



(201) 786-6060

Box 740, 10 Maple Ave.
Andover, N.J. 07821

SOUNDMOUSE™

Product Description

SOUNDMOUSE™ is a simple yet versatile peripheral that allows Atari® 8-bit computers to be controlled by sound. It can be used as a game controller and as a "color organ," an application that synchronizes the movement of a wide variety of computer graphics displays to the beat of music from sources such as a home stereo.

Used as a game controller, the SOUNDMOUSE permits game activities to be controlled by the player's voice or other sounds, such as a hand clap or the tap of a foot. Both the color organ and game control applications can be incorporated in user programs.

The SOUNDMOUSE connects to the joystick port and has a sensitivity control for increasing or decreasing its response, depending on the loudness of the sound. It can be used with all Atari® 8-bit computers having at least 48K of memory and a disk drive.

Price: \$29.95 plus \$2.00 shipping and handling.

Available by mail from: SOUNDSOFT, Inc.
Box 740 10 Maple Ave.
Andover, NJ 07821

(201) 786-6060



learning a band instrument, and who hate practicing without the backing of the rest of the band, *Instant Music* is just the thing.

Thanks to this program, I've picked up my electric guitar again and am quickly relearning all those licks I'd forgotten several years ago. With a band at my command, playing whatever song I want them to, I can crank up my Fender and let fly with whatever my fingers are willing to give. Unlike a real band, nobody complains about the mistakes, and nobody gets impatient when I ask for the same song to be played for the twenty-second time. An excellent program, *Instant Music* offers pure fun. Besides the fun, it teaches music, even to those who know nothing to begin with. In other words, *Instant Music* allows you to expand your horizons, and that, in my opinion, is what computers are all about.

Instant Music
Electronic Arts
1820 Gateway Dr.
San Mateo, CA 94404
\$49.95

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The SoundMouse

Rhett Anderson

Requirements: Any eight-bit Atari computer with at least 48K and a disk drive.

The SoundMouse is a small peripheral box that plugs into the first joystick port of any Atari eight-bit computer with at least 48K and a disk drive. Surprisingly, it adds a large range of capabilities to your computer.

The Hardware

The SoundMouse is called a mouse simply because it looks like a mouse that plugs into the Amiga, Atari ST, and Apple computers. But it's not motion that drives this mouse—it's sound. To give your Atari an ear, just plug this sturdy little piece of hardware into the first joystick port. The computer reads the SoundMouse as if it were a game paddle, so it's easy to write programs that use the SoundMouse, no matter what language you wish to use. The SoundMouse is partial to low-frequency sounds, responding well to a clap or a thump, but ignoring a whistle.

The Software

When you boot up the disk that comes with The SoundMouse, you select from three options: the Graphics Menu, the Games Menu, and the SoundMouse Band. The Graphics Menu lets you synchronize computer graphics with music that you play on your stereo. The Games Menu offers a selection of sound-controlled games. The SoundMouse band is a trio of computer-drawn musicians that appear to perform the music you play.

There are ten games from which to choose. Some of them aren't really games, though. One checks the speed of your reactions and one just draws a foot on the screen every time you make a noise. But the *real* games are well done. The author of these programs clearly knows the capabilities of the Atari. "Bugsquasher," in which you pulverize small insects by making loud sounds, was my favorite. The games can be played in a variety of ways—by tapping on the table where the SoundMouse rests, by tapping on the SoundMouse itself, by snapping your fingers, or by shouting. Because the SoundMouse is partial to low-frequency sounds, it appears to be a bit of a chauvinist—while I can shout from across the room to squash a bug, the SoundMouse turns a deaf ear to my wife's loudest and lowest shouts, so she plays by clapping her hands. One game, "Soundman" (a *Pac-Man*-style game in

which you turn corners by ~~making~~ sounds), is so difficult that I can get a higher score by playing a radio next to the SoundMouse than by playing the game myself.

If you program your own games you'll have no problem making the computer respond to sounds. The manual describes programming the SoundMouse in a special section near the end. All Atari languages I'm aware of are capable of using the SoundMouse. There are other possible applications for the SoundMouse, and the ease of programming the peripheral makes experimentation easy.

Another option on the menu, the SoundMouse Band, is disappointing. A drummer, a lead guitarist, and a keyboard player made a shallow attempt at playing some of my favorite songs. Fortunately, the third menu option, the Graphics Menu, is a genuine prize.

The SoundMouse manual states that the programs included in the Graphics Menu are like *color organs*—a fad of the early seventies. They came in two varieties: one plugged into your stereo like a speaker and the other was accompanied by its own little microphone. Color organs had two or three colored light bulbs that turned on and off in time with the music.

