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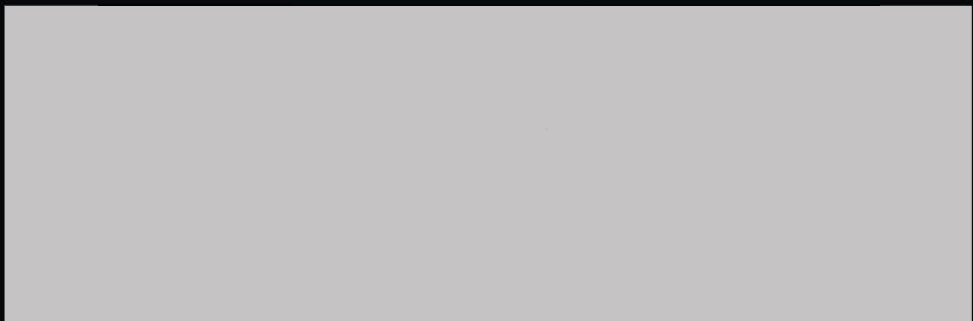
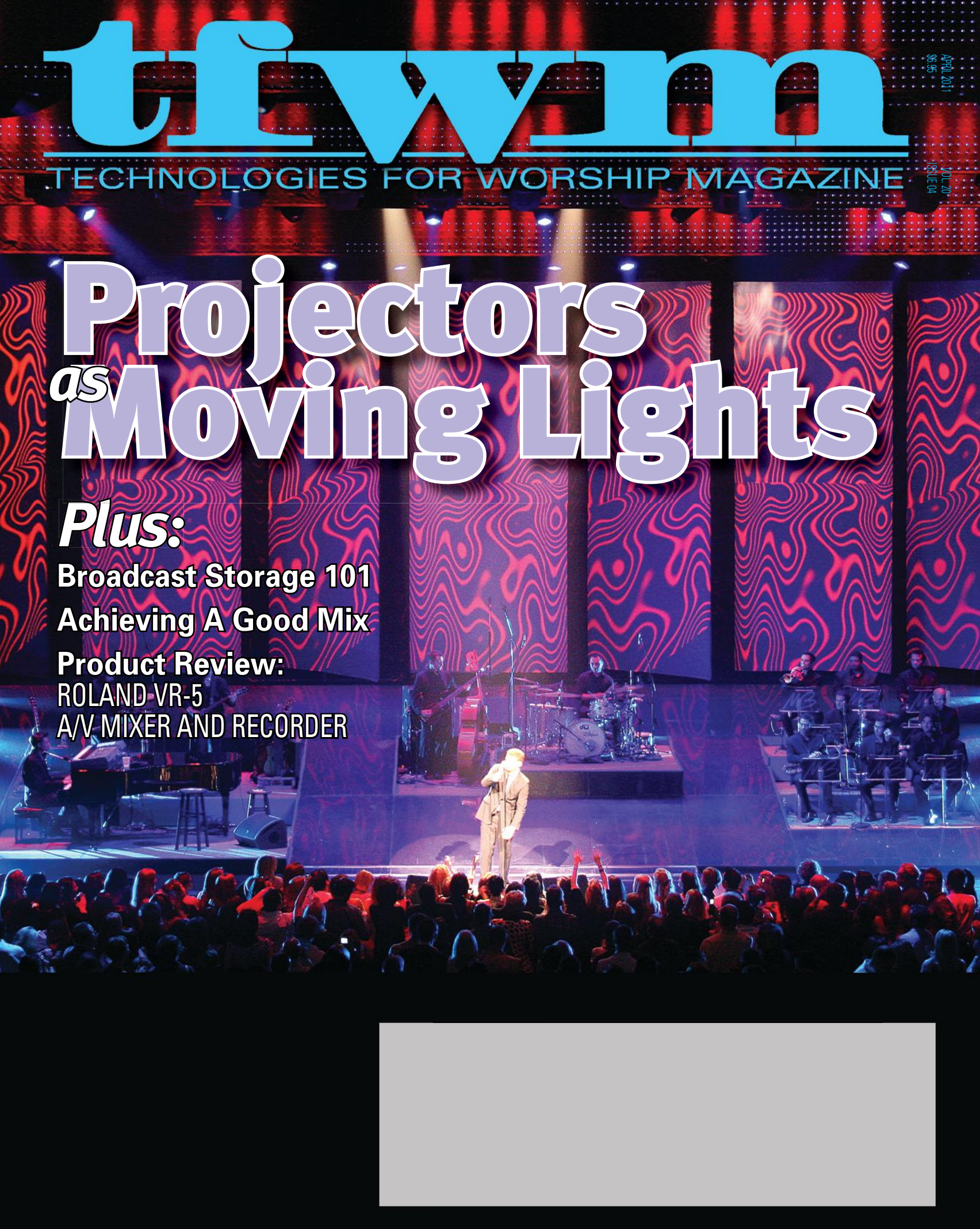
**Broadcast Storage 101**

