Peavey Electronics recently introduced the new and aptly named PVDJ division to promote its growing DJ-product line. Practically a household name, Peavey has been manufacturing quality pro-audio products for more than 30 years. The latest addition to the PVDJ family is the Rotomix professional modular mixer. Aimed squarely at the professional or remix DJ; the small project studio; and pro installation markets such as nightclubs, restaurants, conference rooms and so forth, the Rotomix is a highly flexible and functional mixer engineered with high-quality components intended to deliver superior sound quality.

**FIRST SPIN**

At first glance, you can see that the Rotomix is housed in a metal casing rather than plastic, the first indication of a quality piece. The unit’s silver and gray paint job, complete with black accents, and the industrial-strength power switch add to the sleek and rugged look. The crowning feature of the Rotomix is its modular design. Unlike most DJ mixers, which use only one circuit board for all of their inputs, the Rotomix uses a separate circuit board for each of its six input channels, offering a similar internal architecture to those found in professional mixing consoles. This, combined with an external power supply, lays a rock-solid foundation for a cleaner sound by virtually eliminating crosstalk, or “bleed.”

Upon unpacking the Rotomix to connect it to my DJ rig in my home project studio, I discovered that it can only be flush- or rackmounted. All of the inputs and outputs are on the bottom, so it can’t be used as a tabletop unit—a small sacrifice considering the modular design and the sheer number of input and output options that exist. Each of the six input modules has room for four stereo inputs—including ¼-inch balanced line, RCA line, phono line and XLR microphone—equating to a whopping 24 possible devices. The presence of ¼-inch balanced line inputs on each channel really shows how much the PVDJ design team was dedicated to the cleanest sound possible. Furthermore, just below the XLR input, each channel has its own independent Mic Gain knob, an individual +48V phantom-power switch to accommodate condenser microphones and a master phantom-power button, expanding the possibilities for the Rotomix beyond just that.
of a DJ mixing board. The presence of only one phono grounding post is a minor oversight; anyone who has had to perform last-minute troubleshooting or equipment changes in a dark nightclub or who has tried to mount three or more grounding wires on one post can attest to the headaches that this design can create.

For my particular setup, I hooked up two Technics SL-1200MK3 turntables, a Denon DN-2500 dual CD player, a Røde NT1A microphone and a vintage Moog Rogue synth. For recording purposes, I also ran a pair of stereo outs to a Sony CD-RW33 CD recorder and a Digidesign Audio Media III card inside a Mac G4 dual 1.25GHz. And, finally, I connected a stereo return input from a Yamaha 01V mixing console and sent the master output from the Rotomix to a pair of Event TR8s. The Rotomix handled all of these devices without a glitch and sounded fine when recording a DJ set to Digidesign Pro Tools.

One of the most unique sets of features on the Rotomix is its output section. There are three separate stereo outputs, each with three sets of connections. Labeled Main, A and B outputs, all three have a pair of unbalanced RCA connections. The Main adds an additional XLR connection whereas A and B add a pair of balanced ¼-inch connections. Although not labeled for these purposes, any of the outputs can be used as a DJ-booth output, a record line, an effects send or simply as an alternative output for other areas within a venue. The Rotomix can even be set up to send three independent sound sources to three different areas of a venue, perfect for installations (although this option would negate having an independent DJ-booth control). This is all done through the front panel, on which each channel has a set of three Output Select buttons routing the signal to one, two or all three outputs simultaneously. There is also a mono button for the B output.

All of that can seem a bit confusing at first, but the manual is thorough yet simple enough to explain all of the features, even to novice or intermediate users. In fact, unlike most operation manuals, in which it is assumed that the reader already has a thorough knowledge of core audio principles, the documentation for the PVDJ Rotomix serves as a basic primer not only explaining the various features but also why they’re there and how best to use them. That’s a thoughtful touch.
FELLING THE THUMP

Okay, all of this sounds great, but how does the Rotomix really sound, and how user-friendly is it? Novice or intermediate DJs will most likely find the PVDJ Rotomix intimidating. Even experienced jocks will have to take a few minutes to get their bearings. Face it: Knob mixers aren’t for everyone, and given that this board doesn’t have a crossfader, a lot of DJs won’t even look twice at it. In addition, I’ve never seen a hip-hop or trick DJ use a knob mixer, so suffice it to say that the Rotomix is geared toward house DJs. For clubs that feature a lot of guest DJs, I would strongly recommend getting the artists’ approval beforehand or at least letting them get acquainted with the unit prior to opening the doors.

The metering, headphone-assignment options and output-select switches need explaining, and none of the output controls are labeled for booth output. Because so many options are available, labeling the front panel with your custom setup might be a good idea.

All of this aside, the Rotomix sounds great. The signal is clean, clear and loud. However, the board is not designed to be pushed too far past 0 dB (unity). Occasionally hitting the red lights in the meter is allowable, but sustained levels past 0 dB quickly introduce distortion. Unfortunately, the commercial-grade DJ-mixer market has unwittingly taught DJs that going into the red is okay. (With many boards, you almost have to operate at those levels to get enough headroom.) The widely used Pioneer DJ M-500 and -600 mixers are perhaps the guiltiest of this, as their meter sections are almost half dedicated to metering over 0 dB.

The truth is that red means stop, and the PVDJ Rotomix enforces this almost literally. DJs need to be aware that just because a mixing board can’t be driven at a constant level of +8 dB does not mean that it’s a poor design. Again, this may prove problematic for installations with DJs who are not aware of this or don’t care about sound quality in the first place. The Rotomix has enough output gain that it doesn’t need to be overdriven. I bring up all of these issues not to bash the PVDJ Rotomix, but rather to reinforce the notion that this mixing board is intended for professionals who truly know what they’re doing. Now, for those who are up to the task, the Rotomix has some great rewards. The headphone output is very loud and clear. For comparison, I found the headphone output to be far superior than that of the Rane MP 2016 rotary mixer. Two separate stereo LED VU meters—one for the A, B or Main output and one for PFL (prefader listening)—let the operator set appropriate gain levels prior to adjusting the volume knob. For ease of operation, PFL (cue) buttons exist on every channel, and the PFL is also post-gain and post-EQ, meaning that DJs can compensate for different sources and pressings prior to bringing them into the mix, a feature that is confusingly left out on some leading mixers. For flexibility, there is also a continuous headphone blend that can be used to combine the signal from the PFL with the Main, A or B outputs. PVDJ could have taken it a step further by offering a split mode in which the PFL and Main signals are sent entirely to different sides.

Each channel has independent gain and 3-band EQs operating at a range of +9 to –24 dB, providing a virtual kill of the selected frequency range. (High cutoff is at 10 kHz, the mid frequency is centered at 900 Hz, and the low cutoff is set at 70 Hz.) All of the knobs have a nice resistance to them, thanks to the aluminum shafts. However, the volume knobs could have been tighter whereas the EQ knobs could have been looser. Also, the EQ knobs could either be spaced farther apart or made smaller to accommodate larger fingers.

ADD TO YOUR CART

If you’re looking for a great-sounding knob mixer with plenty of inputs and outputs (both balanced and unbalanced), high-quality components and a professional feature set, all at an extremely reasonable price, the PVDJ Rotomix is ahead of the pack. For professional installations, multiple output options are rarely found at this price point, and the sheer number of inputs makes the Rotomix a perfect fit for small project studios, simple live situations or performance DJs who incorporate studio equipment or live musicians into their sets. The overall caveat is that you have to dedicate some time to get familiar with the unit for maximum performance.