

Jonathan Wilson (Dawes, Roy Harper, Roger Waters) On Making Magic In The Studio

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PreSonus FaderPort

By Mike Metlay

The FaderPort is one of those products that seemed like it was going to just go on forever without having to change. We reviewed it all the way back in our October 2007 issue, and remarked on its unique approach to DAW control, one which users of many DAWs still love today.

Since then, PreSonus has created and popularized its own DAW, Studio One, and released 8-fader and 16-fader versions of the FaderPort as complete control surfaces (see the review

of the FaderPort8 in our June 2017 issue). With the new features incorporated in the newer models, especially those that mesh well with Studio One, it was high time for the venerable FaderPort to get a makeover.

One huge fader—still

The new FaderPort stays true to its basic mission: to augment the keyboard and mouse of your DAW computer with ergonomically comfortable controls for often-used functions. If you think it'd be cool to have a control surface for your DAW, but you don't have the desk space for a full-featured one or the interest in more than the most common tasks, the FaderPort fits pretty much anywhere and does most of what a larger surface will do.

The sturdy and comfortably-angled desktop chassis features a 100 mm motorized touch-sensitive fader, a large push-click encoder knob, and 24 soft-touch buttons backlit in a wide variety of bright colors for easy identification while working. This is the exact same number of controls as the FaderPort "classic" had, but they've been reorganized into function groups that make more sense when used in the context of modern DAWs... and, of course, there are a lot more functions under the hood than were common in 2007!

New functions

Probably the largest new function set on the FaderPort (and certainly the most immediately "oh, cool!") is found in the Session Navigator, the central section of the surface. The central encoder is no longer just a pan control as it was on the first FaderPort; it's now instantly assignable to over a dozen different functions, making it a breeze to get around and get stuff done.

For example, you can now use the encoder to scroll through a song, or zoom in and out for more time or more detail on a track view. Jumping between discrete values is easy with the Prev and Next buttons, now conveniently located on either side of the encoder. Not only is the encoder not limited to pan control any more—you don't even have to use it for pan control! A new Flip function lets you set panning with the fader and level with the encoder, for very fine stereo placement moves.

Each button has a minimum of two backlight colors, so functions accessed with the Shift key are immediately obvious. This applies not only to the Session Navigator but also to the top group of mixer and automation functions, with global controls for clearing mute and solo or arming all tracks at once. Four assignable Shift functions are close at hand, but as was the case with the prior version, pretty much any button can be reassigned to something else if there are dedicated



functions you don't use much. Oh, and before I forget: transport controls have been reorganized into an ergonomic cluster of six buttons, with a new dedicated Loop control.

DAW integration

Out of the box, the FaderPort comes with integration for a variety of popular DAWs. As of this writing, the list includes Studio One (which of course has the tightest dedicated integration), Pro Tools, Logic Pro X, Cubase, Nuendo, and Live, with Pro Tools using the venerable Mackie HUI protocol and the other DAWs using the more modern Mackie Control protocol. Configuring for a new DAW is easy: turn the unit off, turn it on while holding the Next key, and then press a button to choose your DAW (the manual lists which is which).

Some functions only work in Studio One, the most obvious being Link, which lets you use the encoder to control any parameter that you're mousing over. Other buttons are reassigned to functions unique to other DAWs—opening Screensets in Logic, for example, or toggling various views in Live.

Final thoughts

When it was first released, the FaderPort was an eye-opener; the landscape of controller integration with DAWs was still relatively "wild frontier" and our reviewer was amazed that it worked exactly as advertised on his DAW of choice. There's more and better integration today, and the new FaderPort hasn't rested on its laurels. While you'll get the best integration and the most features using it with Studio One—and yes, like all PreSonus hardware, it comes with a free copy of Studio One Artist—I tried it with Live and Logic and was pleased with how well it worked with no fuss or extra setup.

The DAW world has more need of a compact and comfortable controller like the FaderPort than ever, and it's nice to see that the new model has stepped up its game. ➤

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