

TAPE OP MAGAZINE

Future Media Concepts: Taming the Audio Software Monster

by Jeff Touzeau

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While there seems to be no stopping advances in music technology software, there has been an increasing effort in the marketplace to harness its power through proactive education. More and more software manufacturers are offering certified education programs throughout the country, including formalized training programs with certified instructors and approved curriculum. To many home studio owners or professionals who have been struggling with complicated but powerful programs such as Emagic's Logic Audio, this is a long-awaited relief. For others, such as Pro Tools users, becoming certified with the latest software version can provide an advantage in a very competitive job market. Future Media Concepts, which is headquartered in New York City, is among the first educational facilities in the nation to offer manufacturer-certified training programs for Digidesign's Pro Tools and Emagic's Logic Audio. For Logic, the facility offers a three-day, intensive program that provides a broad overview of the program's feature set, then drills down into Logic's interface (the Arrange window, the Environment, Track Mixer, Matrix Editor, Score and others). FMC's Logic Course, like their Pro Tools courses, is extremely hands-on. It helps students not only understand the inner workings of the program, but also teaches them how to be productive with it in real world situations. The course separates the theory from practicality, never losing sight of the users end goal: to increase creativity and productivity. *Tape Op* spoke to Jeff Rothberg, co-founder and vice president of Future Media Concepts, and John Travis, its veteran Pro Tools and Logic instructor.

Jeff, can you tell me how Future Media Concepts evolved?

FMC was founded in April, 1994, so we're in our tenth year of business. I have been in this building for over 28 years, which used to be a post-production house that I managed. My partner Ben Kozuch

and I came up with this idea to start an Avid-authorized education center for video, catering to the post production clientele, mainly editors. The company started out of one room, the office in which we are now standing. Avid was the first to outsource this kind of training, so that became our model. We now have centers in six cities: New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Washington, Miami and Orlando. Over the years, we have added many software manufacturers including Digidesign, Apple, Adobe, and Macromedia

Is it difficult to approach the different manufacturers and be selected to provide authorized training?

It's a little more difficult, because there are certain restrictions one has to adhere to in the training center, such as you have to have the latest software, the latest equipment, you have to have certified instructors, and the curriculum has to be authorized. We are also licensed with the Board of Education in New York State, so there are additional hurdles you have to go over to obtain state licensing. Everyone here has to have a teacher's permit, for example.

Can you describe your classes?

One of the things we do is we have very small class sizes. Classes are never more than five or six. For the most part, we find this class size a competitive edge, and it really gives people a chance to get

individualized, customized training.

Most of your classes are taught with an "immersion" technique...

We call it "Just In Time Training". We have classes weekly or so, and we run classes even if there are only two people. Most of the students are people who are already in the business who are looking to enhance their skills, but there's been a resurgence of people looking to get into the business. So we have "Open Houses" upstairs on our stage that's used as a gateway for people to take classes. We'll talk about Pro Tools, Final Cut Pro, Avid. These are usually evening sessions that run two hours in length, very focused.

How did you get into the audio side? Did it evolve from post?

Digidesign is owned by Avid, so there is a very strong relationship there. When Digidesign decided to offer certified training a few years ago, they naturally looked to us. So we made the large investment in equipment and training. We're one of the few on the east coast that offer it, and it has been a win-win situation.

How do you choose the audio software platforms you offer training for?

There needs to be numbers for us, financially, for it to make sense. That is a large user base or exclusivity from the manufacturer.

What are some of the advantages of certified education?

With Pro Tools, they have a unique certification program. You can take many different courses and become a certified operator or a certified expert. Once you take all the courses, there's a very difficult test. If you pass this test, there are all sorts of benefits. You get to be on the Digidesign Web site, you get their logo on your business card, you get certain advantages purchasing software. Of course if you're going for a job interview, and you're a certified expert, my feeling is that you have an advantage over the person who is not. It gives you a competitive edge. The trend is that more and more manufacturers are taking

this certified approach.

