

If controlling your own foldback mix appeals but you'd rather not invest in a digital setup, the PX System might be just what you need.

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It's great that in-ear monitoring systems are no longer the preserve of professional touring bands — there are now many affordable options that suit the budgets and requirements of semi-pro and amateur musicians. The abundance of digital mixing consoles with Wi-Fi control and plentiful auxiliary outputs has also helped to bring the luxury of 'hearing yourself on stage' to many performers.

Xvive are a relatively new company in this field, established in 2014 with a line of guitar effect pedals, moving into wireless technology in 2016 and now apparently holding several wireless patents. They manufacture in China, although their designers are based all over the world, including North America, Europe and Asia. Their manufacturing facilities make products for "several top American music gear brands", as well as Xvive's own designs, and are described as "highly respected". Their entry into the wireless market in 2016 was the U2 Guitar System, which paved the way for a range of products focusing primarily on wireless systems and in-ear monitors.

The latest addition to their catalogue, the PX System, moves away from wireless technology and uses Cat5 cabling to deliver three discrete audio channels from your mixer to on-stage performers, who can balance each element as required using a small belt-pack mixer. If your budget doesn't stretch to wireless in-ear monitors and the idea of controlling your own mix from an iPad is too expensive, unappealing or downright complicated, the PX System might be what you're looking for.

Linked In

The PX System comprises three elements: the PX-A headphone mixer belt-pack, the PX-B three-channel snake, and a 25-foot, shielded Cat5 cable to connect the two units together. The PX-A is around an inch deep, an inch wide and four inches long, and looks very similar to the personal headphone amplifiers available from Behringer and SubZero. At one end is a small volume knob that also acts as an on/off switch, and below it is a standard

3.5mm stereo headphone socket. A small switch selects either battery power or POE (Power Over Ethernet, which I will explain in a moment), and there's a battery level LED that glows blue when the unit is on and changes to red when power is low. Three volume knobs, clearly labelled Input 1, 2 and 3, are used to control the levels of the individual audio signals routed to the PX-A. A locking etherCON RJ45 connector allows connection to the PX-B.

The PX-A's battery compartment flips open to reveal space for two AAA batteries, plus three DIP switches that serve as pan controls and allow each of the connected audio signals to be sent to the left, right or centre of the headphone mix. Finally, a sturdy clip is provided to attach the PX-A to a belt.

The PX-B is around half the length of the PX-A and, in addition to the etherCON connector at one end, features four 18-inch, braided, trailing cables. Three of the cables terminate in female XLR connectors, which connect to your audio sources, and the fourth can be used for a standard 9V DC PSU (not supplied), providing Power Over Ethernet. This makes it possible to power the PX-A without batteries. Both the PX-A and PX-B feature metal cases that feel well made and solid but not overly heavy or cumbersome, which is particularly helpful if you're taking advantage of the belt-mounting option while playing.

As I mentioned, the included 25-foot cable uses etherCON locking connectors, which work in a similar way to an XLR and are very secure. Should you need to be further than 25 feet from your audio source, you can use any good-quality shielded Cat5 cable up to 200 feet in length.

Direct Connection

The basic idea is that the PX-B's three trailing XLR cables connect to your audio sources and the PX-A receives the signals over Cat5. The user can then balance each signal independently, using the three

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Xvive PX System

Personal Monitor Mixer

Xvive PX System

PROS

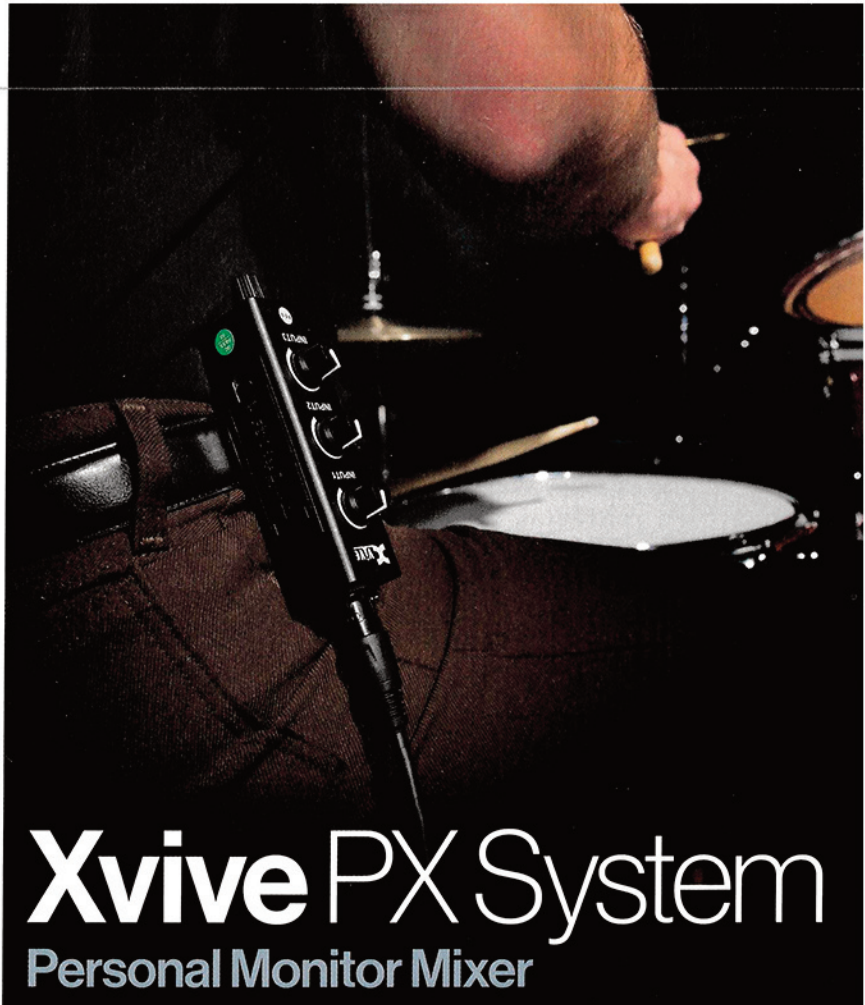
- Extremely well made.
- Easy to set up.
- EtherCON locking connectors.
- Up to 200-foot cable runs.
- Flexible in-ear monitor mixing on a budget.

