

TapeOp Magazine, 2008 HP60



By Joseph Lemmer

The PreSonus *HP60* solves two of the worst home-studio problems by providing individual headphone mixes for up to six people as well as a convenient talkback system. There are two main stereo inputs in the rear, marked *A* and *B*, which feed the six high-power stereo headphone amps inside. A mix knob for each front-panel 1/4" stereo headphone output allows for a customized blend between *A* and *B* for each output. Each amp also has its own 1/4" stereo input (TRS jack) marked *External*. Stereo-to-mono Y-cables will be needed to get stereo from your interface or mixer into the *HP60*'s *External* inputs, unless of course your device has stereo outputs on single TRS jacks (or you're using your device's headphone outputs). If you don't have insert cables handy, as I didn't the first time I connected the *HP60*, then you can use an unbalanced 1/4" cable and hit the mono button (there's one for each headphone amp). Finally, there are stereo outputs (also on single TRS jacks) for each channel so you can daisy-chain additional *HP60*s (or other downstream devices). I also found you can quickly hear what somebody else is hearing by bridging to an unused *HP60* channel with a TRS cable.

The *External* inputs on each amp are intended as "more me" inputs, but if you have an audio interface with a zero-latency matrix mixer and enough outputs, like the PreSonus FireStudio or RME Fireface 800 for instance, then you can give up to six people completely different mixes. Even when recording guitar and bass with two mics and two DIs, this was a huge luxury. Doing all of the headphone mixing from the computer also made it easy to keep track of what was going on. Being able to tell people "you can have any headphone mix you want" removed an entire layer of bad psychology from the recording process. This reduced the stress for both the musicians and me, thus leading to better performances all the way around.

The built-in mic preamp for talkback works wonderfully. Plug in a dynamic mic (the preamp has no phantom), and either hit the momentary button on the front or use a foot pedal to turn on the mic and talk to the headphone outputs. I grabbed an old sustain pedal, switched the polarity, and it worked great. No more setting up a channel on a mixer and

forgetting to hit the mute button after the take starts—again less stress for the recordist! (Check in with me later to see if it’s the secret weapon mic preamp of 2008.)

My only (tiny) wish is for a global “dim” knob, so you could choose to duck the input signals by the amount of your choosing when the talkback mic turns on. As it is, the A/B mixes dim a preset amount (quite a lot), and the External inputs do not dim. You can adjust the talkback mic volume globally, so the only time this would really be an issue is when the External input volumes are so loud that you have to blast the talkback mic to give a cue. Which brings me to the final point. Even with inefficient headphones, with all the stages turned up and a full signal going in, the outputs on the *HP60* can get loud enough to be violent. This is a huge plus over most headphone amps which poop out too soon, but please be careful with people's ears.

I looked at other solutions out there and did not see anything with all of these features in one box. Overall—and I know this might sound weird in reference to a headphone amp—I can’t put into words how much joy this simple device has brought me. It brought back that glowy feeling I used to get when I first started recording—probably by removing some of that nervousness I experienced after the first time I screwed up a session. If you record more than one person at a time, especially without a big-console talkback/headphone section, I think the *HP60* will bring you joy too. (*\$299 street; www.presonus.com*)

–Joseph Lemmer <jlemmer@siriusmedia.com>

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HP60



By Keith Gemmell

Do you have a studio wish list? Most of us do. So what's your number one item? If we had to hazard a guess, we think it's safe to say that it's unlikely to be a headphone amplifier. After all, they're not the most exciting toys in the box, are they? But it's also safe to say that if you're recording anything larger than a duo, both you and the other artists involved will experience a good deal of frustration without one. In the studio, a properly balanced monitor mix is usually essential for a fine musical performance. With four independent outlets the Presonus HP4 has already proved itself a worthy headphone distribution system for many small studios. I can vouch for its credentials because I use one on a fairly regular basis. So when the new Presonus HP60 was delivered I eyed it with considerable interest. With six independent outlets, two sets of stereo inputs, an external stereo input on each channel plus mix controls and a talkback facility, this unit looked fit for both professional and ambitious project studios alike.

Built to last

In common with all Presonus gear, the HP60 is very well manufactured (steel and aluminium chassis) and obviously built to last. All the inputs are at back of the unit and all the outputs and controls are housed on the front panel, except one; the on/off switch. That's located on the back panel and could prove inconvenient in certain permanent rack mounted installations where access is restricted.

Dual stereo inputs are provided, each with a level control. Setups will vary but typically, these inputs will be accepting a feed from (A) the main outputs of your DAW or mixing console, and (B) their auxiliary outputs (monitor mix/click track). Because both inputs A and B can be separately blended together on each of the six headphone output channels, you can supply each artist with their own separate mix. This is achieved with the use of a single mix control knob, available on each channel; the '12 o'clock' position being equal distribution of mix A and B.

Additional features on all channels include mute and mono buttons and stereo outputs, for sending line level headphone mixes to additional headphone amplifiers or monitor systems. These features alone make for a very flexible studio monitoring solution but the HP60 goes a step further...

The third way

A third, external input is also available on each of the six headphone channels for satisfying the ‘more me’ factor. For example, if a guitar player on headphone channel 6 needs to hear more of himself, all you have to do is take the direct output of their guitar from your DAW or mixing console and connect it to external input channel 6.

Needless to say, with an input gain range of -96 to +10dB and a maximum output level of 150 watts per channel (six individual amps), in practice, the HP60 proved capable of providing loud, clear headphone mixes. It’s also suitable for in-ear stage monitoring use.

Unlike many cheaper systems, the HP60 has a talkback facility, for studio communication. Implementation is slightly cumbersome, though, involving the connection of a dynamic microphone to the back-panel XLR input. A front-panel button is used to mute the track as you speak. A built-in microphone next to the talkback button might have been more convenient for some users. However, if you don’t want to set up a microphone stand and sacrifice one of your studio mics, a cheap desktop mic is really all that’s necessary. For hands-free operation, away from the unit, there’s an external control jack for connecting a footswitch.

With so many connections and mixing possibilities, this must be one of the most flexible headphone distribution systems available. Certainly, six outputs will cover the needs of most small studios and with the extra stereo outs on all channels, expanding the system is easy.

Measuring Up

We’re spoilt for choice where headphone amplification is concerned. The HP60 is a very durable, flexible system but it comes at a price. Cheaper but not necessarily better systems to look at might be the Behringer HA8000 Powerplay Pro-8 (£96), or the Samson S Phone, which only has 4 channels but includes 2-band EQ (£125). Direct competition might be the MTR HPA-6 (£289), which provides basic EQ but lacks talkback.

Details

Product – HP60 – six-channel headphone mixing system

Manufacturer – Presonus

Contact – Source Distribution 0208-962 5080 / email sales@sourcedistribution.co.uk

Web – www.presonus.com

Key features

Six independent headphone amplifiers

Two sets of stereo inputs (A and B)

Stereo external input points (all channels)

Mix control between inputs A and B
Talkback facility with control
Direct stereo line output (all channels)

Why Buy

Flexible connections and mixing
Very well built
Talkback facilities
Loud and clear signals

Walk On By

Rear-panel on/off switch not ideal
Lacks EQ

Verdict

A thoroughly well made, well thought out headphone distribution system with flexible connections and mixing solutions – suitable for project and professional studios alike.