

A luxury package from the studio crowd for the most demanding of listeners:
Funk's symmetrical **MTX-Monitor**,

TEST REPORT by HIFI & RECORDS



For those of our readers for whom Funk Studiotechnik Berlin is synonymous with extremely low-priced high-end units (thanks to its LAP-1 mini preamp (issue 4/2001), which has recently found a worthy successor in the LAP-2, and which leaves many larger and much more expensive preamps in the dust), the MTX's "grown-up" price tag will come as something of a shock. Particularly since our test report about the LAP-1 turned out pretty euphoric, suggesting that the ticket to audiophile heaven could be had for as little as €535 (or €635 for the LAP-2). Which is true; neither of the authors of the two articles has shown any inclination to recant.

However, what would our hobby be like without the knowledge that there is always something left to improve, usability or sound-wise? The Funk MTX-Monitor (basic model € 1,795 by Funk Tonstudiotechnik, phone: 030-6115123) is definitely more usable than the LAP, for example because it accepts both balanced and unbalanced signal input and output. This is an absolute must-have for every globe-trotting audiophile who will not accept any restrictions to his choice of input device, while a number of power amps require balanced input to really show their mettle.

LAP, shmap – there is no remote, which is not necessarily true for the MTX: For € 285 extra, it comes with a remote control panel which provides convenient access to all functions from the listener's position, using buttons and rotary level controls. No infrared, however. It's cable. In the age of non-contacting remote control, this may look outdated to some. But in a studio – Funk is primarily a studio equipment manufacturer – reliability is critical, which is why the remote control is hardwired to the MTX. I for once got used to the cable connection very quickly.

A number of MTX features are completely alien to the hifi community. For example, each channel may be switched on and off individually. A phase inverter button, combined with the mono button, reliably registers level differentials between the stereo channels of an input source, which is easy to balance with the MTX's built-in trim pot, without any gauges. Also very typical for studio equipment, yet equally welcome in the hifi camp, is the capability to select any type of source, for example

in order to record with an analogue tape machine without any crosstalk to or from other sources, or for connecting an FX unit such as a reverb processor in the preamp's signal path.

And here comes the MTX-Monitor's main selling point compared to the LAP or any other conventional preamp: Its third signal switching plane for controlling digital information in conjunction with a Funk digital router AMS-2 DAR for €725. This digital signal switching plane turns the Funk MTX into a combined analogue-digital signal management device. In digital mode, digital sources are managed with the MTX's source selector keys. This means that it is possible to route digital signals to a D/A converter or upsampler without affecting or disabling the analogue signal switching plane with its eight inputs. In other words: The MTX manages two planes – listening and monitoring – of up to eight analogue sources each, plus a third plane with another eight sources, in the AES-EBU (balanced) or SPDIF format (unbalanced). Considering the limited number of inputs on a D/A converter, this is a true blessing. To me, the €2,800 convenience package of a remote-control MTX with digital source selection (also accessible remotely) has become an indispensable working tool not just for testing purposes but especially for daily practice. This is particularly true since the MTX easily satisfies even the most exacting acoustic demands.



The MTX-Monitor's developer, Thomas Funk, has endowed this unit with a number of acoustic goodies. Let's talk level control: It is digital, like all MTX switching functions. At the core however – that is, at signal transmission level – it is pure analogue technology based on four high-quality level control circuits per channel. A sophisticated grounding scheme provides first-rate channel separation. Interference or crosstalk from non-selected sources is not dissipated to ground inefficiently. Rather, it is "shorted" via a "dummy earth" that is separate from the payload signal earth. Crosstalk: n/a.

The mains unit with its separate supplies for analogue and digital circuits also contributes in this regard. With its 500 kHz of bandwidth, its extremely fast and reliable circuits and supremely low distortion, no audio signal should be too complex for the MTX.

For the relatively low-priced LAP this would have been too much to ask.

In the sound department it also comes in ahead of the LAP, which was to be expected considering the price. The Funk MTX has nothing to fear from a comparison with the audiophile competition. Convenience-wise, no high-end preamp could easily hold a candle to the MTX. Regarding the sound, the same is true as for the LAP: Get ready for trouble, guys. The performance of this studio preamp should put a good scare in a number of audiophile product manufacturers.

Once again a studio equipment supplier shakes up the high-end community. Packaged in chrome and with grandiloquent advertising, the MTX could sell for several times the price.

Congratulations to the man in Berlin. *Reinhold Martin*



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(Manufacturer note: all prices without VAT)