**Achieving A Good Mix**

**Product Review:**

**ROLAND VR-5**

**A/V MIXER AND RECORDER**



# Roland VR-5 AV MIXER & RECORDER

by Jay M. Delp

**W**ith their recently-released (Feb. 2011) VR-5 AV MIXER / RECORDER (\$4,995) MSRP, Roland Systems Group ([www.rolandsystemsgroup.com](http://www.rolandsystemsgroup.com)) continues to pioneer new frontiers of innovation for the HOW market and beyond by combining ease of use functionality with all-in-one functionality (production, recording and streaming). After putting the VR-5 through its paces I discovered several truly unique features (more on those in a moment) along with a very clear vision for how it would fit nicely into the A/V production workflow for thousands of churches, ministries and organizations of all shapes and sizes.

## VIDEO

The VR-5 is a 5-channel Video Switcher (3 video sources, PC input, video playback) which combines the features of a “live” broadcast A/V switcher, master recorder, and streaming system along with dual, built-in 3.5” color touch screen LCD monitors. HDMI (1), S-Video (2) and composite video (2) outputs along with a Preview output (BNC) provide very adequate connectivity.

As with several of Roland’s other video switchers I once again appreciate the inclusion of a master video out fade to black (or white) dial very useful. Many churches currently using 2 or even 3 cameras will find the VR-5’s number of inputs sufficient, especially if they play their video clips from an SD Card. The dedicated PC input (15-pin) eliminates the need for a separate PC-to-Video scan converter which totally streamlines this much-needed interface. The VR-5’s HDMI connector can be configured for PROGRAM or PREVIEW OUTPUT.

## SD CARD

A conveniently-positioned front-access SD card slot (2GB SD card included, thank you!) provides playback of digital audio, video or still images OR master program recording in the MP4 video format (MPEG-4 Video Codec) along with MP3 (MPEG-1 Audio Layer-3) audio format at 2, 4 or 6Mbps bitrates which translates to approximately 4 hours at 2Mbps, 2 hours at 4 Mbps and 80 minutes at 6

Mbps. I believe these are very sufficient recording times for most long-form church services, concerts, meetings, etc. With a few extra SD cards or a single 32GB SDHC card, you’ll be good to go for that “never-ending” sermon or service! Picture quality at 6 Mbps and 4 Mbps was excellent and very clean. Even at 2 Mbps the recording quality held up better than I expected. And I’m so glad Roland included both touch screen and dedicated panel controls/buttons for navigating, selecting, and playing back (and recording) media files to/from SD Card.