The Graphics program that comes with the SoundMouse is like a high-resolution color organ that uses the SoundMouse as a microphone. Patterns bounce, dance, and explode across the screen in a variety of changing colors. You've probably never seen anything like this. You can even program your own light shows. The display moves to low-frequency sounds—drums and bass, mostly—so the manual recommends rock-and-roll music, but jazz and a few classical pieces worked as well for me. On the basis of the Graphics Menu programs, and the potential for use in my own programs, I believe that the SoundMouse is an unique and exceptional peripheral.

SoundMouse

Soundsoft

Box 740, 10 Maple Ave.

Andover, NJ 07821

\$29.95 (plus \$2 shipping and handling)

©

ATARI TALKING TYPEWRITER

BY GREGG PEARLMAN, ANTIC JUNIOR EDITOR

For Sale: Atari Voices

Speech-related products for 8-bit and ST

If you are interested in experimenting with computer speech, but don't wish to build this issue's *Talking Typewriter* circuit board, check out the following products for Atari 8-bits and STs.

8-BIT

COVOX VOICE MASTER

A voice synthesizer like the SPO256 chip used in *Talking Typewriter* creates speech electronically by stringing together artificial sound elements. The **Covox Voice Master** (\$89.95) digitally records and manipulates your



own voice, storing the electronic signals in the memory of your Atari. Voice Master consists of a small white box, a telephone operator-type headset, connecting cables, a program disk and documentation.

Put on the headset, boot the demonstration program on the disk, press [R] for record, speak into the microphone, press [P] for playback, and the computer will repeat what you said—in your own voice.

Play blackjack with Voice Master. This demonstration really shows off its voice-recognition capabilities. Say how much you want to bet, whether

you'll hit or stand, and Voice Master will respond accordingly.

First you're given a list of blackjack commands and keywords to say into the microphone. These are stored in memory, and the computer recognizes the keywords when you play. However, you must be consistent. Try to make sure all the words have a unique sound, so the computer doesn't misinterpret what you say. And say the words the same way you did when you recorded them.

If you need to practice adding up cards for black-jack, try the talking calculator, which recognizes *and* reproduces your voice as it adds, subtracts, multiplies and divides.

Or try the clock program, which speaks the time when you press the [SPACEBAR], and it can even wake you up in the morning with the alarm you set the night before—also in your own voice.

The Voice Harp Composer is also featured. Sing, whistle or hum into the microphone and your notes will appear on the screen. Play back the recording and edit what you hear. You can add, change or delete notes, alter the note lengths, change octaves, tempos, voices, key and just about anything else.

Voice Master adds new BASIC commands (19 on the Atari 800) for use anywhere in your own programs. These include LEARN, SPEAK, TRAIN and RECOGNize.

Related Covox products include the **Speech Construction Set** (\$49.95), which uses cut-and-paste to simplify the editing of speech recordings and to modify the various elements that constitute the speech. The **Talking Disk** (\$5) gives a taste of what can be

used in your own programs and has speech examples in English, Spanish and German.

Covox Inc., 675-D Conger Street, Eugene, OR 97402. (503) 342-1271.

CIRCLE 270 ON READER SERVICE CARD

SOUNDMOUSE

Soundsoft's **SoundMouse** (\$29.95) is voice-activated, but instead of playing



back sound to you, it continuously transmits paddle values to the computer. It plugs directly into the joystick port and listens—low-pitched sounds are what it hears best.

A sensitivity control lets the SoundMouse respond to a wide range of noises, making it suitable for an equally wide range of applications. The package includes imaginative games and graphics that demonstrate the sensitivity of the SoundMouse. The graphics program demonstrates displays that flash or change color, depending on the sound you make. The SoundMouse Band—a guitarist, drummer and keyboard player, keep up with the beat of any music you play nearby.

Soundsoft Inc., P.O. Box 740, 10 Maple Avenue, Andover, NJ 07821. (201) 786-6060.

CIRCLE 271 ON READER SERVICE CARD

PARROT

Alpha's **Parrot** sound digitizer (\$39.95) can put the Beatles, Ella Fitzgerald, the Vienna Boys Choir or anyone else on your Atari. And not just

product reviews

assessment and an opportunity to save the game.

The first of the six well-designed situations is appropriately the ambush of a truck convoy. You earn extra points for getting the trucks out of "harm's way", apparently impossible (10 out of 10 tries, anyway) in the historical setup, since the VC/NVA units always shoot first and always go for the trucks in their opening volleys of fire. The other scenarios all seem manageable with either set of starting positions—depending upon how you use your forces, of course!

