

# Merging Pyramix V7

Signalling the reinforcement of a new bigger-picture and workflow savvy approach, the latest update for Pyramix adds a stack of delights for **JIM BETTERIDGE**



The last year or so has seen Merging's Pyramix team take on a new ideology. Rather than a series of fragmented features to address individual issues as they arise, it now intends to offer complete workflows. Version 7 is its audio postproduction release and looks to take you from ingest to deliverables without significant recourse to third party add-ons. This doesn't mean to say there aren't some improvements for other applications, indeed Mastering-specific features like the new Hepta ultra-high quality SRC and Recording/Scoring specific features like the new Bars & Beats support will be significant to some. And the addition of Rewire opens up the possibility of incorporating other systems like Cubase or Logic through the channels of the Pyramix mixer. All good stuff but here we're looking mainly at the post angle.

There are already some really sophisticated tools integrated into the system at no extra charge to help you on your way. For example, Reconform lets you accommodate reversioning or those last minute picture changes without need of a changes EDL. Or the Relink function: if you want to quickly conform the multitrack BWFs from the location recorder to the edited mix track provided by the picture editor, or if the link between clips and media has gone awry somewhere, estranged elements can be relinked using a combination of parameters like length, in TC, out TC, clip names, scene and take, etc. It can be a real life saver.

With V7 this burgeoning toolbox has sprung some very interesting new shoots including the Final Check meter plug-in. This panel provides a range of level and phase metering for stereo and surround sources simultaneously. The stereo section provides PPM, True Peak, VU and LUFS, together with a phase meter offering a classic phase oscilloscope switchable to two new display modes: first a phase meter showing a 360° plot of the points displayed by the classic phase oscilloscope and second a circular VU meter

graphic displaying directional RMS of the points in the phase stereo-meter. LUFS stands for Loudness Unit Full Scale (see p44). It's the ITU's recommended unit for measuring subjective loudness and is increasingly how broadcasters are defining programme levels. For the LUFS readings there are also real-time level/time graphs to help you pinpoint any illegal peaks. It would have been nice to have seen these for the PPMs too, as PPM6 is still the reference for a lot of UK SD television audio. Considering how much you might pay for this range of metering facility elsewhere, Final Check's price tag is very reasonable.

There's another over-arching theme for future Pyramix releases — simplification.

Pyramix has always been unusually flexible and adaptable but sometimes at the cost of simplicity, so now the interface is being made more intuitive. For instance, on the timeline the once infinitely flexible (and occasionally confusing) track header is now fixed to display what the majority of users want it to with nice clear buttons. New to the header for V7 is direct access to effects that lets you quickly open the controls for any RTFX or VST plug-in on a given channel without having to open the mixer, find the strip, etc. There's now also a drop-down menu to quickly display on the track the most commonly used automation parameters: fader gain, panning, aux sends and one more that you can choose from an exhaustive list. If you want to see and edit more parameters you can create automation subtracks, each showing a different parameter associated with the chosen audio track and these can be opened and folded down again at a click. Each parameter is to be automatically

assigned its own colour, although this was only partially implemented on the beta version I had for review. These subtracks are very useful if you want to match one curve against another. Though easier to experience than describe, a lot more work has gone into redesigning editing curves, envelope editing and curve colouring to make the overall automation processes smoother.

The relationship between the timeline tracks and the mixer channels has also been simplified. Until now they've been very independent so that creating, erasing or hiding one would not generally affect the other. Though flexible this could lead to confusion, so now the two processes can be linked (although you can still submix multiple tracks to the same mixer input strip if that's how you roll).

There's also a change in the way stereo or multitrack cues are shown on the timeline with only a single header for all tracks. This makes it much easier to recognise non-mono tracks and to address them through one clear set of header graphics but maintain

the ability to edit channels independently without splitting the track into multiple monos. One other small but much appreciated addition is that vertical track zoom can now be adjusted using Shift+mouse wheel; this is added to Alt+wheel for horizontal zoom and Cntl+wheel to scroll left and right.

The mixer's VCA-style group automation has been improved to be easier in use. First you create a group fader and assign your chosen mixer strips to it. From there the strips' current automation is added to by any group fader automation in a relative manner. Each set of automation remains distinct for editing up until the point you remove a strip from the group, at this juncture you can choose to 'coalesce' (merge) the VCA automation into the strip automation track or simply return it to its own discreet state, unaffected by the group.

Though not too glamorous, one of the most important changes with V7 is in its saving and libraries architecture. Until now all project and library database information has been stored in RAM for well

understood reasons of speedy random access. The problem with this is that within a 32-bit system any individual piece of software is able to access a maximum of 2Mb of memory. So if you've taken advantage of the unprecedented 384 tracks available in Pyramix MassCore, within a long project with acres of effects libraries, there won't be enough space and the system will have to scurry back and forth between disk and RAM for its data, reducing the responsiveness of the system.

