

# Presonus Monitor Station | £239

Presonus return with a much more affordable monitoring matrix. *Jon Musgrave* explores what's different from their high-end Central Station

## WHAT IS IT?

Desktop studio monitor control matrix

## CONTACT

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Flexible
- 2 Straightforward layout
- 3 Multiple headphone outs

**F**ollowing a sudden flurry of units a couple of years back it has to be said the monitor matrix market has gone a little quiet. And no surprise, they're hardly the sexiest bit of gear.

Even so, if you want to use more than one pair of monitors or maybe need talkback, they offer a brilliant halfway house between frustration (in the form of endless re-plugging) and an expensive mixing desk. I say expensive mixing desk because, typically, it'll need to be pretty good to provide even basic multiple headphone, talkback and monitor capabilities. Presonus already produce the Central Station – a

high-quality rack-mounted matrix with wired desktop remote. It's a great unit with relay-assisted audiophile circuitry and is therefore quite expensive. So, the appearance of the MS at such an affordable price is good news.

## Back to basics

In terms of features, the Monitor Station treads similar ground to other comparable units (Mackie Big Knob and Samson C-Control for example). The basics are three monitor outputs each with their own output trim, four headphone outputs with individual gain and three stereo inputs (ST1, ST2 & Aux) for feeding in your DAW or

external stereo devices. All connections are on TRS jacks apart from the aux input, which is on phonos. This third input also has an optional preamp stage with gain control, for use with turntables – you can activate this from the front panel.

In terms of monitoring you get the one main level control for all speaker outputs, so it's important to line up your different monitors using the trims, then you won't get any nasty surprises when switching. In addition there's mute, mono and adjustable dim buttons plus talkback with level control. By default the talkback uses the onboard mic, though you can plug an alternate dynamic mic in at the back, activating it with the front-panel switch. Unfortunately, there's no phantom power option. Things on the top panel are rounded off with an eight-segment LED input meter.

## Flexibility

The unit allows for two signal flows – main and cue – and this is reflected in a number of ways. First up the front panel selectors (ST1, ST2 and Aux) are duplicated either side of the metering. The left side selects sources for the 'main' buss and the right side for the 'cue'. Next there's a 'cue' output level control on the front panel and output jacks for 'cue' and 'main' on the back





panel. Finally, you'll find a selector for either 'cue' or 'main' below each phones output.

In essence, the main output feeds your monitors, the cue output feeds an outboard headphone amp should you have one, and either main or cue can be selected for the onboard headphone outputs. The main difference between them, apart from the sources you select, is that the cue buss carries the talkback signal (the main buss doesn't). This is the case even if you select the main buss for the headphones, so you won't get any talkback in this case. Indeed, you'll find with the headphones selected to 'main', the mono switch also affects the signal (this isn't the case when 'cue' is selected).

On the face of it, the MS appears simpler than the Central Station, but this is perhaps a little misleading. It offers a number of operating modes that include summed sources and toggled speaker switching, and

### Modus Operandi

The Monitor Station can be set up to work in a number of ways, and access to these 'modes' is achieved by holding down specific panel buttons while re-booting the unit. First up, speaker selection can be combo, toggle or toggle A/B. Using combo each speaker set is switched on independently, so you can have all three together if you like. Conversely, toggle only allows one set at any

one time. The final option is designed for using a sub bass monitor, and set C acts independently while A and B toggle between each other. Next, you can set one of two input source modes – sum and toggle – and these affect both the main and cue paths. The default setting is 'sum' and means you can have all three stereo sources active at the same time. However, should you want

inputs to be mutually exclusive, select toggle mode to activate this. Finally, the input meters can be set to three different options: +4dBu, +10dBu and +18dBu. This doesn't affect levels, but is purely designed to match the metering to your operating levels. Finally, in use, you'll find the panel buttons illuminate on boot up indicating the current setting – a useful touch.

features. The talkback, for example, latches when pressed quickly, but if you hold it for longer, it's non-latching. Similarly, the phono preamp must be held for a couple of seconds to engage itself, and this should prevent any nasty mishaps.

power for the external talkback is a bit annoying, but easy to live with.

Even so, when you look at the positives you get an awful lot for your cash, and the flexibility offered by the various modes means you can operate it the way you want to. If you work

solely in the box, the Monitor Station will considerably enhance your working practices. But, it also ties in pretty well with a small mixer,

adding the sort of features that are often missing on a budget desk. Thoroughly recommended. **FM**

## It offers several operating modes that include summed sources and toggled speaker switching

although these require you to re-boot the unit, (see the box out above for full details) at least you don't have to take it apart or mess about with dip switches and the like. However, it is worth mentioning that it's very much a stereo unit and doesn't cater for the multiple streams and configurations you need with surround.

### Desirable?

It's often easy to criticise the build quality of cheaper gear, but the MS seems solidly built. All the main selector buttons are rubberised and backlit, and this makes operation quiet and easy to follow. In use, they've also included some subtle yet good

Sonically I can't fault the MS. With plenty of juice in the headphone amps you're unlikely to need a further headphone amp, and the onboard talkback also delivers plenty of level. But for me the most important thing is that the speaker switching is silent – very important if you're listening at any kind of volume.

### Presonus success

On the downside it's a bit difficult to know how robust the main volume control will be, and since this will see the most action, you'd hope that if the time should come, it will be easy to replace. Also, there's no digital input like the CS and omission of phantom

**FutureMusic VERDICT**

<b>BUILD</b>	■■■■■■■■■■■
<b>VALUE</b>	■■■■■■■■■■■
<b>EASE OF USE</b>	■■■■■■■■■■■
<b>VERSATILITY</b>	■■■■■■■■■■■
<b>RESULTS</b>	■■■■■■■■■■■

**An excellent combination of flexibility and value make the MS extremely desirable.**

### SPECS

**Inputs:** Stereo 1 & 2, balanced TRS jack, frequency response 10Hz to 65kHz, (±0.5dB), input impedance 10kohm, maximum input level (Minimum Gain, 1kHz @ 0.5% THD+N) +22 dBu, Auxiliary Inputs, Unbalanced RCA phono, frequency response (±0.5 dB) 10Hz to 50kHz, input impedance 47kohm.

**Input meters:** dual 8-segment LED, -24 dB to 0 dB

**Talkback mic:** Condenser, gain +15 to +55dB, External talkback, XLR female balanced, Impedance 1200ohms, max gain 50dB

**Outputs:** Balanced TRS jack, output impedance 51ohms, frequency response (±0.5 dB) 10Hz to 50kHz, Speaker A, B and C main level range -80dB to 0dB, dim range -30dB to -6dB, Cue main level range -80dB to 0dB, talkback dim -20dB, Headphones max output (60ohm load) 150mW/channel

**Dimensions:** 241 x 222 x 76mm  
**Weight:** 4.6kg

### ALTERNATIVES



**Mackie Big Knob**  
**£299**

Very established box with typical Mackie robust build quality, but only two headphone outputs.

[mackie.com](http://mackie.com)



**Samson C-Control**  
**£109**

Absurdly cheap box from Samson, but with plenty of features including three separate outputs and footswitch talkback control.

[samsontech.com](http://samsontech.com)



**Presonus Central Station**

**£608 including remote.**

A different price bracket but perfect if audio fidelity is your primary concern, and the remote is very cool.

[presonus.com](http://presonus.com)