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# Review of the Presonus Central Station

Add big Mixer Features and a nice D/A Converter to your Mixerless Rig

by Tweak

Many of us have gone mixerless in the past few years. As soon as you do, you can't help but miss some of the convenience features of the mixer. We were used to having a knob to set the volume on the control room outs, and if you owned a bigger mixer you had studio outs and a talkback facility that could pipe your voice into the studio room where the performers wait for your cue. The smaller audio interfaces become even more difficult. The volume control may be buried in a menu or worse, only accessible by a control panel on the computer, where a simple slip of the mouse while wearing headphones could take you to the threshold of pain.

And finally, if it does have a volume control, the audio interface has to be at a low output volume when running powered speakers, or you'll blast yourself out of your chair. The d/a converters, which transform the digital numbers in the computer back to an analog signal, may be further muddled by the output electronics that are needed to attenuate the signal. The cheaper the audio interface, the more likely you will hear some distortion, or perhaps more accurately, won't hear, the transparency of your audio.

- o Switch 3 sets of monitors in and out (A and C or B and C can be active simultaneously, but not A and B).
- o Switch between 5 sources (2 stereo TRS, 1 Stereo Aux, Coax and Optical Stereo s/pdif. You can select any one of the five for both the Main and Cue section
- o Use 2 headphones switchable between main outs and cue outputs
- o If you use a digital output from your audio interface to the central station, you will benefit from the central stations high quality D/A converters.
- o Use the talkback mic to talk to the performers wearing headphones (when the phones are switched to cue)
- o Connecting a mixdown recorder like a DAT, Cassette, MiniDisk or CDR deck.
- o Accurately meter your inputs in 0dbVU and 0dbFs scales. The meters are fast acting and have a calibration control. 30 segments.
- o Mute, dim and mono switches
- o A good sized, good feeling Volume Knob



[enlarge](#)

The Central Station is easy to setup. I looked at the manual for less than 2 minutes and had no problem setting up the device. I ran outputs 1 and 2 from my MOTU 828mk2 into the TRS1 jacks and also ran the s/pdif out to the coax in on the Central station. The monitor outs were connected to mackie HR824s. Using either the analog or digital inputs the sound was a marked improvement over the 828mk2. The sound was clearer and more life-like. Switching between TRS and digital, I could compare the Presonus D/A with that of the MOTU. I detected some subtle differences. The MOTU had a heavier bass coloration that the PreSonus did not have, but I liked both, and again, both sounded better than going straight out of the 828mk2. Of course I had to wonder why that was the case.

Presonus says the Central Station uses a purely passive signal path and the highest quality components. They explain

that the amplifier stages, op amps and active integrated circuits in common audio devices "add noise, distortion and give that pinched sound" and may cause ear fatigue. Well, I can say my HR824s have not sounded this good before. My second day with the unit I went through hours of my music collection, thrilled at the new detail I was hearing.

Presonus claims the 24bit digital inputs will sync at 44.1, 48, 88.2, 96, 176.4 and 192k and will automatically read and lock to the incoming digital stream. That worked as advertised here. There were no clock issues and i did not have to change any settings on my MOTU.

The unit overall appears attractive with blue LEDs that light up as you press buttons. The knobs have a sturdy feel and offer resistance as you twist them. The small knobs are the finely detented variety and the volume knob is smooth. The whole box seems rugged and the jacks have a positive feel. You can connect an external dynamic mic to an XLR jack on the back if you are father away from the rack to replace the onboard talkback mic.

Speaking of getting farther away, there is an optional CSR1 Remote. The remote is a handy device, particularly for those who want to switch monitors without leaving the mix position. The talkback mic is duplicated on the remote, as are the input switches, the mute dim and mono buttons and volume knob. Everyone I have spoken to about this machine says "make sure you get the remote". I did and I see why.

Summing up, the Central Station is a worthy piece for the mixerless studio. I think the piece best fits in for those who have audio interfaces and want to improve their output and gain their switching abilities. However, I can definitely see the value as a high quality D/A converter for the back end of large digital mixers and for expanding the possibilities of a simple 2x2 soundcard with s/pdif. However you use it, the Central Station can remove one more veil of crud between you and your sound.

### PreSonus Central Station Studio Monitor Control Center

The Central Station is the ultimate studio-monitoring interface for the modern digital studio. The Central Station features 3 sets of stereo analog inputs to switch between input sources such as: DAW, mixer, CD/DAT/Tape player, or keyboards/samplers. Two stereo analog inputs feature TRS balanced and the 3rd stereo input features RCA inputs with trim control for level matching of input signals. In addition, the Central Station will accommodate 2 digital inputs via S/PDIF or TOSLINK providing D/A conversion up to 24Bit/192kHz.



### Mackie Big Knob Studio Control Center

Big Knob is perfectly suited to a range of applications beyond desktop music making, including home stereo systems, keyboard/guitar rigs, high-end multimedia systems, archiving LP's to CD, classrooms and boardrooms, and more.

### PreSonus CSR1 Central Station Remote with Cable

The Central Station Remote Control (CSR-1) can be connected to the rear of the Central Station via DB9 connector to control Volume, Talkback, Mute, input source switching and speaker output switching functions. Keep the Central Station in your rack with your gear and use the CSR-1 for ultimate control and flexibility.



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