How many levels of Pro Tools courses do you offer?

There are two different tracks. There is the certified operator track, and certified expert in music and post production. Digidesign has a very strong model, in terms of not having too many schools, as you can see, we have a very small class size here, which is conducive to a learning environment.

John Travis, Instructor

It seems like there is a dearth of instructors for both for Logic and other music software. How did you get your knowledge in Logic and why did you get involved in educating others on this application?

Well, I got started in Logic after running across them on the Internet. I got my own system and opened up a small operation in my hometown, then finally got a job at some of the bigger studios here in town. I was just overtaken with the large studio setups... I realized that you didn't need all this and you could do most of this with software and smaller configurations at home. I actually remember the first time I saw the SSL consoles, E and

G series consoles, and someone showed me the automation. I said, "That's it? That's all you can do?" Already, the software I had at home could automate every single parameter I saw.

How did your involvement with FMC evolve?

There was no training outlet in the city for any kind of audio training for these software and hardware devices. So I wanted an opportunity to teach software and hardware configurations, and was actually interested in trying to teach Logic then as well, but the demand wasn't there. When I started it was a Digital Performer town, then Pro Tools took over.

It seems like there has been increased interest in Logic over the last several months... what is causing the spike? Where are the students coming from?

The students that we're getting right now are a combination of professional and non-professional students. We're seeing more and more people coming from the independent film circuit, because people are really interested in the idea of the integration between Final Cut Pro and Logic. We get a lot of scoring and composition students. There isn't anyone who is looking at the other programs for this purpose anymore.

Why do so many people complain about how hard Logic is to learn?

I have to think it is a culture clash. It is a German software, it comes from the German mindset. I don't think people realize that and take it into account. Just as if you dropped me off in Berlin, I wouldn't be able to speak to everyone there either. I'd have to learn the perspective and the language. Once you've learned it, it's really easy to get into. Now, with the acquisition from Apple, they have taken the software design to a whole new level as far as the interface goes. The thing about Logic is that, I think MacWorld called it the Rolls Royce of sequencers, it has so many features. Logic came from a notator program, moved into sequencing, then moved into audio. To create a notation program is very, very complex. So I think they made it overtly complex in the beginning and they've had to smooth out the finer issues. We are all benefiting from this, because it has evolved from a higher technical level. Now it's all about smoothing out the edges to make it a nice, gui interface for everyone to use.

Can you describe the different roads that Digi and Emagic have evolved from?

Digi was designed to replace the analog tape machine. They wanted to create a digital recorder that would work on a computer-based system with zero latency. The audio cards they have are well suited towards that. The software is very intuitive, and works like a regular console and tape machine. It's a very nice mixing environment. Whereas I think Logic came from a notator program, moved into sequencing, then into audio. So they've come in from two different sides and are coming together and merging. I don't even think the two companies see themselves as the rough competition other developers do. The engineer would use Pro Tools more, and the composer would use Logic. But that doesn't mean that if you're one or the other, you wouldn't use the other software. I just think that's where they came from, but they're definitely coming together in a very nice manner.

What are some of the more difficult concepts in Logic that people seem to have a tough time with?

The environment window is definitely the hump to get over. It's because you're building it completely. You're not coming up to a mixer and a tape machine that has been built for you, you're building the mixer as you go along. So instead of having something that's already laid out for you, you first have to construct it and put it together. In Pro Tools, the master fader is right here. In Logic, you can put the master fader

wherever you want. You could create as many audio tracks as you need. Also, you're not limited anymore by hardware. If I came up to a 24 input console, that's it. I only have 24 faders. If I want more, I gotta go buy another console.

How is Emagic catering to both developers and basic users? Is that a struggle?