## AUDIO

I’ve never had much use (or enthusiasm) for the audio capabilities built into video switchers. In fact, over the past 20 years I can only recall (barely) one or two



## BY THE NUMBERS:

<b>5</b> Video Inputs (3 video, PC, video playback via SD card)	<b>2</b> Touch Screens	<b>5</b> Stereo Audio Inputs
<b>6</b> Audio Faders	<b>30</b> A/V Connectors	<b>9.5</b> lbs. (weight)

instances of having used such a video switcher's audio features. But none of my video switchers (current or former) included the ability to 1) record the program master output or 2) stream that same master output like the VR-5. Its two Mono and five stereo mixable audio channels provide just the audio connectivity you expect and need on such a unit. The inclusion of a PC audio input (3.5 mm stereo-mini audio connector) is another thoughtful audio feature. Feeding audio from computers to ANYTHING (sound system, recording device, etc.) remains a blatant oversight/shortcoming in the majority of churches. Problem solved. MIDI control and connectivity is also included. A dedicated Audio Follow button, a master Audio Out dial and a 6-level LED master audio meter are just a few more (but not all) of the VR-5s very capable audio features.

**STREAMING**

The VR-5's USB 2.0 port can be configured either for storage or as an audio/video class device (like a web cam) streaming device which puts it in an A/V Mixer class all its own. Streaming audio and video (either "live" or on-demand) continues to be the logical next step for so many churches and the VR-5 with its built in recording and streaming capabilities make taking this next step extremely easy.

**TOUCH SCREENS**

Yes, you can (and you will) switch/select video sources and make PinP position changes via touch screen! At first I thought the 3.5" LCD touch screens would be a bit too small to navigate and interact with quickly and confidently, but t'was not the case. The touch screens proved to be an adequate size and responded quickly to fingernail or fingertip taps/touches. Plus they have two brightness settings à la high beam and low beam.

Navigating the six main menus and adjusting the myriad system settings are accomplished very clearly and quickly via the left touch screen, which can be used for PC Preview, audio mix setup, four-image multi-view video source preview and system settings navigation and adjustment.

**WONDERFULS**

Although "easy" is definitely a relative term, the VR-5 is CRAZY easy to learn which is rule #1 (or deal breaker #1!) especially for ministry-based tech buying decisions. 30-60 minutes of "focused playing" with the VR-5 and its many features will provide the vast majority of technical training needed to operate the VR-5 effectively. SD card playback of audio, video and still images is a much more elegant method than using a dedicated DVD player, which also uses up a valuable video input. I like the HDMI

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# PRODUCT REVIEW

connectivity and its ability to display program or preview outputs. The VR-5's simple Chromo and Lumi Keying dial/features are a welcome feature, and what I've come to expect and appreciate about Roland video mixers/switchers. Those dual touch screens, illuminated buttons, very easy streaming and built-in SD card recording round out my top favorite capabilities.

## WISHES

From a "live" production standpoint the absence of a T-bar for performing manual video transitions and image blends is a definite compromise. A second related yet separate missing feature is a transition speed dial (as found on the Roland V-440HD and IVS-800 video switchers) which would greatly facilitate transition speed changes. Transition speed changes can only be made via the VR-5's touch screen menu which is much too time consuming to accomplish quickly, often and intuitively in the "heat of switching".

Although the VR-5 was obviously designed to only include a single SD Card slot, a 2nd SD Card slot, one for playback and one for recording, would add significant power and value to the unit. Currently users must choose to use the only SD Card slot for either playback OR recording but I don't want to give up either!

## WRAP UP

A couple of those "clear visions" for the VR-5 I mentioned in my first paragraph include small to mid-size churches using it as their primary video switcher, recorder and streaming device which may otherwise be financially unfeasible. Larger churches already set up for multi-camera/video source switching could send their master A/V feed to the VR-5 to create a custom recording, broadcast, or web stream which could include separate/additional graphic keys or audio not needed in the main sanctuary. Similarly the VR-5 would be perfect for providing a custom A/V feed/mix to an overflow space.

In short, I want to keep the VR-5, but alas life is good— but not THAT good, and I must return it to its pacific northwest Roland Systems Group homeland. If your ministry, company or organization is looking for an A/V switching, recording and/or streaming solution don't overlook the VR-5. This review is a much abbreviated report of its extensive capabilities. ♦

*Jay Delp has been involved in media & ministry for years and specializes in ministry-based media/video production, training, writing and consultation coast to coast and beyond. For more of the story click over to [www.jaydelp.com](http://www.jaydelp.com)*

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