# Digidesign Pro Tools 8 HD

**Pro Tools 8 was released just before Christmas for HD, LE and M-Powered. The update provides a new look along with new MIDI and Score Editor windows, newly included plug-ins, plenty of new editing features, and myriad GUI enhancements and additions.**
GEORGE SHILLING **says 'What's New in Pro Tools 8' is a rather large PDF.**

*L*aunching Pro Tools 8 brings up a useful Quick Start dialogue with provision for opening recent sessions from a list or creating a new one, optionally from a provided or user-created template. When closing sessions, a DSP cache now keeps plug-ins loaded for faster swapping between similar sessions.

The overall look of the program is far darker, with a theoretically easier-on-the-eye colour scheme. This is not, however, to everyone's liking — some of the text has a harsh contrast, and I found trimming Regions difficult to see with some colours. Automation parameter lines are very thin, but multiple lanes for these and MIDI controller data can usefully now be displayed for each track. In the mixer window the pan pots are now rotary and the mixer strips are now coloured by default. Unnecessary new function labels waste a certain amount of screen space, all the more valuable if you take advantage of the additional five plug-in slots on each channel — useful in particular for complex vocal processing chains, or when using Abbey Road single-band EQs.

On the Edit window, waveform views have been helpfully increased from 8-bit to 16-bit — loading old Sessions results in a minute or two of recalculation. The Colour Palette has been enhanced

and now includes Brightness and Saturation sliders for channel strips but not the Edit window. I spent days fiddling with these and the settings on my monitors to get a comfortable working environment. Unfortunately getting Pro Tools bright enough to see clearly can result in plug-in windows, Finder windows and other programs appearing glaringly bright. The Universe view is now incorporated into the Edit window — although it can be hidden, it can sometimes be eating up space unnoticed. But, at long last, there is now a button displaying Insertion Follows Playback status for that infuriating 'N' shortcut, although the new button symbols for this and other functions are not as clear as they might be. The Edit Toolbar can now be configured to taste and all Transport controls can be shown here if you have a wide enough monitor (or two). These could possibly have been better organised — the Grid/Nudge window wastes some space. But sections can be rearranged, simply by Command-clicking and dragging.

The new Playlist view usefully spreads out hidden playlists for audio tracks but not MIDI. If all playlists are in view, this now finally allows for global edits to be reflected in all recorded audio tracks (this doesn't work for MIDI playlists). But the main aim of this feature is for comping and individual playlists can

be shown or hidden, given a rating, soloed, etc., and chosen audio selections can be jumped up to the main playlist using a shortcut. Other new shortcuts are associated with this feature, (some are wrongly documented) but we still don't have shortcuts to select, create new or duplicate playlists, despite many

rivals. Requested features such as Mute MIDI Note function have been included, and you can even display this at the bottom part of the Edit window, much like Logic Pro. Multiple parts can be shown, with multiple controller lanes (although oddly not multiple Velocity, this can become very cluttered.) There is even a notation view in the MIDI Editor. However, there is also a separate Score Editor, bearing the fruit of some code apparently borrowed from Sibelius. Although beautiful looking printed music can be produced, editing is rather limited. There is no provision to change clef during a part, there are no symbols for slurs available, no means of providing dynamic markings or adding lyrics. But for boshing out a quick part for a musician to refer to, it's fine, and you can even generate a PDF. Despite the omissions, you can adapt display quantisation, insert chord symbols (the Edit window also now has a Chords ruler) and key changes, and easily show and hide different tracks/parts.

Musicians and composers will appreciate great new instruments from the AIR division. Mini Grand is a surprisingly good piano with presets and a lovely built-in reverb. Vacuum is a valve mono synth, DB-33 is a resource-hungry tonewheel organ and rotary speaker, Boom is a programmable drum machine, and Xpand2 is an improvement over the original. D-Fi, SansAmp, Maxim and TL Utilities are included, and there are 20 interesting new effects from the AIR department, although disappointingly these are RTAS only with no TDM.

Also accompanying Pro Tools 8 is a 6Gb bundle of samples from Big Fish Audio. These are grouped by musical style and while nowhere near as comprehensive or elegant as Apple Loops, they nevertheless provide useful starting points for cobbling tracks together.

Strip Silence now has a threshold that goes down

requests. Also, Expand Matching Takes to New Playlists doesn't place regions at the original time stamp. However, the new features are welcome and are heading in a useful direction.

The new MIDI Editor is much like other piano roll editors and boasts most of the features of

to -96dB, far more useful than the previous -48dB, especially for classical music editing.

Grid Mode can now be combined with any of the other three edit modes — I soon started enjoying Shuffle-Grid mode for global editing, keeping things in time without having to constantly change modes. There are a handful of practical new video and Avid-related features such as QuickTime HD playback on a Mac with a qualified video card, and Video Satellite options. Multiple HD systems can now be linked using the Satellite Link software option, and D-Control, D-Command and Icon functions have been enhanced.

One new option that can be extremely useful is the method of opening a session with all plug-ins de-activated, by holding down the Shift key. This is great when you want to go into a session quickly to export some audio regions, or if you're troubleshooting.

So all-in-all some fantastic new features, but the new GUI colours possibly need a bit of tweaking for operators whose eyesight isn't necessarily improving with age. ■

**PROS** New GUI; MIDI/Score Editors; new instrument and FX plug-ins; multiple automation lane view; too many enhancements to list.

**CONS** New GUI colours and labels; still lacking playlist shortcuts; some windows yet to be updated to the new look; I had to buy a faster Mac; a few bugs and oddities.

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