CONS

- Potentially could occupy three mixer aux sends for one performer.
- The XLR adaptors may be too bulky for some mixers.

SUMMARY

The PX System offers a great solution to anyone looking to control their in-ear mix without investing in complex hardware and software.



» volume controls to create their desired mix. On the surface, setting up the PX System couldn't be simpler but, depending on what you are looking to achieve with your in-ear mix, there are several ways you can configure the system.

Most musicians would configure a monitor mix using aux sends on their mixing console, and the PX System can fit in seamlessly with this. Your mixer will need to have at least three aux sends to make the best use of the PX System but, assuming you have those available, you simply connect the three trailing XLR cables to the individual aux outputs of your mixer.

Many mixers have quarter-inch jack outputs rather than XLR connections, and Xvive have taken this into account by providing three balanced XLR to unbalanced mono jack adaptors. However, I found that all three of these adaptors together were too bulky to plug into all three aux sends on my Behringer XR2222 desk, as its sockets are located quite close together. This is certainly something to be aware of — you may need some additional cabling or adaptors to resolve the problem.

Once the system is connected, the user can then go about the task of creating three independent mixes that will be sent to the inputs of the PX-A. You might, for example, configure aux 1 for vocals, aux 2 as bass and drums, and aux 3 as guitar and keys. How you configure each aux send will depend on what you want to control separately in your own mix.

If your mixer doesn't have the luxury of three aux sends, another option is to use the direct output of a channel or a subgroup output as one of your sources. Let's say

you wanted to create the same mix as above, but your mixer only had two aux sends. As with the previous configuration, you could use aux 2 to create a bass and drums mix, aux 3 for a guitar and keys mix, and connect the remaining XLR on the PX-B to the direct output of the vocal channel. Depending on how a given mixer is designed, it may be possible to use the insert point of a channel as a direct output, but you would need to be aware that this can interrupt the signal path to the main outputs on many mixers.

If you're a performer playing to backing tracks, you could take a stereo feed from a laptop or iPad into channels 1 and 2, with the DIP switches in the PX-A set to left and right, to give you true stereo in your headphones. Input 3 could be your vocal, your instrument or, if you're a drummer, a feed from a click track.

The PX System isn't exclusively for live performance — you could also make it work well in a studio environment, taking individual outputs from your audio

interface and allowing performers to balance themselves against a backing-track mix.

Wired For Sound

The PX System offers a great solution for performers wanting a degree of control over their personal in-ear mix without using Wi-Fi and iPads, which can be over-complicated and confusing for some musicians. As it's hard-wired, you achieve excellent quality audio and are not subject to the interference that is the bane of cheaper wireless IEM systems using the congested free frequency bands.

Of course, the fact that it is hard-wired does make it most ideally suited to more static musicians, such as drummers and keyboard players, but a potential 200-foot cable length allows some leeway. The hardware is well made and very solid, and all the cables feel very high quality, especially the locking etherCON connections, which add a welcome level of security on stage. Having trailing XLR connectors also gives the system a high-end feel, but in practice I found the XLR-to-jack adaptors too bulky for my particular mixer.

To suggest the PX System "lets you hear what you want to hear on stage, in the studio or in rehearsal", as Xvive do, is perhaps overstating the case a little, as it is limited to three channels, but a bit of lateral thinking with DI boxes and signal splitters — and the way you configure the system — allows a good level of flexibility. To sum up, at around half the price of a reasonable wireless IEM setup, the PX System is easy to use, sounds great and gives you a degree of control over your mix that you don't get with a stereo system alone. ■■■



■ The complete system comprises the PX-A mixer unit, the PX-B breakout snake, and a 25-foot etherCON cable to connect the two.

Expanding Universe

The most obvious issue with the PX System is that one performer could monopolise up to three aux sends, potentially leaving no monitor outputs for anyone else in the band. This is where the PX-Hub comes in. Although I didn't have a physical unit to review, it's certainly worth mentioning, as it does allow you to easily expand the PX System to accommodate up to five additional musicians.

This simple half-rack unit resembles an Ethernet hub and, in essence, that's what it is. You connect the PX-B to your audio sources as normal, and then connect the Cat5

cable to the input of the PX-Hub. Each band member can then connect their own PX-A to one of the five available Cat5 outputs and create their own mix. Of course, each mix will be based upon the same three audio sources, but the balance between them is up to each individual band member. It's a neat solution that saves a lot of cabling, as you only need one PX-B to supply audio and power to five PX-A units.

