



PreSonus PC MAC FireStudio Mobile £269

A well-connected compact audio interface, this one comes bundled with PreSonus' own Studio One Artist software

> The FireStudio Mobile takes PreSonus' existing FireWire interface technology and packages it into a small, bus- or PSU-powered box. The first two combo mic/instrument inputs and a headphone socket are on the front, while round the back, you'll find balanced line level connections for inputs 3-6, balanced stereo outs, S/PDIF and MIDI - effectively, it's a 10-in/6-out device. As with all models in the FireStudio range, it comes bundled with the company's Studio One Artist DAW, and although this omits some aspects of the Pro version (see boxout), it's surprisingly well equipped for a 'lite' version.

On the specification front, similarities with its bigger siblings include 96kHz/24-bit operation, Class A XMAX mic preamps, JetPLL jitter reduction and reliable 48V phantom power even when running two mics on FireWire bus power. The FireStudio Mobile has two FireWire ports, too, so you can daisy-chain FireStudio units for up to 52 inputs and 52 outputs.

Zero-latency cue mixes and general output levels are handled by the Universal Control Panel software. Here, you can set individual mixes for the FireStudio Mobile's three stereo outs (main, 'phones and S/PDIF) and balance the ten ins and six outs. You can also disable these mixers, if you wish, to instead control the output assignments directly from your DAW.

Let's get physical

The interface is very compact (a third of a 19" rack unit), and it's a slight hassle using the breakout cable for MIDI and S/PDIF. On the front panel, there are LED input meters for the two mic/instrument ins, and a blue/red FireWire sync LED. It's solidly made, too, and if you're on the go, it should withstand being dumped in a bag. What's more, all knobs are gently notched, giving a positive feel as they're turned. Our only gripe is that the front panel feels cramped - there's certainly an ergonomic argument in favour of following the desktop interface route.

The XMAX preamp stage of the FireStudio series is pretty tried and tested, and both inputs delivered a rich, clean sound. We also spotted that FireStudio Mobile is capable of even greater gain than other models in the range: 70dB on mic inputs and 50dB on instruments.

We got the most out of the FireStudio Mobile when using it with Studio One, as the integration of the routing is excellent. Even so, with onboard software routing, it also works brilliantly with other DAWs. Apart from the slightly cramped front panel, it's hard to criticise a compact interface offering so much at this price. **cm**

Contact Source Distribution, 020 8962 5080
Web www.presonus.com

System requirements

Mac G4/Intel CPU, 1GB RAM,
OS X 10.4.11

PC P4/Athlon 64 CPU, 1GB RAM,
Windows XP (SP2)/Vista (32-/64-bit)

Alternatively

Steinberg C12
cm150 >> 8/10 >> £195
Ergonomic and ties in with Cubase, but less I/O and overall flexibility

Digidesign Mbox 2
N/A >> N/A >>> £218+
The original hardware-linked-DAW, the software being Pro Tools LE

Unleash your inner Artist

It's not unusual to find a 'lite' DAW bundled with an interface, but Studio One Artist is far from lightweight. With an unlimited track count, 20 native plug-in effects, four virtual instruments and over 4GB of additional bundled content (including NI Guitar Rig LE), there's plenty here to keep you amused. Should you require extras like third-party plug-in support, even more effects, 64-bit internal processing, a further 4GB of loop content and mastering capabilities, you can

upgrade to Pro for a quite reasonable £181.

Built by PreSonus, it's no surprise to find that Studio One cooperates perfectly with FireStudio Mobile, especially when setting up cue mixes - not only can you assign your internal cue bus directly to the Mobile's headphone outs, but you can also activate zero-latency monitoring. Activating cue mixes effectively overrides the Universal Control Panel, with routing then handled directly from within Studio One.

Verdict

For Plenty of I/O options

Very compact

Studio One Artist is a fantastic freebie

Quality XMAX mic preamps

Dedicated headphone out

Expandable by daisy-chaining

Against Cramped front panel

An impressively high-spec little box that's well up to PreSonus' usual standards

9/10