



PreSonus DIGIMAX FS

MusicTech
RECOMMENDED
★★★★★★★

More than just an 8-channel mic preamp, PreSonus' new DigiMax FS offers a whole new way of getting sound in and out of your DAW. Mark Cousins gets connected...

locking either the DigiMax FS to your interface, or clocking the rest of the system to the DigiMax FS' word clock. Front-panel controls (plus the provision of BNC word clock sync connectors at the rear) make this easy to set up, enabling the DigiMax FS to fit into any digital production environment.

The eight Neutrik combo inputs are accessible from the front panel, facilitating quick and easy access to the preamps should inspiration strike (permanent installation would entail draping cables to the front of the rack, which might be a little unsightly). Usefully, the first two inputs accept instrument-level input, enabling you to simultaneously input a bass and guitar via a DI box, for example. Phantom power is also available across inputs 1-4 and 5-8 via the two illuminated front-panel switches.

Grab the mic

It's immediately apparent that the Class A mic preamps in the DigiMax FS are arguably superior to those found in the majority of audio interfaces (with the possible exception of Mackie's Onyx 400). What's more, the gain pots feel sturdy, with the clip light providing some indication of levels before the

KEY FEATURES

- Eight Class A microphone preamps
- 24-bit resolution; 44.1, 48, 88.2 and 96kHz sampling rates
- ADAT I/O
- JetPLL jitter-reduction technology
- Direct Outputs and inserts on every channel
- Word clock I/O

DIGIMAX FS

Manufacturer **PreSonus**

Price **£589**

Contact **Source Distribution**
020 8962 5080

Web **www.presonus.com**

With most audio interfaces being equipped with just two or eight mic preamps, many musicians are faced with a limit as to the number of instruments they can record at any one time. In truth, even a simple drum kit recording requires more than eight channels (especially if you plan to use room mics and so on), so having access to an additional set of preamps can be highly desirable. Recognising this problem, manufacturers such as PreSonus, Focusrite and Mackie have all developed 8-channel mic preamps specifically tailored for the DAW market, often using an integral or optional ADAT optical output as a means of connecting to an existing audio interface.

DigiMax FS follows in the footsteps of PreSonus' previous DAW-expanding preamp: the DigiMax LT – a product featuring the same solid build quality we've come to expect from PreSonus,

with the additional bonus of a price that made it accessible to many semi-pro recording enthusiasts. The DigiMax FS continues the original concept of the DigiMax LT (including inserts and integral ADAT interfacing), but also expands on the DigiMax LT in respect to 96kHz sample resolution (courtesy of ADAT SMUX connections), DAC Outputs, and a patented JetPLL jitter-reduction technology. Despite all these refinements, however, the DigiMax FS still manages to retail less than £600.

Max headroom

In most cases, the DigiMax FS will connect with your existing audio interface via the ADAT Lightpipe

A FLEXIBLE SET OF INPUT AND OUTPUT OPTIONS DISTINGUISHES THIS UNIT FROM THE COMPETITION.

connectors. This enables the DigiMax FS to integrate with a wide variety of audio interfaces (including Digidesign's 002, MOTU's 828 mkII, and RME cards) although, of course, not all interfaces and audio cards feature ADAT connections as standard. With the Lightpipe connection established, the next point to consider is clocking –

signal reaches your DAW. However, you won't find additional extras such as pads, bass rolloff or phase inversion, which are features that often appeal to those who like to get their recordings 'right' from the source. We also noticed that the DigiMax FS has slightly less gain than some of the other preamps in our studio – something that you might

need to take into consideration if you intend to use the DigiMax FS for delicate recording tasks.

The additional inputs and outputs at the rear of the DigiMax FS are a real bonus for DAW users wanting to improve connectivity within their studio. The inserts, for example, enable you to customise the recording path with hardware compressors and EQs – a feature that is often omitted from the input path on a lot of audio interfaces. Also, by including a Lightpipe In port, the DigiMax FS offers an extra eight analogue outputs from your DAW, enabling you to run more channels to an external console, for example. With the Direct Outputs, you can also use the DigiMax FS as a conventional preamp without the need for digital interfacing.

The conversion quality of the unit feels surprisingly good given its price, and it's clearly helped by the JetPLL jitter-reduction system. Given the apparent quality of the system, we would have no qualms running the DigiMax FS as the master word clock device with an existing audio interface and DAW clocked to it. Equally, the DigiMax FS feels just as comfortable slaved to an existing digital setup, clocked either from the ADAT Lightpipe or the BNC connectors, which can also

be terminated (if the DigiMax FS is on the end of a daisy-chained word clock path) to stabilise the integrity of the world clock signal.

To the Max

The DigiMax FS is not the only 8-channel preamp on the market at the moment, but it stands out thanks to its connectivity options. So, while other preamps provide more in the way of features such as bass rolloff, pads, phase inverters and so on, the DigiMax FS puts it eggs fairly and squarely in the 'inputs and outputs' basket. With ADAT connections as standard (so there's no need to buy an optional card), inserts, DAC Outputs and Direct Outputs, there's no reason why the DigiMax FS can't integrate seamlessly into a wide range of studio setups.

Most importantly, though, the DigiMax FX delivers excellent sonic results in one of the most crucial parts of the recording chain, with solid and dependable performance from the preamps, conversion and clocking. So, if your existing audio interface isn't making use of a Lightpipe connection and you feel that your setup needs a few more inputs and outputs, it's well worth giving the DigiMax FX some serious consideration. **MTM**

Measuring Up

Mackie's Onyx 800 (£1,174) illustrates the additional features you could enjoy by doubling your outlay. It has everything you'll find on the DigiMax FS – including ADAT interfacing and flexible word clock configurations – but it also features an impressive number of controls on each of its preamps. What's more, you also get bass rolloff, phase invert and variable-impedance options (enabling you to explore a range of subtle tonal variations with your microphones) alongside the ability to decode an M-S signal. Another model to consider is Focusrite's Platinum OctoPre (£749), which features compression and limiting on all channels, although ADAT interfacing is available only as an optional upgrade (£149).

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- ADAT Lightpipe interfacing included as standard
- Flexible clocking options
- Low jitter
- DAC Outputs provide additional analogue outputs from your DAW

WALK ON BY

- No phase invert, pad or rolloff

VERDICT

The DigiMax FS keeps its preamp controls simple, but a flexible set of input and output options distinguishes this unit from the competition and makes it an excellent addition to any Lightpipe-enabled audio interface.



METHOD SPOT

If you want to make use of the DigiMax FS' highest resolution sample frequency – 96kHz – you'll need to double your Lightpipe connections, with each Lightpipe carrying four channels of digital connectivity. At standard sample rates (44.1kHz or 48kHz, for example), the full eight channels are carried by the first ADAT Lightpipe connector.



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