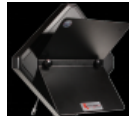




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Digital Console for Live and Studio with 40 Input Channels, 32 MIDAS Microphone Preamplifiers and 25 Mix Buses

## November 2013 Issue

### Road Tests

## PreSonus StudioLive 32.4.2 AI Digital Mixer



The much-anticipated next generation of StudioLive consoles has finally arrived. The new StudioLive AI line is offered in 16-, 24- and 32-channel versions. And the numbers refer to full channels with mic preamps — there's none of that "24 input board with 16 mic inputs and four stereo line inputs" business. All are four-bus designs.

It would have been easy enough to answer the market demand for a 32-channel version of the popular StudioLive series by simply elongating the frame, adding another eight input channels and calling it quits. But PreSonus has always been one of those engineering-driven companies and for their design team, "good enough" wasn't good enough, especially for the flagship 32.4.2AI model. All the entries in the new series feature the Active Integration (AI) dual-core computing engine, which adds 64 times the processing power and 10,000 times more RAM than the previous StudioLive 24.4.2.

Besides turbocharging the StudioLive line, AI also serves as a universal platform within the PreSonus AI-series console and speaker lines, combining wireless and wired networking/communications with powerful DSP to create a unified working environment.



### Diving into the StudioLive 32.4.2AI

I should come clean on one point from the start. I've mixed on dozens of analog and digital consoles, but other than a few quick tradeshow demos, I've never actually worked with a StudioLive board prior to this. It might have been easier to assign this article to a long-time StudioLive user, but I wanted to approach this review from the viewpoint of someone was coming to this console from a blank slate, diving into an

unfamiliar platform.

Also, when it came to reviewing the new line, we opted for the \$3,999/street StudioLive 32.4.2AI, partly because it's the top-end model in the series, having 32 channels with XMAX mic preamps, but unlike the 16- and 24-channel models, also adds hardware controls for six mute groups and six user-assignable Quick Scene Recall buttons, with the latter acting sort of like a grab-on-the-go speed dial for mixer scenes. These are also available on the 16 and 24 models, but only via the VSL-AI software.

Also new are four internal effects buses and an Alt EQ/Dyn button lets users create two sets of Fat Channel EQ/dynamics settings for an input and make quick A/B comparisons. Besides ease in creating processing setups, the latter also allows you to instantly switch between the two different stored presets within a single channel during performance. So if your performer switches back and forth between classical guitar and a banjo, you don't have to use two different input channels. Just use one and hit the A/B switch to instantly toggle

Written by George Petersen  
Sunday, 17 November 2013 15:11








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A USB 2.0 port can host the included USB Wi-Fi LAN adapter. Connect a wireless router and control the mixer wirelessly from a laptop, iPad or iPhone. An accessory slot accepts a dual-FireWire S800, RJ-45 Ethernet and S/PDIF stereo out card (included) or optional I/O cards that provide interfacing to Thunderbolt, AVB or Dante. The standard FireWire card supports up to 48-in/34-out channels (24-bit at 44.1/48 kHz) and is compatible with ASIO and Core Audio, so attach your laptop with your DAW of choice (Pro Tools, Logic, SONAR, Digital Performer, Cubase, etc.) and go for it. If you prefer the analog route, balanced pre-insert direct outputs for every input are available on four standard 8-channel D-sub 25 ports.

To sweeten the pie, the free software suite included with all StudioLive AI models adds PreSonus' Studio One Artist DAW, Capture 2 multi-track live recording software and Virtual StudioLive-AI — a bidirectional console control/editor/librarian with integrated Rational Acoustics' Smaart acoustical measurement technology. All of the programs support both Windows and Mac platforms. And for iOS fans, there's the StudioLive Remote AI mixer control app and QMix-AI (an app for onstage monitor mixing) offered as free downloads from the Apple App Store.



#### Back to Front

There's no mystery on the straightforward rear panel. Each channel has an XLR mic input, TRS line input and TRS insert jack and there are four TRS aux inputs and tape in/out on stereo RCA's. Also on TRS are the 14 inch aux bus outputs and 1/4-inch outputs for the four subgroups and two control room outputs — not just for studio, this is useful for running a set of near-fields when you're mixing in an acoustically tough spot, like under a balcony. Besides the digital I/O option slot (described above), XLR's are provided for a talkback mic input, summed mono main output and the main L/R outputs. Next to each of these is a small rotary level trim control. I wish these would have been recessed, as it's too easy to accidentally move one of these while moving or connecting the console.

