



# Hercules DJ CONSOLE MK2

The vinyl single might be making something of a comeback, but digital DJ'ing is here to stay. Mike Hillier hits the deck.

## KEY FEATURES

- Two stereo analogue inputs
- Two stereo analogue outputs
- MIDI controls for DJ'ing
- Bundled VirtualDJ software

## MEASURING UP

The digital DJ market is hotting up, with new software and hardware from M-Audio, new software from Numark, and news from Native Instruments that the company's newly formed DJ Division will cease operations with Stanton and start developing an integrated solution for DJs in-house. M-Audio's DJ division, SynchroScience, has just launched two new products: Conectiv and X-Session Pro. Conectiv (£169) is an integrated product featuring a 4x4 audio interface and the Torq DJ software. X-Session Pro (£79) is a USB MIDI controller with four MIDI sliders, one crossfader, 12 knobs and ten buttons.

## DJ CONSOLE MK2 (PC EDITION)

Manufacturer **Hercules**

Price **£180**

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Much to the horror of hardcore traditional vinyl-turntablists, digital DJ'ing has leapt into the mainstream and laptops are now a common sight in venues of all sizes. The argument for digital DJ'ing is pretty straightforward: transporting thousands of tracks on a single hard disk is easy, carrying thousands of vinyls or CDs isn't. And while lossy formats such as MP3 don't match the quality of full-bandwidth vinyl or even 16-bit/44kHz CDs, the popularity of the iPod proves that listeners don't seem to mind.

Taking advantage of this apparent sea change in DJ'ing habits is a variety of DJ software, varying from freeware utilities to complex professional applications. But the lack of tactile control makes them a less than ideal solution – as is so often the case in the software domain.

The original Hercules DJ Console rectified this drawback by providing DJs with all the requisite controls in a MIDI interface packaged to look like a traditional DJ mixer. And with the DJ Console MK2, Hercules has taken this

concept further, including a soundcard for integrating analogue equipment with the digital DJ environment.

## Choose carefully

The Hercules DJ Console is available in two flavours: one for Windows PCs and one for the Mac. In addition to a few minor hardware differences (which mean that the PC variant cannot be used with a Mac and vice versa), the two also come with different software bundles: the PC model (reviewed here) comes with Atomix Productions' VirtualDJ 3 DJ Console Edition, while the Mac version is equipped with a special edition of NI's Traktor DJ Studio. Both versions can be used with any MIDI-controllable software if the bundled application isn't to your taste.

## The ins and outs

The soundcard section of the Console features four phono inputs for connecting turntables, CD or MP3 players, plus two stereo outputs (1/8-inch stereo jacks or phono pairs). Due to the lack of balanced outputs we were forced to run the signal through the stereo inputs of a phono preamp in order to monitor the mix. For most novice DJs this won't present a major problem as amateur users will most likely be monitoring through a hi-fi amp, but if you intend to integrate the DJ mixer into your existing project studio, you may need to look at your current I/O options.

The top panel of the DJ Console accommodates the main controls, while the front panel features a mic input and headphone monitoring section. The main control surface is designed to imitate a traditional two-channel analogue DJ mixer, featuring two level faders, a crossfader, a basic three-knob EQ, pitch knob, X/Y joystick and buttons for a variety of common tasks, including transport control, pitch bend and looping.

## Mastering the breaks

Performing using the bundled VirtualDJ software is incredibly easy. The default skin may not be to everyone's taste, but all the necessary controls are present and the CPU overhead is exceptionally low. One feature present in VirtualDJ that gives the software an edge over the otherwise more advanced Traktor is that VirtualDJ supports VST plug-ins. This is a feature that Traktor users have been crying out for, enabling VirtualDJ users to apply a variety of VST effects to their mixes.

Once you get to grips with the layout and features of VirtualDJ, putting together your own mixes is easy. Beat-matching can be done either manually or by using the Beatmatch button. Right-clicking on this button locks it on, ensuring that your next track is automatically beat-matched.

## The stuff of legends?

Hercules has done a very good job of meeting the requirements of a digital DJ with the DJ Console MK2. The lack of balanced outputs puts the hardware firmly in the amateur camp, though, as does the lightweight plastic case and the non-standard dimensions of the unit, which means that it won't fit in a DJ rack. However, if you're taking your first steps as a digital DJ and don't feel ready to invest in expensive equipment, this could fulfil your every need. **MTM**

## SUMMARY

### WHY BUY

- All-in-one hardware/software DJ solution
- Switch between analogue and digital sources
- Sensible controller layout

### WALK ON BY

- You must choose between PC or Mac compatibility
- No balanced outputs
- MIDI controls not freely configurable

## VERDICT

A great starter kit for aspiring digital DJs, the Hercules DJ Console MK2 provides users with all they need to start DJ'ing, but more advanced users may need to look elsewhere.



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