

Product Review - Cuelux

Computer-based lighting control packages are very much becoming the norm and while some (such as ShowCAD) have been doing it for many years, the advent of cheaper computing and high speed data ports such as USB have given rise to a greater proliferation of such systems. Visual Productions has been specialising in computer-based control systems since 1999 and has products aimed both at architectural applications (Visual DMX), pixel mapping for LED matrix control (Canvix matrix server) and the product in this review: Cuelux - an entry-level software application.

The software can be downloaded from the company's website, although a USB dongle with the software on can be purchased direct from the company's online store. For an 'entry level' program, it is quite well specified, with the ability to output Art-Net (as long as the USB-DMX device is attached and acting as a dongle), industry standard cuelists (presented in a similar fashion to those in other consoles such as Wholehog, GrandMA etc), MIDI control and also an app that works with the iPhone or any phone with a decent web browser. It is designed for use with touchscreens and so buttons and windows are sized appropriately (even the on-screen keyboard has big buttons so that all programming can be done on screen without ever needing to resort to a proper keyboard or mouse) although there is support built-in for a USB joystick. From a controller aspect, it has unlimited groups and sub-masters, 64 playback faders and buttons and is limited to a maximum of 48 fixtures (not DMX channels!).

Installation is easy and on the machine used (Windows 7 64bit) the only marginal hiccup was the usual software verification nag screen, although on this machine User Account Control had been disabled which saved a few more nags popping up during the installation process. The acid test comes with trying to drive it without resorting to the manual and the first task was to make the control panel bigger. This was a case of pressing the options button, the general button and then selecting the screen resolution (or 'full screen') from the drop-down menu. The display is dark with a purple and black/grey colour scheme, and my only minor gripe is that I had to turn the brightness of the monitor up quite a bit: a negative version of the display would be nice - as would an option to brighten the colour scheme by pressing the 'desklight' XLR.

To start off, a couple of six-channel dimmers were added which again is an easy task after selecting 'patch'. There is a nifty little window that pops up if you select 'address' to try and change the DMX start address of a fixture that allows the decimal number to be set, whilst the binary one is shown on the adjacent DIP switches which change to reflect the new setting. The fixture library is extensive with pretty much every manufacturer covered and a long list of generics (including LED displays) featured as well. One interesting thing is that if a smoke machine, strobe or blinder is patched in then the 'globals' (top right, below the clock) automatically become activated.

Having added a few fixtures it was easy to program a few settings and patterns using the shape generator. The cuelist shows icons displaying the attributes that are active in a particular cue, the targets and the loop and release times. Toggling the 'options' button displays the actual program options such as DMX monitor as well as a list of patched fixtures and their current states.

Building a stack or cuelist is a matter of selecting the appropriate button and then adding and editing accordingly - there is little to say about this as it really is as easy as it sounds. However, it did take a moment or two to work out how to turn the dimmers on. From the fixture patch list it is possible to select a device, and the controls on the bottom right allow attributes to be changed. One would have thought that selecting the 'Dimmer' would bring up a row of channels for the dimmer, but it doesn't. Instead, toggling the options button to display the fixtures allows one to select the dimmer channel



in question and then control it using the dimmer slider at the bottom. Toggling the button again shows the DMX monitor and the live channel being controlled (if DMX monitor is selected, of course).

Should a personality need changing or a new one creating, another application called 'Personality Builder' allows existing fixtures to be edited or created. This is in a Beta version at the moment but again is quite easy to get to grips with. The picture shows a random moving yoke fixture called Bucket with colour (RGB, so must be an LED device!), shutter, gobo and pan/tilt; in this case the functions for the gobo wheel are being edited. The colour bars at the bottom represent the channels and functions - the gobo here highlighted in red as some functions overlap - all the effects have the same DMX level set. A green bar indicates that nothing is allocated to that channel. It is possible to upload the fixture to the Visual Productions database by clicking send, or on exiting from the program it is available for use in Cuelux itself.

So, for €399 including the DMX output device, does it represent good value? It's certainly comparable in price to other products of its genre, but is different in that it provides a very easy-to-use interface that anyone familiar with a basic lighting desk will grasp easily, which is where many others fall over. The layout is also designed to be used on a touch screen, so for nightclubs or similar small venues that want a traditional simple lighting desk with more functionality than two presets and bit of memory, it is ideal and much better value over its hardware equivalents.

> www.cuelux.com
> www.visualproductions.nl

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