The new process works exclusively with your hard disk using a more efficient form of database architecture to avoid sacrificing any speed of fluency and allowing projects and libraries of virtually any size. It also means that, in the case of a crash or power cut, all your edits and changes will be there when you reboot; that alone could add a year to your life. This database engine has also been implemented in media management and libraries, bringing a completely redesigned search engine with Boolean-style logic for trawling your effects libraries. If you're looking for more sophisticated library facilities, Merging has opened the door to external FX database engines. Pyramix has a particularly preference for Soundminer, which is now integrated like in Pro Tools or Nuendo, and provides clever search facilities, stretch tools and the ability to paste your chosen region of an effect from the library to a sync point on the timeline.

It's worth mentioning, while on the subject of MassCore's ability to handle large and complex projects, how it differs from native systems (*Resolution V7.5*). Although it uses the Merging Mykerinos card for I-O it does take all its core processing power from the host PC's processors, hence the common misconception that it's native. The big difference is that it replaces the Windows OS with its own and hence avoids all



the inherent latency and overhead that come with Windows, releasing far greater dedicated processing power. This means 384 discreet tracks and buses at 1Fs (44.1/48kHz), 192 at 96kHz, 96 at 192kHz and 48 tracks DSD. So, given a suitable RAID, you could record a large ensemble at DSD quality with negligible (1.3ms) latency. Not that many users are going to need such numbers, of course, but it does mean you never have to worry about running out of DSP.

If you find that your projects are so huge and with so much bussing and RTFX effects that you need more power, V7 allows you to buy the multicore MassCore option and apply a second processor to MassCore. This may become more interesting when Merging's plans to involve further third-party plug-in manufacturers in writing software for RTFX bear fruit; a few 5.1 convolution reverbs without a second thought, perhaps..? Meanwhile, it's also now possible with V7 to use as many spare cores as your machine has for powering VST plug-ins.

After a rather shaky start the version of the ADR Tool released with V7 seems very promising and worth a brief explanation here. When you set up the session you enter the names of the actors and their characters, and assign each one a clip colour, a wipe colour, a record strip and a playback strip. The basic cue timecodes can be imported from virtually any comma or tab separated text so it's compatible with most spotting tools. Alternatively, you could have a cheap native Pyramix system with the ADR Tool loaded and use that to spot the project and to set up all the other variables.

As part of the set-up you arrange your lines into scenes, actors and characters, so that when you

select a line everything falls into place including the record and playback tracks. Incidentally, if a quick emergency session comes in with a digiBeta as the picture, the system will also control a tape deck via 9-pin. There are the three basic modes in which to work: Rehearse, Record and Review. As you record successive takes they move progressively down the tracks on the timeline, but all these tracks remain associated with the main record track and the character. You then mark one track as the selected take, which you can cut and paste to from the other tracks to your satisfaction, before finally consolidating it, i.e. copying it to that character's Consolidated Take



track. So when you deactivate the loop to move on to the next, all tracks disappear except the Consolidated Takes.

If you want two actors to record together you can open up both loops at the same time and, even send each their own playback track via separate headphone feeds (if desired), and each character will have a separate beep and colour-coded wipe. There's a notes page for each loop to guide the editor later on.

The monitoring is very slick allowing detailed control of guide tracks, M&Es, atmos, EQs, reverbs, etc to be associated with different processes (rehearse/record/review), actors and scenes. For any of this to work you'll need one of the versions of Merging's V Cube to handle picture playback.

There's an awful lot of interesting new stuff packed into this upgrade and if Merging can maintain the increasing levels of stability that recent releases have shown, there should be a lot smiling faces out there. ■

**PROS**

A simpler, more logical interface; lots of interesting new features; improved jog-wheel response.

**CONS**

Nothing in particular.

**EXTRAS**

Pricing (all UK and + VAT).  
Finalcheck £750 approx (pricing TBC)  
Native Post Pack £3456  
Post Pack Masscore 48 £4091  
Post Pack Masscore 128 £4727  
Post Pack Masscore 256 £5362  
Other software packs vary from £541 to £5362

Version 6 to 7 upgrades are free of charge to all customers under valid Annual Software Maintenance contracts. V6-V7 upgrades will range from £168 to £804 depending on software pack configuration, multi-seat upgrades are available for users with multiple systems. Users are encouraged to take advantage of ASM for the additional benefit it offers on top of the software upgrade (telephone/email support, immediate access and notification of software releases.)

ADR option £1387  
ADR keyboard £752

VCube Software and Hardware options range from £1231-£7044 and are highly configurable.

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