

PRO AUDIO REVIEW

Coleman
Audio

by Dr. Frederick J. Bashour

Reprinted from April 2000

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MS8 Balanced Audio Switcher



As luck would have it, while making a final walk-through the exhibits at last fall's AES convention, I bumped into Glenn Coleman, next to his small display of passive-balanced audio switchers and monitoring gear. Since I was to drive the next day to a big remote recording session in Denver - one whose equipment list had grown tremendously as a result of new gear I'd discovered that weekend - I literally begged him for one of his units. When I arrived in Denver a few days later, a Coleman Audio switcher was waiting for me at the hotel.

What attracted me to Coleman's boxes was the excellence of their design and the obvious care taken in their construction. Here, at last, was a line of control room switchers that would not compromise the sound quality of a source, nor affect it in any weird way by terminating it with an unbalanced load. The units contain only high-quality input and output connectors, heavy-duty pushbutton switches and, in some cases, a second and third set of outputs via premium stepped attenuators and/or headphone amplifiers. They differ only in the type and number of input connectors and the presence or absence of the output pots and true VU meters.

As a remote engineer, I always require the most functionality in the smallest amount of space, so I ordered the MS8VH (\$670; other Coleman switchers range from \$399 to \$799), a single-rack-space box with eight stereo balanced inputs on TRS connectors, three outputs (direct, via the pot, and amplified for headphone use) and no meters. I could have gotten the MS6V, which fits six stereo inputs via XLR connectors in the same space or the MS2V, which has seven stereo inputs and two large VU meters in a two-space chassis; I opted for the greatest number of inputs in the smallest package, and just built myself a set of XLR to TRS adapter cables.

In use

I won't detail the collection of equipment I connected to those cables, but I will comment on how reassuringly solid its big white pushbuttons felt while switching between them. The 22-position stepped attenuator is huge; Coleman tells me it's the same one used by Solid State Logic to control monitor level in its consoles. I connected a pair of 15' low-capacitance Belden 1800F cables between the pot's output jacks

and my Dynaudio BM6A loudspeakers. The sound was beyond reproach; it was great to be able to send my various balanced output sources directly to the balanced inputs of my active monitors without unbalancing them along the way.

The little headphone amp packs a pretty big punch too; its own pot feels smooth and maintains good channel balance. Its power supply is also mounted inside the Coleman MS8VH's chassis; no clunky and easily lost wallwarts here!

Summary

Coleman Audio, admittedly a little guy in the pro audio world, builds small boxes that seem big. Its MS8VH has certainly solved my analog location-monitoring dilemma with the most elegant solution I can imagine. It's not glamorous gear designed to dazzle but, rather, a beautifully built piece of equipment designed to do its job well, and last for a very long time. Thanks, Coleman, for building these switchers! Contact: Coleman Audio at 516-334-7109

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