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DENON DJ MCX8000

BY GLENN NASH WITH JACK WILSON



SSP: £949.00

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Now, if I said “it’s a Beauty and a Beast” you may think that I was talking about a Disney film, however, you’d be wrong. It’s the way that I can best sum up Denon DJ’s new, and much-anticipated, flagship DJ controller, the MCX8000. I currently own and use a Denon MC6000MK2 MIDI controller, and also briefly flirted with Denon DJ’s teaser offering of the MC4000, so when details of a new Denon super controller emerged I was intrigued. I went digging for more information and soon couldn’t wait to get my hands on the MCX8000 and put it through its paces, both at home in my studio and also out on the road in a real live event environment.

While Denon DJ has been a mainstay of the professional DJ equipment industry for years, and is popular with many mobile DJs, the brand’s ownership changed recently. Around two years ago InMusic, the company behind brands like Numark and ALTO Professional, acquired Denon DJ. This led to concerns within the DJ community that this new controller would be more like a Numark product than what we’ve come to expect from Denon DJ. However, I’m pleased to report, that despite sharing a parent company Denon DJ and Numark have maintained autonomy. Denon DJ has its own research and development team and I’m sure that long-standing Denon DJ users will not be disappointed by the new MCX8000.

Upon opening the box, which is most colourful and adorned with a life-size image of the MCX8000 along with an overview of its features, my eyes gleamed at the sight of this beauty of a DJ controller, or should I say beast – it is huge! My MC6000MK2 is a dwarf in comparison. The construction is very typical of Denon DJ products, with a sleek design and an all metal casing. The first thing that struck me is that, thanks to its large size, the layout of the MCX8000 is very spacious compared to the MC6000MK2. The other thing to note, especially if you’re not an existing Denon user, is that the playback controls are mirrored. This means that the Cue and Play/Pause buttons on both decks are on the inside, close to the mixer controls, while the pitch faders are on the outside, at the edge of the unit. This design is different to Pioneer controllers, for example, which have two sets of identical playback controls.

One of the key features of the MCX8000 is that it can be used to DJ without a laptop. It features Denon DJ’s Engine software on-board, which can be used to play music directly from USB storage devices. Two hi-definition colour display screens are included on the controller itself to display track information and also to facilitate library browsing and track selection.

In order to play music using Engine on the MCX8000 you first need to run your collection through the free to download Engine PC / Mac software to catalogue and analyse your tracks. So, with my back-up DJ laptop, I proceeded to download the Engine software, install it and build my Engine Library, scanning and analysing a selection of Mastermix DJ Beats tracks for duration, BPM, key etc. The Engine 1.5 software has many advantages once installed on your computer. It allows Playlists and Crates to be easily created, as well as

the setting of Cue points. Once my files were prepared, I removed the USB stick and inserted it into one of two available USB inputs on the MCX8000 and soon had music playing directly from the controller.

Once a USB device is loaded, channels one and two (which are actually the middle two channels) are configured to work with the Engine software. This can be selected for each channel by the flick of a switch above the Gain (Level) control. Selecting and loading tracks is a doddle – by using the rotary knob you can easily scroll through your files / folders and load up your music to either deck. As well as the track title and playback time, the display screens also show a coloured waveform of the currently loaded track. This is based on the frequency content of the music, with low-frequency slices displayed in red, mid-frequency in green and high-frequency in blue. This is designed to help identify percussive elements and other sonic features of your music to see in advance up-coming mix points.

For those who want the benefits of digital playback, but would prefer not to have a laptop running at their gigs, the MCX8000 is a solid standalone player. Personally, I like the flexibility of DJing from my laptop, but having the Engine feature is perfect for my mobile DJ work as a reliable backup should my laptop crash mid-gig. Switching between software control and USB playback is as simple as the flick of a switch. What's more, the USB devices can be safely ejected and removed and replaced without any power down or affecting playback from other sources. This feature allows for seamless transition between DJs at events where multiple DJs are playing sets in continuous succession.

The mixer section of the MCX8000 has four channels, each with a dedicated 3-band EQ, Filter knob, and, as already mentioned, a rotary

Level control. Each channel also has its own 10-segment LED channel meter, which is useful when mixing to ensure the level of an incoming track matches that of the currently playing song. All four channels can be switched between software input and external line input, while – as already mentioned – the central two channels also have the option for Engine USB playback.

The Play/Pause and Cue buttons are solid and have that traditional feel we have come to expect from Denon DJ products, without any real latency issues. The sliders are slick and tight with a nice glide and the crossfader is fast and responsive. The cross fader is fully assignable; every channel is switchable between the left and right side of the fader and also has the option to bypass it. It is also adjustable via the X Fader Contour feature on the front panel of the unit, where you will also find the headphone outputs provided as both mini jack and full size ¼ jack.

Around the back of the MCX8000 there are both USB-A and USB-B sockets for connecting to your laptop and also for hooking up an external hard drive for track playback via your DJ software. There are also plenty of audio input and output sockets, giving plenty of flexibility when it comes to integrating the mixer into a mobile DJ setup. As you would expect, the Master Output is provided via balanced XLR sockets. However, unexpectedly, balanced XLR sockets are also provided for the Booth output, which is perfect for use with powered DJ monitors. [The Booth Output has a dedicated two-band EQ, in addition to a level control, located on the front panel]. There is also a stereo pair of unbalanced RCA phono sockets for the Master Output as well as a Mono/Stereo selector switch which is useful if you find yourself playing in a venue with a house PA system that is configured in mono.

