PreSonus FireStudio Project | £350

The features you need at a keen price point. *Daniel Griffiths* checks whether the cut-down FireStudio still matches its full-featured brother

HIGHLIGHTS
1 Easy to use
2 Great mic pres
3 Tough and portable

SPECS
High-speed FireWire audio interface

24-bit resolution up to 96k sample rate

Eight Class-A XMAX mic preamps with gain controls

Eight analogue line inputs, two instrument inputs

MIDI I/O

JetPLL jitter elimination technology

Zero latency DSP full-matrix mixer/router

PreSonus ProPak software suite with Cubase LE 4, Cubase LE 4 Demystified DVD tutorial, Wave Arts TrackPlug LE, Wave Arts Masterverb LE, PreSonus EyeQ, Audio Damage FuzzPlus2 and Filterpod, Pluggo Jr, Camel Crusher, BFD Lite, Discrete Drums Sampler, Twiddly

Back in issue 195, we sung the praises of Presonus' FireStudio – a 19-incher packed with enough ins and outs to satisfy the busiest of project studios. And with top-quality Presonus mic-pres in attendance, plus a talk-back equipped MSR remote control option, we could see it making the grade in many commercial facilities. In fact, our main bugbear was the slight overkill of features, making it a rather heavyweight option for the home user yet – due to it's diminutive rack size – never considered truly 'pro' by more serious studio owners.

Fire starter

Which brings us to the FireStudio Project – an at-a-glance identical looking unit that strips out some of the more exotic jacks to leave behind a feature set ideally placed to ensnare home users who are serious about their sound. The Project offers the same rock-solid construction as it's bigger brother and once again the 19-inch rack is surprisingly shallow (about four inches) meaning that it's easily portable. And – as a bonus this time around – the

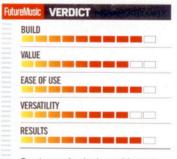power supply is built in, so no more bespoke power plug to remember to bring.

Out front, there's the same eight Class-A XMAX PreSonus mic pres that we've had the pleasure of using in the past while at the back there's a no-nonsense selection of stereo send and return, eight individual outs and a main stereo pair. Plus the usual MIDI In and Out and a pair of FireWires. The main casualty of the cut down has been the digital S/PDIF ins and outs and sixteen channel ADAT support. So the choice is simple – if you need these, check out the full FireStudio. If not – and we suspect that many home users don't – then go for the Project.

It even comes with a stripped-down version of the same Control Station software that we heaped praise on last time around. FireControl for Mac or PC gives extensive routing and level options for every in and out, effectively sitting between the hardware and the internal brains of your DAW. It's a brilliantly simple 18x10 matrix that'll let you send any in to any out. The options are therefore enormous – be it to simply send eight mics or line ins to eight

tracks on your DAW, or for creating stereo monitor mixes and routing them to the outs on the back. It's this software that has allowed the unit to appear deceptively simple, with all controls (bar the eight handy gains on the front) rendered on screen. There's even room on the front for eight three-segment LEDs for level monitoring this time. Not essential, but nice if you're away from a computer and using the Project as a simple set of pres.

Fired up

Sound quality was identical to our FireStudio – these mic pres really are up to the job of getting the best out of your mics, sounding warm and full and – once again – in our tests with Logic, it worked perfectly. Logic found the interface and offered up its ins and outs at the first attempt. That said, the software bundle is so extensive you don't need to already own a DAW at all!

The Project is up against plenty of stiff competition – the excellent Fast Track Ultra 8R from M-Audio springs to mind, which features such luxuries as a pair of headphone outs and S/PDIF round the back – but if you're fussy about your mic pres then the Project is well worth checking out. **FM**

FutureMusic **VERDICT**

BUILD

VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

Great pres, backed up with great software. Getting quality sound into your DAW has never been easier.

Presonus Firestudio Project : **October 2008**

Presonus Firestudio Project £399

pros
- Highly affordable.
- Decent audio quality, with plenty of gain available on the preamps.
- Internal power supply.

cons
- Only one headphone output.
- Not expandable at present.

summary
If you want to record up to eight mics at once, this is the most affordable way of doing it, and it sounds good too.

information
- £ £399 including VAT.
- T Source Distribution +44 (0)208 962 5080.
- E Click here to email
- W www.source distribution.co.uk
- W www.presonus.com

Presonus Firestudio Project
Firewire Audio & MIDI Interface

Reviews : Computer Recording System

Cut-price Firestudio action!

Sam Inglis

Multi-channel audio interfaces these days usually include not only A-D and D-A conversion, but preamps and monitor mixers too. Plug a device like M-Audio's Profire 2626, MOTU's 896 Mk3 or Presonus's Firestudio into your laptop, and you have a portable recording system that can tackle small band recordings with little or no additional hardware. And should you find yourself wanting to record large bands, most of these products offer digital inputs that can be used to attach further eight-channel preamp/converter units.

Photo: Mike Cameron

You can already pick up a Profire or Firestudio for under £500, but Presonus's latest offering applies a further twist to the price/performance ratio. In essence, the Firestudio Project takes the existing Firestudio concept, throws out most of the digital I/O, and makes the rest of it available at a very competitive £399.

Big Brother's Little Brother

The Firestudio Project is in many ways identical to its older sibling, which was reviewed in the December 2007 issue of *SOS*, but there are actually a couple of ways in which the Project version improves upon the original. The power supply is internal, phantom power is switched in four banks of two, and the metering boasts an extra LED per channel — all welcome bonuses.

Missing in action are the optical digital I/O, word clock, and the ability to connect Presonus's MSR multi-channel monitor controller. Importantly, however, all the analogue I/O is present and correct, including nice features such as the insert loop for channels 1/2 and the additional pair of 'Main' outputs that duplicate outputs 1/2, but with a front-panel level control.

In Use

Installation was very easy indeed, and the drivers seemed robust in my Windows XP system. Presonus's control panel software isn't pretty to look at, but it works, and makes it easy to set up separate low-latency monitor mixes for each pair of outputs.

With manufacturers falling over themselves to emphasise the quality of their preamps, not to mention finding ever more important-sounding names for said preamps, it's good to report that Presonus's 'XMAX' design delivers on both fronts. I had no complaints about the audio quality, and there is noticeably more gain available here than on the M-Audio Profire 2626, so it could be a good choice for those who use a lot of ribbon and dynamic mics.

A minor irritation is the single headphone output. Most of the Firestudio's rivals at least offer two, and it's high time someone built a multi-channel interface with four or even more. A more serious problem with the unit as a whole is that despite the provision of two Firewire ports, you can't daisy-chain multiple Firestudio Projects to build up a 16- or 24-channel recording system. If this were possible, the lack of digital I/O would be an irrelevance to many users, but as it is, there is effectively no way to expand the system. If you're happy with eight inputs, though, the Firestudio Project delivers in style. SOS

Vital Statistics

Firewire audio & MIDI interface
- Compatible with: Mac OS 10.4 and later, Windows XP SP2 and later, Vista 32.
- Analogue inputs: eight, balanced, on combi XLRs.
- Built-in mic preamps: eight, plus two high-impedance instrument inputs.
- Analogue outputs: eight, balanced, on quarter-inch jacks; outputs 1/2 duplicated on Main output.
- Headphone output: one, on quarter-inch jack.
- Digital inputs: stereo co-axial S/PDIF.
- Digital outputs: stereo co-axial S/PDIF.
- Other I/O: MIDI, balanced inserts on channels 1 and 2.
- Sample rates: up to 96kHz.