

PreSonus StudioLive 16.4.2 | £2,149

An appropriate name and amazing feature set. *Trevor Curwen* is let loose on the StudioLive



WHAT IS IT?

Mixing desk with a FireWire connection for audio transfer

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Great ergonomic, easy to use design
- 2 FireWire I/O
- 3 Ability to function in several different scenarios

HIGHLIGHTS

24:4:2 version
£3,199

The name says it all really... the new StudioLive digital mixer from PreSonus is intended for use both in studio

environment and for mixing front of house (and monitors) at a live show. The company's intention was to pack this new product with a set of features that would allow it to straddle the boundaries – so does it succeed? Let's take a look.

What you get is a 16:4:2 mixer – that's 16 input channels feeding four subgroups and the main stereo output. There are eight auxiliary sends – two permanently assigned to a pair of onboard stereo effects processors, the others available to access external

effects or to be used for cue/foldback – plus a pair of stereo aux inputs to bring external sounds back into the mixer and a stereo two-track I/O.

Besides these mixing capabilities, the StudioLive functions as a 32 x 18 FireWire audio interface. Each input channel can send audio to your computer, as can another eight stereo pairs selected from subgroups, aux sends and other mixer sources.

16 FireWire channels return single audio tracks to the input channels simply by pressing the 'FireWire' button on each channel, while you can also route a stereo mix via FireWire to the two-track input or monitoring buss. The StudioLive is certainly a nice looking

mixer – colour coordinated with a large number of illuminated rubber buttons that turn bright to show their active status. It's also very practical in its layout – all the connections, bar the necessary front-surface headphone socket, are all tucked away round the back and the compact sloping front panel surface lets you see all the controls very clearly and keeps them close enough that you don't have to stretch to reach them.

Signal paths

Most of the central part of the upper sloping surface is taken up by the 'Fat Channel'. It is here that EQ and dynamics processing for every audio stream on the StudioLive is carried out – a Select button on each input channel, auxiliary send and subgroup plus the main output gives access to the Fat channel's controls – a small LED window at its bottom right hand corner letting you see exactly which channel etc it is processing. The Fat channel has a bunch of clearly-labelled knobs each coupled to a 16-ladder LED display showing its parameter value. There's a high-pass filter plus dynamic control in the form of a gate/expander with threshold and release controls, a compressor with adjustable threshold,





ratio, attack, release and gain plus a basic limiter. EQ is four-band with low, low-mid, high-mid and high bands each with frequency and gain controls. Panning plus routing to subgroups or the main output is also carried out in the Fat channel section.

Aux sends are selected one aux at a time for all channels – selecting the Control button for a particular aux assigns the 16 Fat channel knobs as the sends (one per input channel) for that aux with the consequent send levels displayed on the associated LED ladder. The two auxes that access the internal effects are known as FX A and FX B and each addresses a stereo DSP effects engine with 50 factory reverb or delay effects presets and 50 user memory slots. All the effects have several adjustable parameters with a dedicated display window for editing as well as tap tempo where appropriate.

The desk's compact master section has the necessary controls for the monitoring options plus a handy

Store and Recall

One big advantage that digital mixers can have over analogue is the total recall of parameters – something that should happen at a flick of a switch if you want to go back to a mix that you were working on previously or null the controls for a fresh session. With the StudioLive you can create and store a library of scenes that include six different categories of

parameters – assignments and routing, EQ and dynamics settings, aux mixes, fader, knob positions, mutes and internal effects parameters. Some of these categories can be disabled if you do not wish to recall them. Unlike some digital mixers, the StudioLive does not have motorised faders. However, on recall, the StudioLive enters 'Fader Locate'

mode whereby you can quickly reset the faders to their stored value as shown on the Fat Channel's LED ladders. Unfortunately, there's no similar procedure for the knobs, so if you need to move one after a recall it will jump from the stored value to the WYSIWYG value determined by its physical position – not exactly elegant. Time to get out the recall sheet and a Sharpie then...

straightforward – you can choose to send a pristine signal from directly after the mic preamp without any Fat channel processing, in which case you only have to set the mic gain and, if you are using a condenser, select phantom power for the individual channel. If you

Likewise, the EQ is fine for both gentle boosts and a bit of sculpting. Fully variable Q rather than two switchable options would have been nice on the two mid bands – something that PreSonus has implemented in the new 24-channel version. StudioLive is pretty

much designed for multitasking so there are several scenarios in which it could be used. As a pure studio desk, there are enough options for recording the

The StudioLive uses the PreSonus XMAX class A pres which provide a nice transparent quality sound

talkback button although there's no built-in mic so you'll have to plug one into the rear panel for that.

