



PC MAC

PreSonus FireStudio Project £399

Eight quality mic inputs and zero-latency monitoring without breaking the bank? Heads up for PreSonus' latest audio interface!

> PreSonus have spent the last year revamping and updating many of their products, incorporating upgraded converters, better jitter control and improved direct monitoring. The latest to come our way is the FireStudio Project and this slots into the range alongside the FireStudio Tube, FireStudio Lightpipe and the FireStudio. On the face of it, it's a slimmed-down version of the FireStudio, so what do you get for your cash? Essentially, a 10-in/10-out, 24-bit/96kHz FireWire interface with MIDI and zero-latency monitoring.

Eight of those inputs are equipped with PreSonus' Class A XMAX mic pres, with the remaining pair being via the rear-panel S/PDIF. The front panel inputs give you patch bay-style access, and the first two inputs also double as high-impedance instrument input jacks. On the back panel, these two also have pre-converter balanced insert points on TRS jacks. Neatly, the insert return also acts as a standard-impedance line level input, should you prefer not to use inputs 1 or 2 for an instrument.

Input gain is on notched knobs and the accompanying LED meters are basic but do enough to confirm you have a signal and tell you whether it's clipping the converters. Phantom power is dealt with in pairs, with front-mounted switches saving you some back-panel fiddling.

Simplicity is a virtue, and the FP is on the money in this respect. The included FireControl

software is easy to get to grips with, and mixer defaults mean that all the inputs are routed back to the outs, so all you have to do is activate the mixer that corresponds to your desired outputs, and you'll get zero-latency monitoring.

Burn, baby, burn

In use, we found there was plenty of gain for most situations, although the maximum 50dB of mic gain might be an issue if you plug in a passive ribbon mic. In tests, both the mic pre and output sounds were clean and clear. Importantly, the unit behaved itself on our Mac setup. One thing that wasn't clear from the outset is that you can't use FireWire bus power to run the unit, so truly mobile recording isn't an option. Also, although the routing system is excellent, there are no further DSP goodies in there.

This product is less complex than the FireStudio, making it a simpler and potentially less flexible unit. However, if you don't need ADAT connections or the optional MSR remote, then it's also much more affordable. What's more, PreSonus have kept all the useful recording-related stuff in place - quality mic pres, analogue insert points and balanced connections. And with Cubase LE, BFD Lite and various other apps in the box, this package is hard to fault. **cm**

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System requirements

PC 1GHz Pentium/AMD CPU, 512MB RAM, Windows Vista 32-bit or XP SP1

Mac G4 1GHz, 512MB RAM, OS X 10.4

Test system

Mac Apple Mac Pro Dual 3GHz, 3GB RAM, OS X 10.4.11, Logic Pro 8

Alternatively

Focusrite Sapphire Pro 10
N/A >> N/A >> £379

This FireWire unit houses eight preamps based on the Green series

M-Audio Fast Track Ultra 8R
N/A >> N/A >> £399

Uses USB 2.0, but includes eight of M-Audio's Octane mic pres, twin headphones and DSP reverb

Verdict

For Affordable

Eight quality mic pres

Zero-latency monitoring

Cubase LE bundled

Analogue inserts

Against No phase-reverse on mic input
No FireWire bus powering

There's not much to grumble about, so this is another fine addition to PreSonus' FireStudio range

9/10

Playing with FireStudio

Like a number of comparable interfaces, the FireStudio Project sports a software-driven zero-latency routing system. Here, it's called FireControl and enables you to mix incoming input signals with DAW outputs. Each physical pair of outputs (so that's four stereo pairs plus the S/PDIF) gets its own mixer tab, and within this you can blend up to 18 signals. You can assign inputs and outputs to whichever faders you want, and usefully,

they switch colour - inputs are blue, outputs grey. Adjacent pairs can be linked and each fader has solo/mute switches, with master reset options under the main output.

Finally, each mixer has a master output level and an on/off switch, so you can disable the mixer and drive the outputs from your DAW. One limitation is that the front-panel headphone output is hardwired to the first stereo outputs, but this isn't a deal-breaker.