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DigiMax D8



By Barry Rudolph

The new PreSonus DigiMax D8 started scoring points with me the moment I hooked it up and started to get recording levels for a drum kit overdub. Being a professional recording engineer, who was brought up using the finest gear available at any cost, I wanted to be impressed but I had to hear it and be convinced first.

As it turned out, I was actually blown away by everything about the DigiMax D8.

I was initially interested in the D8 as an efficient way to add enough extra mic pre-amps to record drums directly into my Pro Tools HD3 Accel rig. But you can add these eight professional microphone preamplifiers to any digital recording system including Digidesign's 002 and 003 systems, RME, Yamaha, Alesis, Mackie, and many others.

The D8 has eight, award-winning Class-A XMAX mic preamps with rear-panel XLR connectors, variable gain controls, 20-dB attenuator pads, switchable 48V phantom power, ultra-fast acting LED metering and a 24-bit ADAT® digital optical Lightpipe™ TOSLINK output. For direct recording, there are two ¼-inch DI jack inputs on the front panel for plugging in guitars, basses or synths. I liked the lighted in/out buttons for both the pad and DI functions.

As an extra when recording live shows, you can feed the eight mic pre-amp analog line outputs simultaneously to your FOH's mixer using the eight, balanced TRS jacks on the rear panel.

Another good professional touch is the rear panel BNC jack for word clock sync input from external DAW interfaces or standalone clocks. Likewise, you can sync your DAW to the D8 because its clock is transmitted along with the digital audio out of the ADAT Lightpipe output.

Drummer Curt Bisquera (www.curtbisquera.com) was kind enough to let me invade his studio space and record him playing his kit using only the D8. Curt runs a Digidesign 002 system and has a couple of Neve 1073 mic pre-amps he usually saves for the kick and snare mics. We wanted to see how well the D8 would stack up. Curt is used to hearing his kick and snare EQ'd through the Neves but we opted to go "fat and flat" with the D8.

Curt's DW (Drum Workshop) drum kit had all the typical drums mics around it including a pair of Audio-Technica AT-4050s for overheads for capturing the whole kit including his Paiste cymbals. AT-3000s were placed on the two toms and, for fun, I brought and tried the new David Pearlman TM-1 tube condenser placed at tom-tom height and about four feet out front of the kit.

I found connecting up the D8 easy and after restarting the MAC, the Digi 002 clocked immediately from the ADAT Lightpipe connection with no problems. The D8's phantom power worked fine on all the mics and getting precise record levels was a breeze. I used the 20dB pad for both kick and snare but it was a borderline case—if I moved the mics an inch further away or if Curt played a little lighter instead of his "bone crushing" style that day, I could have left the pads off. Other than the level difference, I found no sonic change with or without the pads—something not always true for certain very expensive mic pre-amps and vintage consoles.

Inside of Pro Tools, the record levels were great—as hot as I wanted or NOT. The gain pots on the D8 work smoothly with good resolution—a tiny move gives you a linear, tiny change in gain. The D8 meters give you, at a glance, a good idea of your level status. Since the D8 was positioned behind me (temporarily for this review), I relied on the meters in PT but I found the handy D8's meter to work well too.

I and especially Curt were impressed with the drum sound. Curt knows well what his studio and drums are capable of and he was very surprised at the punchy sound. Even without EQ, the snare was bright and tight and the toms, ballsy-sounding. Like the Audio-Technica overheads, the Pearlman TM-1 mic out front provided a perfectly balanced overall drum sound; the D8 was not adding any coloration of its own—it was just amplifying the sound the mics were capturing—the proverbial "wire with gain."

A big, surprising winner for both Curt and me, the PreSonus DigiMax D8 is a worthwhile addition to any studio—pro or project. It sells for \$499 MSRP and for much more, visit: www.presonus.com/products/Detail.aspx?ProductId=48