



Fairlight EVO

STEPHEN BENNETT gets a sneak preview of Fairlight's latest *EVOLution* in consoles – a truly integrated and powerful production tool.

Fairlight has been doing post production systems for a long time now, with the emphasis on power, speed of operation, and integration into the modern post workflow. Its CC-1 Crystal Core technology is developed and refined, and continues to push boundaries of channel count and functionality; while the software has won many fans for its inclusive approach and user interface. Now the company is taking another step forward with its surface and control technology. The product is EVO.

New Frontiers

"The reason it's called EVO is because it genuinely is an evolution from our existing consoles," says Ken Barnsley, Fairlight's Sales and Marketing Director. He's at pains to point out however, that the new kid on the block won't mean the extinction of the earlier model. "The Constellation appeals to a particular type of person and the EVO will appeal to another," he says. "Broadcasters with multiple systems may not want to introduce a new model yet and would rather keep continuity throughout their suites." Tino Fibaek, Fairlight's General Manager, says that it was time to bring out something bigger and better. "The world has moved on and we can do more with the technology we have now. EVO is literally built onto the Constellation in many different ways – for example, the chassis of the EVO is technically the same as the Constellation, so you could take an EVO panel set and drop it into an existing Constellation chassis. That part worked very well and we were very happy with it – so why change it? We were one of the first companies in the business to use OLEDs, which give us a much better brightness and viewing angle and are much easier to read. We've evolved on that by using OLEDs for channel strips, but this time we've gone for higher resolution and quicker update times. We've got colour – we've got more processing power behind them. We've used what was working well for us but taken it to a whole new level."

The EVO is based upon an updated version of Fairlight's aforementioned CC-1 Crystal Core technology, which uses a FGPA (Field programmable Gate Array) based engine. A single CC-1 can support up to 220 physical audio I/Os in either analogue or digital formats, is scalable and, because

it is Windows-based, plugs seamlessly into virtually any existing IT infrastructure. "We wanted to try and take as many circuit tracks off the board as possible – and put them into FGPA chips," says Fibaek. "You end up with a board with less tracks, less solder, and which is less fragile. It also means that if you come up with a new creative idea, you have a much better chance of enhancing the hardware. There's a lot more scope for future proofing and adapting to the changing world. Because it's a brand new design, we've had a chance to use the most cutting-edge FGPA technology we could lay our hands on. It's cheaper, it's faster, and it uses less power." The Constellation sports a physical processor on each of the panels, whereas on the EVO, this has been replaced by a virtual one. "If we find through the life of the product we need two processors on each channel, we can change that using the FGPA – we have much more scope to enhance the system in response to feedback from the users," says Fibaek. This is not a boxed product – it's something that can keep on evolving."

Master Of All?

Fairlight's long expertise in the industry means that the company has all the building blocks in place to produce a combined digital workstation, mixer, editor, and effects processor along with extensive video capabilities. "Fairlight is the only company in the world that has all these parts," says Barnsley. "We've taken those building blocks, and created a completely new media production system with them. We use the CC-1 because it does recording playback and editing really well. We've also got a range of sync boxes (the SX-20) and we can add 200 channels of MADI if the customer desires it, for example. We also do video very well – you can have a guide track which will play pretty much anything you can throw at it." Fibaek considers himself to be a toolmaker, creating the means by which creative people can ply their trade. "We try and listen to our users and turn what we hear into our interpretation of their needs," he says. "We want to give them a tool they can use all day long and which will allow them to produce the best work they can without them becoming tired – a tool that helps them rather than gets in their way." The compact size of the new console means that users

THE REVIEWER

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FAIRLIGHT EVO

▶ don't need to stretch too far to get to essential controls. "The nature of the EVO means that you can see things a lot easier – everything is close," says Fibaek. "We combine tactile controls with really powerful graphics and we want to make it so that your body motor control takes over and lets you operate the EVO while leaving your brain to concentrate on being creative." Barnsley adds; "In addition to all of that, it's really simple to use. I've never see a system that's so intuitive to operate. It's the first time I've sat behind a desk and thought, 'I don't need a manual, this is obvious.'"

Fibaek considers that, to an extent, the technology used in modern audio production systems is now irrelevant. "It's not the technology; it's the end product that's important," he says. "We've taken the graphics power available to heart to see how far we can push graphical feedback." EVO is designed from the off as a flexible system. "This is version 1," says Fibaek. "We can put the EVO in front of the users and listen to what they have to say. Then we could, if necessary, bring out a new version that was fundamentally different – it could have a bunch of new things in it that we hadn't thought of first time around. We're not constrained by the hardware in the way we used to be." Fairlight has taken this customisation to a new level with the EVO, by letting the user get down and dirty with the software itself. "We've developed a programming language that sits inside the system and, if there are things you'd like done differently or need some extra features or functionality, you can change things," says Fibaek. "For example, if you'd like to reassign the function of any given switch, you can write a piece of code to do just that. We believe we understand the basic needs of our customers, but we also appreciate that every single installation is different and the user has different needs."

Multi-faceted Facilities

The days of audio people working in just one area are long gone. The modern studio needs to be able to handle pretty much anything that comes its way and the EVO is designed to cope with multiple users and configurations – as Fibaek explains. "For example, you might be doing ADR with multiple talents, so you'd bring up your layout of the in-line panels on the EVO so that it's got the inputs side by side, perhaps along with gain controls and headphone mixes – you make the console work for you." The EVO's 48 assignable dual concentric knobs can be used to easily control plug-ins (the console supports the VST standard), while the centre section's touch screen and self-labelling key switches mean that it can hold its own in more traditional editing scenarios. "You might be picking up audio from a database, exporting to different formats and maybe playing embedded video – the world isn't as simple as it was in the past," says Fibaek. "You don't have a room that does a single job – you have a room that does a lot of jobs, and that's what we are trying to facilitate with the EVO." Barnsley hastens to add; "On top of that we have the music guys who don't just do music anymore – they work in multi media and find the multiple configuration setups particularly useful."

Modern high-end production tools are so powerful now that the announcement of a system capable of handling hundreds of tracks each with multiple EQ and compressors is almost commonplace. But allowing users to instinctively harness all the potential available is not easy – but Fairlight is attempting to tackle this problem with the EVO. "The complexity of using that power can be really mind boggling and not particularly intuitive," says Fibaek. "What we are heading towards is a convergence of all the elements needed in today's high end productions – editing, mixing, recording, plug-ins, video processing – and putting them logically in front to you so you can get to them quickly. This is not a control surface that plugs into a separate mix engine, that plugs into a separate video system, that plugs into an editing system – it's a truly integrated console."

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INFORMATION

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