bulk of it."

MIDI Control

The Xone:92 has a very subtle feature that could almost be overlooked with just a casual glance, but its potential control over external devices is something to be revelled in. The MIDI controls on the 92 have been designed specifically to work with the Korg Kaoss pad. All the faders on the mixer are voltage controlled (VCA), including the filters (VCF). The faders not only control components internally but they can also manipulate virtually any external MIDI gear via the internal MIDI converter.

A standard MIDI output connector is situated on the back, so care should be taken to keep the rear panel accessible if installed into a booth (or fit a breakout box for convenient access).

In Sync

There are six controls on the Xone:92 that control MIDI output. These are the cross-fader, both filter knobs, the LFO tap button, a start/stop button and one dedicated MIDI data knob at the top of the unit. When a tempo is tapped into the LFO button the 92 instantly starts pumping out a MIDI Clock. This can be picked up by most effects units and sequencers that have a MIDI input and enables timing to be set remotely from the mixer for delays, chops, etc.

The Data knob is defaulted to act as a fine tuning tempo controller (also controller 94). Set initially in the middle (with a dip), turning it to the left decreases the speed and to the right increases it. This allows the DJ to hook up a drum machine

and set its tempo straight from the mixer. The start/stop button uses the standard controller for all MIDI machines and the stop action also sends a rewind message to bring the track to the beginning. This is the only mixer that actually supports live performance in this way.



Richie Hawtin on the Xone:92

"The 92, is a huge step forward in the development of mixer design. To have a mixer in production with all its capabilities is still somewhat mind blowing. "My 62 CTRL has 16 controllers, so once you get used to so much control and all the possibilities it's hard to go back. But for the rest of the people out there who don't have the luxury of a 62 CTRL (only two exist), the 92 is not a step back, it's a huge, huge, huge step forward over the 62 and everything else out there. "Saying that, I'm waiting for the 92 CTRL version, which Andy, my father and I are currently working on. Ha ha!"

Custom Control

The cross fader is set to controller number 92, which turns the effects on and off on the Kaoss Pad. The two frequency knobs on the filters also control the X and Y of the Kaoss Pad (controller 12 and 13). The Xone:92 can actually be opened up to change certain MIDI setting, as described in the manual. These are modified using little micro switches.



MIDI control can be turned off on the cross fader, as some will not use this. The global MIDI channel can also be set to either 15 or 16. And the data knob can be switched to control effects depth on the KP2 (controller 95) instead of fine tuning the internal MIDI clock. When using a computer, most software – namely Ableton Live – can map any controller input number to any control in the software so the 92 is not limited in this way. The standard controller numbers set to each feature on the mixer might not work with every FX unit, but you can check the specifications to see which ones match up.

SPECS >>>

- ▶ Phono: 4 (RCA)
- ▶ Line: 4 (RCA) 2 return (Jack)
- ▶ Mics: 2 (XLR)
- ▶ Master: #1 (XLR), #2 (Jack)
- ▶ Booth: Jacks
- ▶ Auxiliary: 2 (Jack)
- ▶ EQ: 4-band
- ▶ 2 Filters: Hi, Lo and Band pass
- ▶ 2 LFOs: Freq, Res. and Depth
- ▶ LFO tap tempo + MIDI Clock
- ▶ Fader options: Rotary/Linear
- ▶ Size (mm): 320 x 358 x 83
- ▶ Weight: 6kg

good points

- MIDI control + Clock
- Great sound quality
- Two filters and LFOs
- Two master outputs

bad points

- No BPM recognition
- No EQ punch facility

rating

Professional - Installation

value for money



build quality



ease of use



features



sound quality



overall



CONCLUSION

The Xone:92 is rock solid in both build and sound quality. The improvements over the Xone:62 are very valuable, particularly the new MIDI clock/control which is a leading concept. The new dual filters are also very useful - the first mixer capable of blending two tracks with two filters using one knob or cross fader. The Xone:92 is the perfect club mixer for today's forward thinking DJ. Many of the features may never be used by some, but even for conservative DJs, the filters and EQ alone add unrivalled polish to any set.