

## LYNX HILO

Mastering Quality Conversion With Touchscreen GUI



In the mid-'90s, I was dragged kicking and screaming into the practice of recording with computers. Digital wasn't tactile and sounded different to me. I quickly came to the understanding that the conversion process colored the sound much like tape did in the analog world. After working with different converters, I started to develop a feel for recording in the box. The Lynx Aurora was one of the first converters I used, and I quickly grew to trust the sound they provided, and often carried them with me for sessions. I have owned Lynx converters ever since, and was excited to see the latest portable addition to the line at the 2012 Winter NAMM show. The 2-channel Hilo takes a new look at how we interact with a converter. It features A/D, D/A, stable clocking, and an independent headphone amplifier with its own dedicated D/A converter, plus flexible routing of the I/O through a touchscreen interface.

### SOLID FEATURES

Pulling Hilo out of the box put my mind into a state of wanderlust. I had seen it before and knew it was fairly compact, but during setup I realized I could throw this little half-space unit into a backpack with my laptop and record anywhere. And I mean anywhere: Hilo has an optional battery-pack connection that uses the same batteries you would find for video cameras or electronic equipment: nine to 18 volts with a 4-pin XLR connector.

by pressing the screen for analog-styled dbx 160-type meters or digital Dorrrough-type meters. The arrow at the bottom right will take you back to the previous screen.

The back of the unit includes digital and balanced analog inputs (XLR) that can be routed to three separate outs: line (XLR), monitor (1/4-inch) and a 1/4-inch headphone out on the front of the unit. The monitor and headphone outs have their own touchscreen volume control. Also, both have their own dedicated set of digital converters, allowing the user to create separate and unique mixes. Pushing the large knob on the front switches between the monitor and headphone output.

Pro levels can be set at +18, 20, 22 and 24 dBu, and consumer levels include +0, 2, 4, and 6 dBu. Digital outputs include AES, S/PDIF, ADAT, coax for the clock source and the ever-handy USB 2 from the optional LT-USB card (\$395). New features and software upgrades can easily be integrated from the USB connection. This interface can be used for eight ins and outs at all sample rates, and the slot itself will allow for future interface formats as they become available. There are 12 inputs and 16 outputs, plus 32 possible channels via the L Slot port. This flexibility allows Hilo to handle a simple or complex session.

Even a cigarette lighter will do the trick. A 60-watt battery would give you almost three hours of operation. Very cool.

The sleek 480x272-pixel touchscreen interface allows for an amazing amount of flexibility and possible routing options for the I/O and its 32-channel mixer. It's very easy to navigate through the control of Hilo, even with its extensive routing, mixing, sample rate selection, clock sourcing, levels, diagnostics, and metering. Users can select their preferred metering choices

### TRY THIS

Archive your favorite vinyl records through Hilo using RCA-to-XLR cables and run them into the line inputs on the back and record at different resolutions to see what you prefer. Set the outputs on your computer to Hilo and have fun finding out what sounds the best to you.

## PRODUCT SUMMARY

**COMPANY:** Lynx

**PRODUCT:** Hilo

**WEBSITE:** lynxstudio.com

**PRICE:** \$2,499

**PROS:** Mastering-quality converters and dedicated headphone amp. Flexible I/O., Unique touchscreen interface.

**CONS:** Only one headphone output.

### EASY SETUP

I often have reservations when I have to pull one of the converter/clock units out of my rack to take somewhere else or if someone wants to bring something in they prefer. I foresee spending time that the DAW is not seeing the interface, not synching, downloading latest drivers, etc.: This was not the case with Hilo. Connection to my system was easy, using coaxial cables for the clock and AES for digital I/O.

The illuminated power button engaged the touchscreen and I easily started to find my way around the I/O staging from the menu. I pulled up previous session mixes just to listen to something familiar I had been working on, and the I/O recognized Pro Tools right way. Clock was locked and solid. I saw meters moving and turned up the volume to find fantastic detail and clarity in my mixes. I knew the tracks in and out and nothing was missing. In fact, some of the elements felt wider and more balanced than I remembered from before.

After some research, I learned that Lynx has reworked its original Aurora and the analog circuitry for Hilo, improving the converter inside the unit. There is now a separate DAC chip for each line output, for conversion and summing the audio. This in turn significantly reduces the distortion and improves the noise floor by 3 dB. The monitor and headphone paths are still using stereo DAC paths in the conventional way, but the overall listening experience is fantastic.

### SMALL PACKAGE, BIG SOUND

When listening to my own mixes, and other recordings I knew well, Hilo provided the richness and clarity I expected in the top end, balanced midrange and full bottom, with extended depth in the lower sub octave range. I didn't notice a particular color to the converters; Hilo was fairly transparent in its delivery.

I next used Hilo to record rapper/singer Cashatt, a dynamic performer. It was important that Hilo could handle the range of his varied delivery and replicate what he puts out; we weren't disappointed. Once I dialed up a mix, I found myself wishing for a second headphone out

on the unit so I could reference the mix as well. The track started, and his vocal sounded great. I didn't need to do much to get it sitting in the mix, the blend of the mic and a touch of compression had it sounding the way I wanted it.

We also recorded some acoustic and electric guitars—both sounded fantastic. I later tried recording an acoustic guitar, a highly-strung acoustic, and vocal at varied sample rates to see how Hilo performed at higher sampling levels. I noticed a difference in detail and acoustic space at 96 and 192 kHz: Hilo was incredibly accurate in the high-strung guitar—I could hear the picking of every note against the regular acoustic and the vocal.

I tried using Hilo in a couple of location recordings. Setting it up with a laptop was quick and easy, and I was up and running in a matter of moments. I liked how I could save presets and switch between session setups quickly. I tested Hilo with iTunes via the USB connection and only had to change the output of the computer. It was great to have a high-quality converter outputting your music library in a remote setting.

The final test I did was to incorporate an analog stereo chain on the line inputs and outputs and route the signal through the matrix to the outboard units for some quick mastering on a track I had just finished mixing. Once I had signal running through the I/O, I made some adjustments to the outboard gear to taste, and printed another version of the mix. It was easy to get the outboard gear integrated using the signal routing on the touchscreen and control the level of input and output. The track was sounding great, and after some more listening I printed the track at a couple of different sample rates to see how the conversion was affecting the overall sonic picture. Again, the higher rates really brought out the full range of impact that the track needed. Hilo is a great unit for mastering.

### ROOM TO GROW

Lynx has always met my expectations when it comes to achieving sonic clarity with maximum detail: Hilo is an extension of that path and more. Hilo includes a fantastic-sounding headphone amp, and an easy-to-use interface that I'm sure will only continue to improve as it evolves and there is room to grow. Could Hilo be a real-time analyzer, or a phase or loudness meter? I see them coming, and it's just a download away. The idea of combining stable recording on the front and back end with quality monitoring into a small unit has me thinking of other places I can record, while being sure of great results. Hilo can handle all of it and then some. ■

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