



Maintaining a Sound Connection

Echo Digital Audio's new Indigo DJx helps laptop jocks change with the times

By Stu Chisholm

Due to my well-publicized transformation from a CD to "digital DJ," I often find myself on the phone with another entertainer asking for my "expert" advice. An odd state of affairs, since that said transformation only happened at the tail end of 2006. I also prefer USB media controllers to computers, yet this also doesn't deter anyone either. Maybe it's because real tech support costs money...and talking to me is free? Hmmmm...

THE OLD AND NEW BLUE

Anyway, one of the most frequent questions I'm asked is, "How can I hook my computer up to my mixer?" Programs like PCDJ, Virtual DJ, DJ Power and others have amazing features, and some have program-specific hardware to control them without the traditional mouse and keyboard. Yet how to get the music from the computer (usually a laptop) to the mixer or amp gets overlooked more often than not.

Echo Digital Audio recognized this problem early on. They created the DJ-specific Indigo DJ sound card that fit into a notebook's PCMCIA slot, offering digital DJs superior 24-bit sound quality as compared to the standard onboard sound card, and multiple outputs for mixing/cueing to make the integration of a laptop into their rig a snap. Laptop DJs far and wide praised the little card's performance. One of them was my friend Paul Taylor who owns and operates Sunshine Entertainment in Detroit Michigan.

For better or worse, technology marches on. Laptop computers become increasingly more powerful, yet continue to shrink in size. As a result, the traditional PCMCIA slot is going the way of the floppy disk, being eliminated from the new computers in favor of the smaller, more efficient ExpressCard slot. Suddenly that good old Indigo DJ card is obsolete! Paul alerted me to this situation and, being the well informed, cutting-edge DJ that he is, also mentioned a new

version that would soon be available; the Indigo DJx. After all of those "how do I...?" calls I've had, I decided that this is something that DJs need to know about--ASAP! I contacted the company and soon had one of the cards, which hadn't been released yet, in my hands.

HOOKING UP

The first thing I noticed was how small the box is! Even though it holds the card, a six-foot cable and a software disc, the box itself is about the size of three stacked CD jewel cases. Inside is the card and cable, well protected in a plastic tray, with an instruction card and CD-ROM below. The disc contains drivers for Windows XP and Vista. (Note: Mac OSX support is in the works, should be available soon.)

The next thing I needed to do was score an ExpressCard slot-equipped laptop for testing, preferably one with DJ software and a music library on it. Once again, Paul came to the rescue with a new HP laptop equipped with Virtual DJ and a fairly decent music and video library to boot. After installing the drivers and console software, we were ready to put this new card through its paces.

This is when the first small shortcoming became apparent: As we went to hook the card up to my mixing console, we realized that the box contained a single 1/4" to RCA cable. If you want

your virtual decks to be on separate channels, like your old dual CD decks, then you're going to need two, obviously. Lucky for me, we found one in my massive drawer o' cables.

There is also another work-around, which apparently the Echo people thought would be the preferred method: set the DJ software to send both output channels to the same card output, but send the cue signals of both decks to the other. This way you'll use the mixing features included with your DJ software, and the second output of the DJx becomes your headphone/cue interface. This does have the added advantage of



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only needing a single channel on your mixer. In fact, it would make the mixer obsolete, if it weren't for the need for mic inputs. For our tests, we chose the former method, which is how Paul had been running his old Indigo DJ card.

INDIGO ON THE ROAD

Paul and I had expected the new card to be just an updated version of the previous one, and that's what it is by and large. Playing with it just before our "test gig," though, what seemed at first to be another small glitch appeared: one channel seemed to be drastically over-modulated on certain tracks. It sounded as if the song had been recorded way too hot and was clipped. Putting the same track on the other deck solved the bad sound problem, but left us wondering why it sounded so bad on the first channel.

Seeking a better answer, I reached for the unit's one and only external control; the recessed volume knob, designed to allow you to adjust your headphone to a comfortable level when using the other mode. Dialing it down worked. Paul explained that he just ran his old card flat-out and it always sounded fine, but I suspect that the Echo folks may have made some improvements to the headphone preamp section so the card will work with a wider variety of headphones. Loading the same track on both decks and setting the volume so that they match was an easy fix for our little sound problem. (By the way, that the problem only happened with certain tracks, and was caused more by Paul's library not being well normalized. Something to consider when ripping!) The rest of the gig ran as smoothly as

Paul's laid-back, New Orleans style is famous for.

A GOOD REPORT CARD

During the many hours I spent playing with the computer/card combo in the days after the gig, the DJx, the card performed flawlessly—even after being out in a freezing cold car and then in a hot laptop for hours on end. My final verdict: The Indigo DJx is a simple, straightforward device for a simple, straightforward job. I found myself wishing it was even a bit simpler, with maybe a bypass for the volume/headphone channel, but I understand the need to make it as versatile as possible, so that it can be used with nearly every mixing program and DJ preference imaginable. I found these small, personal issues easily ignored in the light of the low cost and ease of installation of the Indigo DJx. It is certainly the card I would use if I ever converted to laptop-based performance. The Indigo DJx should be available as you are reading this, so if you're as into "simple" as I am, you'll be able to simplify your DJ life immediately.

As always, if you have any questions, comments or suggestions, please feel free to e-mail me at DJStuCrew@gmail.com. Until next time, safe spinnin'! **ME**

INDIGO DJX - MSRP: \$229

www.echoaudio.com

Software Specs

Software console for metering and setting levels

Supports Windows XP/Vista (32-bit and 64-bit)

Macintosh OS X support coming soon
Supports pro audio and DJ software - WDM Kernel Streaming, ASIO, GSIF (32-bit only)

8 "Virtual Outputs" to run multiple applications at the same time

Low-latency drivers