Besides the truck ambush, NAM provides a firebase skirmish, a large-scale helicopter assault, a clearing operation in an area honeycombed with caves, the single U.S./NVA armor engagement and the urban battle to retake the city of Hue.

Familiarity with Southeast Asia operations is an asset, but not a requirement. The well-written manual clearly states how to load the game and execute all 11 phases of play. The scenarios are described in concise terms along with any special rules that apply. Key points regarding terrain, the types of forces and their deployment are emphasized and deserve extra attention to be successful. Some lessons, such as routinely digging in, force mobility, helicopter firepower and the judicious use of artillery are driven home in the game much more effectively than in the manual.

The multi-colored graphics are excellent. Icons representing the combat units are easily interpreted. The terrain features are the best I've seen in a war game—dense jungle, rough and open ground, hills, roads, caves, buildings, rivers, bridges and walls are all colorful and well-defined. The player's view scrolls smoothly over a playfield almost twice the dimensions of the screen. Virtually all input to the simulation is via a joystick and cursor with the commands a natural part of each phase in a turn.

NAM is fun and a challenging simu-

lation of combat with enough variety to make it enjoyable for a long time. Moderately addictive, it tempts you to play "just one more turn" before dinner/bed/dawn/finishing this review. Speaking of which, I've got to go back and finish clearing out those caves.

SOUNDMOUSE ■

Soundsoft, Inc.
P.O. Box 740, 10 Maple Avenue
Andover, NJ 07821
(201) 786-6060
\$29.95 48K disk

Reviewed by Charles Cherry

Now here is a fun item. The **Sound-Mouse** is not really a mouse, although it looks like one. It's a sound-activated controller. The little box plugs into the joystick port and listens, particularly for low pitched sounds. It continuously translates the sound volume into a value for the paddle register. Simple and effective.

Once the result is in the computer, software can do anything with it. Since the sound can come from anywhere, the possibilities are limitless: games that work with a shout, a clap or a footstomp; an unusual random number generator; an applause meter; an event counter; a burglar alarm; or, of course, a music-driven light show.

Although the SoundMouse works through the paddle register, an assembly language programmer could write a little routine to feed the data into the joystick register. Such a routine could allow you to use the SoundMouse as the joystick trigger with some commercial games. You could steer with the joystick and shoot by yelling FIRE!

A sensitivity control (the only moving part) lets the SoundMouse respond to a wide range of noises. This makes it suitable for an equally wide range of applications. Although the manual says the SoundMouse responds to the volume of the sound,

experimentation showed that it really responds to the *change* in volume.

For example, a constant sound returns a level of about 105, no matter how loud it is. If the volume drops, the number decreases. But if the volume drops and stays constant at a lower level, the value will drop and then rise back to 105. This makes it relatively immune to constant background noises.

Normally a hardware device like this is for people who can utilize it in their programming. But the SoundMouse comes with some demo programs which are spectacular. The light shows alone are worth the price of admission. There are also some examples of games and other uses for the SoundMouse, including an animated three-piece band which will play along with your stereo.

The SoundMouse is well designed and well constructed. It is a unique product with many potential uses, at a reasonable cost. And it is a lot of fun.

GRADESCAN ■

C. Robert Blum
1722 Golden Court
Crofton, MD 21114
\$29.95, 48K disk

Reviewed by Stephen Roquemore

Gradescan is a teachers' application program for tracking students, classes, and grades. It is menu-driven and easy to use. The term "user-friendly" has been beaten to death, but it really applies to this software.

The program uses only one disk drive, even if you have more. The manual is clear and easy to understand, although it is not at all fancy. It is simply a stapled-together printout of a text file, with a title page apparently done by Broderbund's Print Shop.

However, after starting up the software you really don't need a manual.

continued on next page

THE END USER

THIS MONTH:

An 8-bit color organ/ game controller, new ST languages and consumer regrets

Arthur Leyenberger is a human factors psychologist and free-lance writer living in New Jersey. He has been an Atari enthusiast for four years. When not computing, he enjoys playing with robotic toys.

by Arthur Leyenberger

Were you around in the late sixties... you know, the "psychedelic era"? Gosh, just the thought of black lights, Day-Glo colors and lava lamps takes me back to my innocent youth. Things were simple then. No personal, micro- or home computers to use, learn about and enjoy. We just had rock and roll, Boss 302 Mustangs and color organs.

Do you remember color organs? If you've forgotten—or think by now that I've finally lost my mind—I'll fill you in. A color organ is an electronic gizmo to turn sound into light. Well, actually, there's more than magic involved. A microphone converts sound into an electrical signal whose varying voltage is used to modulate one or several lights.

