



By Steve La Cerra

Midiman Surface One

One of the most unusual products announced at the Winter NAMM Convention in Anaheim several weeks ago was shown by Midiman. Their Surface One Virtual Control Surface is a user-configurable controller that may be used to generate any type of MIDI data. What sets the Surface One apart from most other MIDI controllers is that it employs some very clever optical technology to translate user movements into MIDI data.

On the front panel of the tabletop console are a series of controller elements or "objects," which consist of eight virtual touch panels, a thumb panel (user-definable with one to three regions), eight virtual buttons, and 16 traditional rotary encoders. All of these objects may be programmed to transmit any message within the MIDI protocol including note on and note off, volume change, program change, and continuous controllers. The interface behind the touch pad objects is a fiber-optic-based, touch-sensitive material. This "smart" fabric was originally developed by the Canadian Space Agency and is now licensed by Tactex. The fabric transmits the information it receives through touch for conversion into MIDI

data. Once converted to MIDI, control information is sent out of the Surface One to any compatible device. A USB interface is included for programming the Surface One via software graphic user interface.

Objects on Surface One utilizing the Tactex material are capable of reading up/down, left/right, and pressure

information; correspondingly, Surface One can send out multiple messages simultaneously. Surface One's "buttons" or pads can transmit a variety of information ranging from solo and mute commands in a sequencing environment to MIDI note on/off in a performance control application (we can envision percussionists going wild with the Surface One and a MIDI drum module). Any message may be assigned to a MIDI controller message. Different types of motion on the smart fabric can be used to trigger specific commands. A shift command allows an operator access to a second layer of objects that may be programmed for commands different from those in the first layer. The resolution of each object may also be user-defined, providing (for example) coarse and fine pitchbend controllers. If an object is defined as a fader, pressure applied to the top or bottom of the fader can result in a fade in or out of data on that particular channel.

Since Surface One's objects are virtual controllers, they can exchange roles, locations, and functions. This allows the unit's functions to vary depending on the environment in which it's used. In one application, the eight touch pads could control MIDI note on/off for drum sounds; in another they could control delay time or chorus depth of a multieffects processor. Other possible uses for the Surface One would be as a virtual mixer for digital audio/sequencing software, or even an input device for 3D graphics or animation software.

The Surface One's I/O complement includes two MIDI ins, two MIDI outs, and a USB port for connection to a computer. Upgrades may be loaded into the unit via flash ROM, and the controller is capable of functioning as standalone device without the need for a computer. ■

MIDIMAN SURFACE ONE

WHAT IS IT? A MIDI control device utilizing fiber optic material to translate motion into control data.

WHO NEEDS IT? Anyone interested in pushing the envelope of performance control over MIDI devices.

WHY IS IT A BIG DEAL? The Surface One employs Tactex's "smart" fiber optic fabric as its interface.

SHIPPING: June, 2001

SUGGESTED RETAIL PRICE: TBA

CONTACT: For more information, contact Midiman at 626-445-2842 or visit www.midiman.net. EQ#ree It. #101.