

DIGITAL PRODUCTION

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JULY | AUGUST



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Flame meets Tangent



Most artists use Flame classically with pen and keyboard. But since Flame has become more and more confident in grading, it also needs proper control surfaces. Autodesk supports Tangent products here, from the small Ripple to Wave2 and Arc to the large elements. But how does the combination of flame and tangent fare in the eyes of an experienced colorist? And can a compositing artist benefit from such a panel? An experience report.

by Christoph Zapletal

Unboxing

The panel for this test was provided to me net- t by Mazze Aderhold (www.angryface.com). As the name suggests, the Tangent Elements consists of various elements that can be put together individually. The centerpiece is the Tk-Panel (Trackball), which consists of three high-quality trackballs, a few buttons and an OLED display centrally located above the trackballs. In addition, there is the Mf panel (multifunction) as well as a Kb (knob) and a Bt panel (button). They have all inherited the OLED display from the Tk-Panel, the Mf panel even two, as well as A and B buttons for quickly reaching further functions. The Mf-Panel

will primarily fulfill the function of a jog shuttle in Flame and will be used for editing in the timeline module. All panels are connected to the computer via classic USB cables. But even before connecting, I am happy about the feel and the high-quality workmanship. The surface is discreetly rubberized, so that the hands lie on very comfortably, and already at the first blind press and -dre- hen of the individual elements it is noticeable that nothing wobbles or hooks here. Contributing to this is the fact that Mazze has replaced the trackballs and rings supplied by Tangent with his own. The rings are black and made of aluminum, the tracker balls instead of bright red in noble petrol and have a bit more weight than the standard version. An upgrade of the panels that offers comfort in everyday life and simply looks better.

First steps

The first positive surprise comes with the first launch of Flame. Apart from the Tangent Mapper, the standard software for the panel, nothing needs to be installed or configured. As soon as you start your project in Flame, the five OLEDs come to life and immediately take away my feeling of being overwhelmed. This is because the OLEDs are divided into a table that exactly matches the arrangement of the underlying buttons, controllers or

Trackballs. A kind of backlit cheat sheet. The nomenclature is quick to see for a flame artist, after all, the occupancy was created by Autodesk's team in Montreal. But the occupancy seems quite spartan. Every time I start a project in Flame, I ended up on the Timeline tab, and the only one of the four element panels that is really busy is the Mf panel. Here I find not only controls for jog / shuttle, but also buttons for insert and override, mark-in / mark-out and so on. Just everything you can use in the timeline. In principle, I think to myself, the whole thing is a speed editor, just not from Blackmagic. I continue to click through the menus and find assignments for timeline effects, which I can apply at the push of a button instead of by FX ribbon or right click.

Flame als Grading Tool

To test Flame and the Tangent as a grading tool, I get help from Bernie Greiner. Bernie is a freelance colorist from Hamburg with over five years of experience in advertising, feature film and music video. And has already graded with everything that is available for grading. From Pogle to Lustre and Baselight, Nucoda and of course various resolve systems, Bernie knows and can do them all. Showreel and more can be found at berniegreiner.com.

So we sit down at my Flame and take a small timeline into the Grading Environment. The first navigation through the timeline with the Mf panel works quite well, whereby we have to set the right layout via pen & tablet. Primaries are quickly created with the Tk-Panel. With the secondaries, we start to click deeper through the menus, this also works reasonably well via a meaningful assignment of the Bt panel. Of course, it helps me that the nomenclature on the OLEDs corresponds to the Flame-Lingo, Bernie is rather annoyed by it. Because what is a GMask in the Flame is a matte in every other tool, offset ist position, etc. Of course, these are small parts, but they inhibit the flow of work. And what we both notice: In the standard configuration of the panel, no buttons are defined to change the viewer. In order for us to be shown a key or to make a Compare



we always help each other with the keyboard and the Wacom. In any case, there is still room for improvement here, because these functions are essential. What particularly annoys us about this is the fact that other menus are sometimes very detailed with buttons and knobs for each individual parameter, but something as crucial as the Views was completely ignored. Nicely solved, however, is the integration of the Explorer. Storing setups there or calling them up from there works easily via the buttons of the Mf panel. There they also make sense, because so you can quickly switch between individual shots and provide them with previously created setups.

Of course, we are also interested in Flame's Performance as a grading tool off the panel. In principle, everything Bernie expects from a grading tool is there, but unfortunately I often have to dig it out of the threads of any menu or preference somehow. But from the scope setup to the various compare modes to monitor output or color management settings, nothing is really missing. It is only less intuitively accessible as with other systems such as Resolve. And some things are very special with Flame. If, for example, you can use LUTs for creative purposes directly in grading in Resolve, you first have to apply the corresponding Matchbox Shader to Flame before you can then apply the LUT.

Even with several secondaries, the performance is comparable to the competing products on the grading market. This is where the optimizations of the grading environment in the last versions become noticeable.

The Mapper

We try to bring the missing viewing options to the panel ourselves. Fortunately, pretty much every function available in Flame can also be mapped to the buttons of the element panels via the Tangent Mapper software. However, this is a small Sisyphus work, because not only each element of the panel has its own configuration page, but also each page in which the panel can be called. And that's a lot more than the six tabs that Flame is navigated through. For example, there is a separate configuration page for each Grading Mode within the Effects tab, i.e. Video, Log and Scene Linear. More than 35 tabs in total. In addition, the possibility to assign buttons with alternative functions and precision modes, i.e. particularly fine setting of a parameter.

If you pair this with the cascade of hotkeys in Flame, it becomes a bit obvious.

Result

In the end, Bernie and I are both a bit at a loss. For me as a compositing artist, who also does finishing, but very rarely grading, the elements are simply overkill. Because the tasks that support the panels well, i.e. editing and grading, I do too rarely to build up the muscle memory in order to really benefit from the panel. And for colorists, the panel is absolutely necessary if they want to graduate from Flame, but it still takes a lot of time and love in the mapper to get up to speed with the occupancy, where, for example, a Blackmagic Resolve Mini just works

out of the box. Admittedly, the tangent is not built dedicated to Flame and is also supported by many other applications. And Flame itself? Can deliver as a grading tool, but once again stands out due to the steep learning curve. For a colorist, it becomes more difficult to include Flame as one tool among many in his repertoire. So for whom is the Flame Tangent Combo recommended? If you rely on Flame as a central grading / finishing tool in your production, you will get a tool here with the appropriate training period and the individual adaptation of the panel that does not have to shy away from comparison to the competitors. In grading, flame will also play to its strengths in advertising rather than necessarily in the Long format, but this is certainly also possible. > ei