The fancy color organs of those days had several channels, each corresponding to a different frequency range. To the viewer, this meant bass notes might be represented by blue lights, mid-frequencies by green lights and high frequencies by red lights. To see one of these color organs in action, accompanied by loud rock music (it would also work with normal music, but who would bother?) was something best described as, well, far out.

A decade later, Atari was selling a product which did essentially the same thing. Instead of using Christmas tree lights strung inside a large box with a

fresnel lens, the Atari product sent the output to your TV. Various patterns could be displayed on-screen, and the sound of the music would vary the intensity (brightness) of the picture. True Atari historians will know the name of this product.

Here it is, roughly another decade later, and we have another improvement on the basic color organ idea. (I'll bet you were wondering what I was leading up to, huh?) The **Sound Mouse**, by Soundsoft, Inc., is a color organ that uses the Atari 8-bit computer to display a graphic image on your TV or monitor screen. Movement of the graphics image is synchronized to the beat of the music.

Sound Mouse is a peripheral that allows your Atari to be controlled by sound. You can use it as a color organ or as a game controller. As a color organ, it functions as described above. As a controller, sounds like your voice or a clap can control on-screen activities.

Sound Mouse requires at least 48K of memory and connects to the computer's joystick port. Hardware consists of a microphone and electronics to input the proper signal to the joystick port. A sensitivity control on the unit itself allows you to tailor its use to the volume of the sound source.

The software consists of eighteen different graphics displays—including spirals, spheres, stars and snowflakes. These images may be displayed one at a time or shown continuously, via the

THE END USER *continued*

demo program. How fast the display colors change, the direction of movement, and how long a given display is shown can also be controlled by the user.

Although **Sound Mouse** will generally respond to all types of music, it performs best with music that has a pronounced bass beat. The effect is heightened by turning down the monitor screen brightness and room illumination.

Nine sound-controlled games are provided on the disk. Although the games aren't necessarily of commercial quality, they represent an interesting collection of challenges. All operate on the same theme, that is: you must make a

noise at a certain instant to fire a "laser canon," squash bugs, measure your reaction time, or move a man in a maze.

One of the best aspects of **Sound Mouse** is that you can create your own graphics screens. Any graphics 10 screen will work, and the manual provides a short program that will save a user-created graphic screen to disk.

All in all, **Sound Mouse** is an interesting diversion. Not only is it a conversation piece, but it will bring back golden memories of color organs—to those who lived through that era.

Sound Mouse retails for \$29.95, from Soundsoft, Inc., Box 740, 10 Maple Avenue, Andover, NJ 07821.

B.A.C.E. Station - June 1986 - page 4

Hardware Review

SoundMouse

SoundSoft, Inc. Box 740, 10 Maple Ave., Andover, NJ 07821. 48K Disk, \$29.95

There are many different input devices that can be plugged into the Atari controller port, such as joysticks, paddles, light pens, and touch tablets. Although all of these have their uses, they all must be physically manipulated to send input into the computer. How about using sound to control your computer?

The **SoundMouse** looks very much like a normal "mouse": it is a small plastic box that plugs into the joystick port. However, it responds to audible sounds, such as a voice or the clap of a hand. The only moving part on the **SoundMouse** is a sensitivity control, that must be adjusted depending on background noise and other factors. It monitors changes in volume of sounds, particularly low frequency sound, and returns a corresponding value to the paddle register of the Atari. The hardware component of the **SoundMouse** is very simple and does its job without complaint. It is the software supplied with the **SoundMouse** that really shines.

With many such hardware devices, the company usually provides some simple little BASIC programs that demonstrate the use of the device. With the **SoundMouse**, however, the company outdid themselves. A double sided disk is included in the package, with three main components: the graphics menu, the games menu, and the **SoundMouse** Band. The graphics menu includes a variety of stunning color graphic "light shows" that pulsate to the beat of music or anything else the **SoundMouse** "hears". The games menu gives access to nine machine language games which are sound activated. One of the best is the "Sound Cannon", which is a target gallery type of program, in which the cannon shoots when you say "fire". The third main part of the **SoundMouse** disk is the **SoundMouse** Band: a full screen animated demonstration of a three-man band, that moves and plays to the beat of music. Very impressive!

Although the included software is good, the primary use of the **SoundMouse** is to incorporate it in your own programs. The manual is quite good, and includes a detailed section on how to use the **SoundMouse** in other programs. If you would like to experiment with this type of capability to your computer, the \$29.95 price is right. (Look for a complete demonstration of the **SoundMouse** at the June 24 meeting.)

Paul Freeman