Also standard are two 1/4-inch TRS jacks that mirror the XLR main outs, the four D-sub 25 direct outs and a front-mounted 1/4-inch headphone out. The top surface adds a 12V BNC light socket and a USB 2.0 port, with the latter perfect for hosting the included USB Wi-Fi module. Alternatively, users can hard-wire plug into a network or Wi-Fi router using the rear panel Ethernet port.

The StudioLive 32.4.2AI has an internal power supply, with rear-panel AC switch and IEC connector and can operate at any voltage from 100 to 240 VAC. Current draw is a scant 200 watts.

#### And More Features

There's no scrimping on features. Metering is extensive with 16-step LED ladders throughout. A panel with illuminated switches in the master section (you'll use this a lot) lets you change the meters to display levels of individual channel inputs, outputs, auxes and dynamics gain reduction, but these also operate in the central Fat Channel to show parameters of the EQ's, compressors, limiters, gates, highpass filter frequencies and a large, wide readout of the onboard 31-band EQs that can be applied to any of the aux or main outputs.

Within the Fat Channel (easily selected from each input) are controls for phase reverse, pan, 4-band parametric with individual band and global defeat, gate (with key filter, threshold, range, attack and release controls), compressor (threshold/ratio/attack/release and hard/soft knee operation), as well channel link buttons.

Also onboard are four programmable DSP effects engines — two with reverbs and two with delay programs, and all route to their own internal FX bus. Included are 50 effects, mostly solid, useable presets, with plenty of rooms, plates and delay variations — I couldn't find a reverse turbo flange anywhere. Of course, if you don't find what you need, you can certainly go outboard via the 14 aux buses and get just the right sound for your new-age car wash — or you can tap into Studio One's plug-in collection via the FireWire bus.

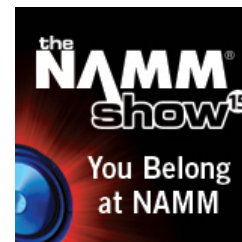
#### Impressions

With the mixer's 31.6 x 21.3 inch footprint, there's plenty of room around the controls without being cramped. The use of backlit switches is impressive — you always know what's going at a glance. Nearly every control is right where you'd expect it to be; in fact the control surface layout is very analog in nature. The first time I used the StudioLive 32.4.2AI, I wasn't sure what to expect, but I was up and running in a matter of minutes. There are no buried layers or hard to find functions.

The layout is straightforward and logical. In fact, it's a lot more simple than the operations of some analog boards I've mixed on. I barely even needed to use the manual, and that was mostly to read the section on setting up Wi-Fi connections. The board is a speed demon and perfect for fast-paced production. About the only downside is a lack of moving faders, although there is a fader locate mode for manual resets. But I've mixed thousands of shows without them, and especially as the console doesn't use layers, these are less of a necessity.

The audio quality is excellent, especially for a 48k Hz design — yeah, 96k Hz would have been nice, but it's not the kind of thing audiences complain about. The XMAX preamps are clean with plenty of headroom and punch; the EQ is musical and the effects are way better than I would have expected. Ergonomics are first rate and the feel and construction are superb.

But the strength of the console comes from the package, with recording flexibility (including virtual sound checking) and the power of its iPad control apps and the Virtual StudioLive-AI, especially with its integration of the Smaart Spectra spectrograph and RTA. In short, you could pay less for a 32-channel live board, but I think you'd be hard pressed to match the power and versatility of the StudioLive 32.4.2AI at this price.



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### At a Glance

PreSonus' next generation StudioLive consoles finally arrive in 16-, 24- and 32-channel versions with extras including powerful onboard DSP, other expanded features and a versatile software suite. They all take the console to the next level.

**PROS** Excellent console ergonomics, fast navigation, solid construction, flexible software package.

**CONS** No moving faders.

**WEBSITE** [www.presonus.com](http://www.presonus.com)

**PRICE** \$3,999 (Street)

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