In terms of inputs, there are four stereo pairs of RCA Phono sockets for connecting line-level inputs such as CD players. Two of these are also switchable to Phono level, and are provided with a Ground binding post, to allow vinyl playback or, more likely, DVS software control. There are also two microphone inputs, one provided as a combination XLR / ¼" jack socket and the other just as a ¼" jack. There is also an Ethernet link connection which has been designed to work with StageLinq technology to synchronise lighting and video. (InMusic has just launched a new lighting brand Marq, which is designed to work with the MCX8000). The unit is powered by an external AC adapter with the low voltage input socket located on the back panel alongside a push-button power switch.

The MCX8000 works straight out the box with Serato DJ, which is available to download online for free once you have registered your product with Denon DJ. The unit is also Serato DVS ready (with an optional expansion pack). As I am not a Serato DJ user myself, I'll hand over to Jack Wilson now to review using the MCX8000 to control Serato.

So, first things first, after getting the MCX8000 out of its box I knew I'd need to install the drivers on my windows machine and upgrade to the latest version of Serato (a scary thing if you've been using the same version for a while, as you know it's stable!) The installation went swimmingly, with both pieces of software easily available online, just remember – don't plug in the controller until the driver installation software gives the instruction!

Once connected to Serato, I found that the controller was very responsive, which I really liked. I also liked the layout, everything was where it felt like it should be. Being a native



DENON DJ MCX8000



Serato controller, navigating around the various buttons was pretty easy after a short while, although locating the labels in the dark did prove to be a little challenging at first. One feature I couldn't find was the ability to navigate through Serato's History on the screens of the controller itself (as this review is of the MCX8000, I tried to use the on-board screens as much as possible!) Unfortunately, not only couldn't I navigate through the History on the controller's screens but pressing the Load buttons also didn't work when I navigated through the History on my laptop screen. This was a little disappointing, as I often find it useful to look back at the tracks I played at other parties for inspiration mid-gig.

Apart from the History issue, I found navigating through all of the menus a doddle using the controller, as the dedicated buttons beside the screens got me exactly where I needed to go (there's even a Load to the Prepare List button, which is VERY handy!)

The screens are nice and bright (the brightness can be adjusted to suit your taste too) as well as good quality and of ample size. This means that all of the necessary information can be displayed, although I did notice that Artist is not displayed on the screen – no biggy, but it's nice to have it there. (I'm sure this will be solved in a firmware update at some point!) When I first looked, I noticed the screens weren't showing the track BPM counts, but I then realised a simple button combination could be pressed to toggle between BPM and Track Time. This is ok, but I'd have liked to have both of these pieces of information displayed together.

At the bottom of the screens the FXs are shown relative to their assigned knob, along with their current value, which is quite useful. Unfortunately, in my opinion, these knobs are placed far too close to the Needle Drop control, so make sure you disable this feature whilst a song is playing (in Serato settings) otherwise you may

accidentally start jumping back and forward through the track when applying FXs!

At first glimpse the controller itself looked huge, although when standing behind it, I felt that I was in a perfect position and that everything was very nicely spaced – not too close and not too far apart! The large platters make searching through a song easy and effortless and I must say I much prefer them to those found on my current controller (MC6000mk2). Another bonus feature of this controller is the ring of LEDs that surround the platter itself to indicate the playback position. As with other controllers that offer this feature, the LEDs can be changed between 'single on' and 'single off' modes. The LEDs also flash when a track is coming towards its end, if the relevant setting is enabled in Serato, which is very handy!

It was nice to see features on the MCX8000 relating to Serato that you don't often see together on

other controllers: a dedicated Slip Mode button, a Beat Grid editor and a Stop Time knob. There are eight multi-colour performance pads per deck which can be used in different modes to trigger cue points, samples, loops etc. I predominately used this for cue points and it was nice to see that the colours of the pads matched those of the cue points on screen and that they changed colour for the different modes so you always know which mode you are in.

To sum up, I think Denon DJ has created a fantastic product to rival the other leading controllers on the market and the icing on the cake will be when they release the information/products on how to use the controller to control lighting via the Ethernet link (I'm really looking forward to see what that can do!) The controller's stability was fantastic and it didn't miss a beat all

night long. I'd be confident to take it to all of my gigs using Serato. I suppose the final question must be would I buy one?... I think that's a 'yes' from me. Given its specs and features, I'd be happy to have one of these as part of my DJ equipment inventory. Now I'll hand back over to Glenn to finish the review.

The MCX8000 also works with the new Virtual DJ 8.2 software, thanks to a recently released MCX8000 mapper, although the screens are yet to be supported at the time of going to press. I've had the opportunity to use the MCX8000 both at home and at a live event with Virtual DJ 8.2, and to date it has worked flawlessly and seamlessly with the feature rich elements that VDJ has to offer.

As a mobile DJ, I found the MCX8000 to be something of a

game-changer and a real joy to work with. It offers great build quality, lots of connectivity and a full complement of controls whether you use its internal playback capability or its ability to control your DJ software of choice (or both!) Denon DJ are definitely on the right track with this controller and I think it will help to put the brand at the forefront of DJ creativity and technology once again.

Because of its quality build and comprehensive feature set, a fairly hefty price tag was inevitable. However, at £949, I really don't think we can complain! Whether you are a mobile DJ or a club DJ (or both), the MCX8000 is a perfect choice for both performance and quality. If I had to sum up the MCX8000 in three words it would be "Go Buy One"!



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