Studio simplicity

There really is nothing difficult about operating the StudioLive, PreSonus seem to have gone out of their way to keep things simple with dedicated knobs for just about everything and very little dipping into menus – the whole experience is tactile and hands-on.

Recording an ensemble or band with up to 16 input channels is very

want to adjust dynamics and EQ on the way to your computer it's a simple matter to select the Fat channel for your input, engage the Digital Output Post button and dial in your processing.

The StudioLive uses the PreSonus XMAX class A preamplifiers which provide a nice transparent quality sound that coupled with pretty decent A/D conversion will give you quality recordings. The dynamics control is pretty comprehensive with the compressor having enough adjustment for gently keeping things in check.

sound that you want – if you want to use dynamics and EQ other than the Fat channel, each of the input channels is equipped with an insert point.

The auxiliaries are all switchable between post and pre, and with six available there's plenty of scope for setting up several different cue mixes and bringing outboard effects units into the picture. Similarly this would work for live sound too – with the option for several different foldback sends.

With that in mind, StudioLive may be ideal for a small venue or a gigging

SPECS

Sampling Frequency: 44.1, 48 kHz

ADC/DAC Dynamic Range: 118dB

Connections: 16x XLR balanced mic inputs, 16x 1/4" jack balanced line input, 16x 1/4" TRS jack insert points, 6x 1/4" aux outputs, 4x 1/4" subgroup outputs, 2x aux inputs L (mono)/R, 1/4" main output L/R, XLR main output L/R, XLR mono output, 1/4" control room output L/R, RCA phono jack Tape in L/R, RCA phono jack Tape out L/R, FireWire sockets x 2, XLR talkback mic input, 1/4" stereo headphone jack, S/PDIF digital out, 2 x DB25 balanced direct outputs (1-8, 9-16)

Dimensions:

437 x 568 x 175mm

Weight:

10.4kg

ALTERNATIVES



Yamaha n12
£1,300
 12-channel digital mixer, FireWire I/O and comprehensive DAW control
yamaha-europe.com



Mackie Onyx 1640i
£1,649
 16-channel analogue mixer with integrated 24-bit/96kHz FireWire I/O
mackie.com



Allen & Heath ZED R16
£2,001
 16-channel Analogue mixer with a FireWire I/O and DAW control
allen-heath.com

band where recording the show is important – the front of house sound and monitors being taken care of while 16 channels of audio (and a stereo mix) is simultaneously painlessly recorded onto a laptop.

The various combinations of reverb and delay solely provided by the onboard effects ought to be adequate for most live sound mixing scenarios and their sound is not too shabby for

use if you are mixing down a recorded track on the StudioLive. Although most live engineers, given the option, would prefer an analogue-style scenario of a dedicated knob for each and every function, the StudioLive offers a hands-on interface that is easy to get around and that would be practical enough to use at a gig.

Other useful functions for live use are an onboard stereo 31-band graphic

equaliser on the main outputs so you can compensate for room acoustics and a socket for adding a gooseneck lamp.

For overdubbing in the studio, you get the option of routing individual recorded tracks or a stereo mix back into the StudioLive via FireWire for monitoring purposes, and the mixer can also be used either to take care of the whole mixdown or as extra processing power with certain tracks sent to the StudioLive for processing and effects before returning to the computer.

Capture Record

Created exclusively for use with the StudioLive and bundled with it, Capture is a basic audio recording application that is set up to record 16 channels of audio directly from the mixer's input channels and/or a single stereo track from the StudioLive's main output,

one pair of subgroup outputs or a pair of aux sends – this gives you the option, if the mixer is being used for a live show, of recording a different stereo mix than that being heard through the PA.

PreSonus has made simplicity the key to Capture's operation – 16

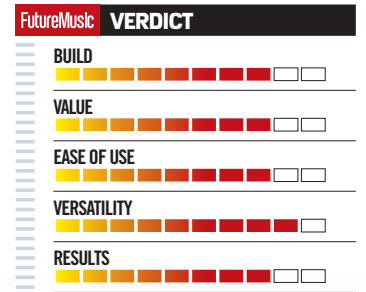
tracks can be armed ready to record with the click of a single button and recording starts with another single click. Basic editing facilities (copy, cut, paste, splice, resize) are available should you need them, but file export is available in WAV and Open TL formats so that any captured audio can be easily transferred to all of the major mainstream DAWs for further editing.

Recorded tracks can also be sent back through the StudioLive's FireWire playback inputs, taking advantage of the dynamics, EQ and onboard effects to create a full mix that can be printed back into Capture.



Verdict

PreSonus weren't the first to combine a mixer and audio interface in a single unit but they have certainly done it in a seamless and stylish way to create an extremely versatile feature-packed piece of gear that can slot into a host of situations – studio and live. **FM**



A comprehensive, well laid-out mixer that suitably feels at home in the studio or front of house.

