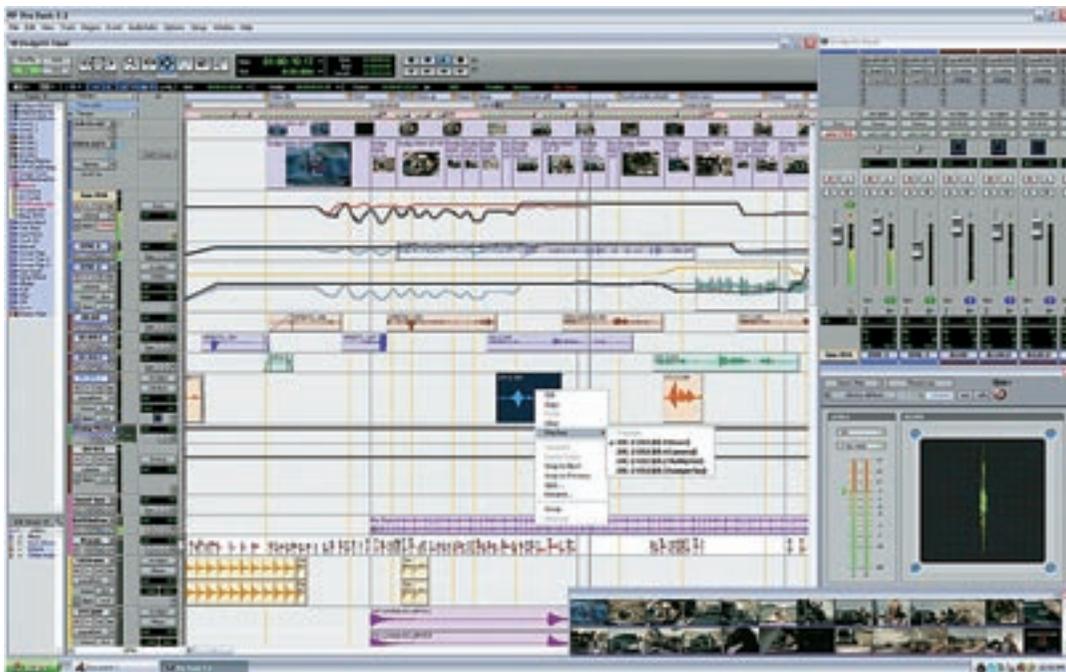


Digidesign Pro Tools HD 7.2

It's been billed as a substantial upgrade that is above and beyond the scope of a more regular nip and tuck. The latest version of Pro Tools takes years off **GEORGE SHILLING**.



IT DOESN'T SEEM that long since the last major update took Pro Tools to version 7.0, and indeed it isn't. Interim free updates have included 7.1.1 for MacTel machines, the Xpand! softsynth, and a number of bug-fixing CS updates, but new operational features have meanwhile been gathering on the shelf marked 7.2. A lot of innovative stuff is here, and this could just as well have been named 8.0. The emphasis is on mixing and automation, and there are a further raft of features targeted at the post fraternity, plus functions for Icon users, such as window scrolling with the Scrub/Shuttle wheel. Video import/export and editing is vastly improved too; you can resize and chop up video with audio. Meanwhile, a few new free Digirack plug-ins have been issued, and Dynamics III has had a make-over with animated displays.

Pro Tools 7.2 is a paid-for upgrade (UK£105), authorised by iLok — you can keep the 7.0-7.1 authorisation — but I had random niggles at start-up and it seemed best to put them on separate iLoks. Launching a session with the new version, as is often the case with Pro Tools updates, it was hard to immediately spot any difference from the old version. However, the 'What's New' guide runs to well over 120 pages, so plenty is new or different under the bonnet. Screen layout, keyboard shortcuts and basic functionality remain unchanged so, essentially, it is again a long list of tweaks and add-ons to add features, all helping



workflow and flexibility.

Usefully, the whole track grouping system has been updated — instead of 26 you can now make 104 groups for editing and mixing (four banks of 26). A new, more advanced Create Groups dialogue box allows grouping of plug-in controls and bypass buttons, record enables and pan controls. The last of these was off-requested by post engineers, and will allow linking of offset pans, retaining their offset relationship during moves. Furthermore, there are new VCA-style masters, created in the New Track dialogue and selectable in the Groups window. Although it might seem an unnecessary luxury at first glance, these allow you to operate in a fashion similar to a large traditional console. When muting and unmuting VCA masters, for example, individual mutes are remembered. When automating, it is even possible to merge in the VCA data to individual faders.

When writing automation, you can now see the new data as a red line in real time, while the original is black, until stop is pressed and they are merged. This is really handy to see how far above or below you have adjusted while you are making the move — just to be sure you haven't imagined the change! Additionally, the status button text turns bold when data is being written. There is now a separate Trim data stream and display, so you can compare, coalesce or revert to the original data. You can also now perform edits on Regions while in automation views, and

Fades' shapes are now shown in automation views, helping automation editing.

A new automation mode, Touch/Latch, allows Touch adjustments to faders without the annoying momentary operation of (Mute) buttons that was often frustrating. There is now also a means to capture automation settings and punch them in somewhere else in the track, with preview also available. If you write updates that go 'off the scale', Pro Tools now remembers the excess level moves if you trim back down again.

There are now right-click and scrolling mouse functions a-plenty, whether you are on a Windows or Mac machine. Right-clicking pops up a little context menu in various locations. For example, on a track name this brings up functions such as Hide and Make Inactive (one command), Rename, Delete, and suchlike. Right-click functions are also available when clicking Regions, and these can really speed up the workflow. On the other hand, some users with mice set up so that Right-Click is the same as Control-Click on a Mac have moaned that it slows them down having to select the previous function from the pop-up menu. But the benefits are huge; you can now right-click and Delete Groups, rather than having to de-select others before deleting active Groups. I do, however, still wish there was an easier way to select Playlists — the button is small, and some sort of shortcut or memory function would be most welcome.

The Preferences pages have had a sensible reorganisation — long overdue, this makes everything more logical, but, like the menu reordering of 7.0, takes a little getting used to. Solo mode has been removed to the main Options menu, for example. Audio Import functions are streamlined and changed for the better, and even recording functions are enhanced. DestructivePunch is a new mode that allows punching in on tracks without creating additional audio files. Great for fixing stems and mixes recorded back into Pro Tools. And in Punch modes, the trailing waveform is now displayed — as it should be.

When editing, irritating error messages when Fades exist have gone, as Fades no longer get in the way and can be moved or adjusted to the new splice point. You can nudge Regions with faders, with fades stretching as necessary. Fades can also now be automatically applied to REX/ACID files for smoother loops.

To 'old school' engineers, this kind of function and flexibility is the stuff of dreams, but the new breed demand quicker workflow, more functions, more groups, more of everything, and Digidesign seems to have been listening. Inevitably, there are a few small issues and bugs, but the DUC forum was fairly quiet on the subject of 7.2 at the time of writing. This update won't stop people wanting even more options and features, but there are plenty of helpful improvements here. This represents a comprehensive overhaul of much of the way Pro Tools works, and will benefit all users. ■

PROS VCA Groups; right-click menus; plenty of new goodies for mixing, automation and postproduction; lots of other things too numerous to mention.

CONS You still can't instantiate a Send on-the-fly; lacks a 'snap-to-zero-crossings' editing option.

Contact

DIGIDESIGN, US:
Website: www.digidesign.com