It's definitely a struggle. Apple is going to help that though. You see, there are two users. There's the users who want simplicity, and want to pare down some of the high level functionality you have, and there's the power users who just want more and more functionality. The balance between the two is in the plug in design. The original plug-ins were just a list of parameters, and now they are much more user friendly.

I realize Digi started a lot of the certified training tracks, but is there a trend of certified tracks apparent in audio software versus the typical college courses?

Certified tracks can be for people who have already gone to college. What we have here is an adult learning center. We aren't training kids who might not have a clue about what they want to do. Most the people that we have are very dedicated, and know exactly that this is the track they want. They want to learn it quickly, and we provide an overload so you will be able to take as much as you can away.

Will you be offering other Logic courses in the future?

Yes, definitely. They are working on a new book that will come out eventually. They want also to see how well the first instances of the course are received.

Brian Chmaj "Monkis", FMC Student

Why did you choose Logic?

On recommendation from friends, I purchased the gear and found myself way over my head.

Are you a writer, what do you plan on doing.

I am a songwriter, I've done a few commercial projects where I wrote a jingle for a lemonade commercial, but more or less, it's to get my own demos together and stuff like that.

Did you say you are in a band?

I'm in several bands in the Buffalo area. The most widely known is Major Healy.

What was your process before you got into sequencers?

I was using the Korg Triton, which has a built-in sequencer with the LED. The Triton is a lot more powerful than many others. You can do things like cut and paste. The thing is it's limited in its processors, you can only apply compression and it's very limited in its mastering abilities compared to Pro Tools and Logic.

How long have you been dabbling in Logic?

6 or 7 months.

What have been the real challenges?

Setting up the event window. The thing about Logic is, everyone says, it's such a powerful tool. And it's still a program that's built by engineers and not musicians. So you're like, okay, I'm ready to lay down tracks, you know, and I want to record into it. It's not just pull up the mixer and press record. There's a lot of things you have to set up before you do that. When you're looking for that in the manual, it's not a sequential process. It's a lot of hunting and pecking. I finally got into recording some audio in, and within a few seconds, it crashed on me, and said that I didn't have any more recording time.

What kind of recording interface?

MOTU 828. I'm not a big time computer user, so the thing that happens to the novice is that you don't know where to start looking to fix the problem. It's not so much you can't follow the directions, but what happens is many times a step doesn't work out because you may have clicked the wrong button, but now the step by step process isn't clear anymore.

Had you used other programs?

The only other music software I've used before was Finale. I've been working on a methods book for teaching. Although the program's been around for a while, I'm very used to it. I wanted a program that I could store large audio files, be able to pull them up, mix them, apply effects, master and all that stuff.

Brian Parnell, FMC Student: Retail Sales, MacAuthority

What drove you to take this class, and how did you find it?

I'm predominantly self-taught in Logic, but I'm starting to get more trade in it where we work at in Nashville. More and more customers are interested in it. I work at an Apple Specialty dealership (macauthority.com). I am the audio specialist there. I will be Apple certified in Logic Audio so I can go out and do more consultations, installs, and provide better answers in the store. I am getting asked more and more questions that I can't answer.

Would you say that the percentage of Logic users has increased?

Since Apple has embraced Logic, everyone is onboard with it.

Who is using the program?

In our world, in Nashville, the main people who are getting into it are young artists themselves who are doing dance and hip-hop music as well as country writers and producers. People are looking for a better way to compose and do midi. Logic's power plus its price point is of interest to everyone. I've seen a lot of Finale and DP 4 users who have made the switch or at least added Logic to their existing systems.

How did you find FMC, and what other education for Logic did you consider? Were the pickings slim?

Very slim. I looked on the Apple training page to find all the centers. I called every center that was listed, and the only one that had a class scheduled at all was FMC here in New York City. We're doing a lot of groundbreaking here...I like being in on the front end of it. I know that Full Sail in Miami started their own

Logic training center as well.

How about FMC's immersion technique?

Immersion is the only way to go if you're learning languages or technology. Only way to go.

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