

SAJE MEMORY

French console manufacturer SAJE has developed an approach to digital control of audio that they refer to as the SARP Principle. Terry Nelson looks at its application within the SAJE Memory console

Consoles have increasingly become more complicated with more and more controls that must be manipulated. The other drawback has been that control room floor space has been steadily eaten up.

The last year or so has seen the appearance of consoles that have centralised functions—either fully or partly—in an attempt to make mixing more manageable by reducing console size and/or the number of knobs and switches.

Research into this type of console has not been limited to England and the USA, however, and French manufacturers SAJE have been quietly engaged in the development of the *Memory*. The first showing to the world was at the CTEAP in Paris, December '85, and since then the *Memory* has been

gathering interest in spite of a notable lack of fanfares or informed general press coverage.

SAJE are situated in the Parisian suburb of Argenteuil and here managing director, Patrick Aufour, was able to explain the principal reasons behind the initiation of the project.

"In 1980 SAJE brought out what we believe was the first production live sound console in Europe with eight auxiliary sends, the *Auxy*, which enabled it to be used for front-of-house or stage monitoring without modification. As the '80s progressed we started seeing consoles with 16 sends becoming standard and if the rate continued, we would soon be up to 24! (Can you imagine what trying to run a console with 24 auxiliaries would be like?)

"We felt that there were two ways out of the situation—either reach for a drill and install more knobs than the competition or re-think the whole concept of the console and come back to a saner level.

"A point that people seemed to be forgetting as consoles got larger was that the time taken to reset it was also getting longer and longer, thus cutting down efficiency and making them unwieldy to use.

"You could almost say that it was back to the old dictum, 'there has to be a better way'—and this is when we came up with the SARP concept."

SARP stands for the SAJE team which developed the system that was to become the *Memory*—Charles Edouard Six, Patrick Aufour, Daniel Rainotti, Claude Prevost although, "We would have liked to put the initials in alphabetical order but that gave us APRS!"

In a world where we are used to seeing innovations directed initially more towards the recording studio, the *Memory* stands apart by being a live sound console.

"In my opinion," Patrick went on, "live sound is where you have to work the fastest. This is not to say that studio operation is not pressurised but there you go when you are ready. Live sound—and this can be PA, broadcast, mobile recording, etc—is happening there and then and you have to go with it. By starting with a live sound console we felt it would be easier to apply its functions to a studio console rather than the other way around."

Basic requirements

"From the start, one of the major stipulations that went out to our R&D people was that at no time could an engineer who was working the console start wishing he was back with a conventional desk. There was to be no wait time between the calling up of different functions and the fact that the console would be computer-controlled could not excuse any restrictions on operation.

"The 'password' at the early stages of development was a worst case situation: it is 8 pm, the concert is at 9 pm, the truck has just arrived (late for any one of a thousand reasons) and there has been no rehearsal with the band."

At first glance one could be justified in wondering what benefits a computer-controlled console could bring in a case like this (apart from instant dismay) but, after hands-on experience at the *Memory*, the answer is—quite a lot!

The main improvement is the speed with which the console can be configured and from power-up you can have a rough mix on both the main faders and auxiliaries plus basic EQ settings within minutes whereas with a normal console you would probably still be resetting functions from the previous gig (and if the desk had been conscientiously set to zero the last time, still twiddling knobs and pushing switches).

SARP's principle is based on the realtime functions of rack mounted audio electronics as displayed on a video monitor: "The graphics are really there to reassure the engineer and to provide him with a connection to what he was working with previously." Put more simply, the graphics display gives a visual indication of the status of one or several inputs or outputs with animated 'knobs' and 'switches'. Colour changes are used for push switches for clear indication of their status.

A little thought shows that the number of actual commands on a console can be reduced to three types: On, Off, Variable, with on/off usually being switch functions and variable being

