

Presonus Centre Station

The ability to monitor what you are doing in a flexible and quality manner remains something of an enduring limitation of the DAW way of working. You'll be needing a monitoring controller, then. **ROB JAMES** finds one to suit most pockets.



AS PC AND MAC based audio workstations established themselves in many fields of operation, the virtues of purpose designed monitor controllers became obvious. Perhaps surprisingly, most of the early entrants were surround capable but more recently a number of stereo only monitor controllers have appeared. Each has its own slant on the problem and a feature set that reflects this. Presonus has established a strong reputation for producing cost-effective front ends with an emphasis on the cleanliness of the signal path. The Central Station is the Presonus take on the stereo monitor controller dilemma and, following its value for money theme, is offered at UK£499 (inc VAT) for the main unit and UK£165 (inc VAT) for the remote.

Central Station aims to cover the monitoring and communications requirements for live recordings into a DAW and for mixdown, with the bonus of routing an analogue signal to an external recorder. Any one of four sources may be selected for monitoring. Two of these are balanced line-level analogue, supplemented by an unbalanced analogue and coaxial or optical SPDIF. For monitoring there are two pairs of alternate speaker outputs plus a third pair that can be active with either of the other two. Typically this might be used to switch a subwoofer. The separate Cue output takes the selected input mixed with the talkback signal after the cue level pot and is ideal for feeding artists' headphones. A further Main stereo output provides a signal sourced from before the main level control for an analogue recorder. Two headphone jacks on the main unit are switchable between Main and Cue mixes.

The meters feature an auto calibration function. A tone reading -18dB on the master external device output meters (workstation or whatever) is played into any one of the inputs and the Calibrate button is pressed for two seconds. Automatic recalibration adjusts the meters to read 0dBu/-18dBfs. A Talkback button also invokes a Dim function to avoid howl round. However, in some applications this could be annoying. I would have liked to have seen a switch to disable this, also, although the Dim button lights on the main unit regardless of which TB button is pressed, the Dim button on the remote only lights when the Dim function is directly selected.

It is refreshing to see an emphasis in the Central Station on passive circuitry.

The TRS inputs are passive balanced as are the speaker outputs (except when Mono is selected when a summing amp comes into play). All switching is achieved using relays. Amplification is used to give the Aux input sufficient range to bring lower level sources up to line level and the Main and Cue feeds use active balancing. This reflects a pragmatic approach



position. All the Central Station controls apart from the Main level remain active when the remote is switched on.

to providing the right feature mix while retaining clean paths wherever possible. Apart from the Aux input level control and mic gain, all the other pots are purely attenuators.

The optional remote control offers a more convenient solution for installations where the main unit must be mounted some distance from the main operating

The Central Station largely succeeds in what it sets out to achieve. It is extremely simple to install, calibrate and operate. For anyone working in a typical stereo DAW environment with a mixture of live recording and mixdown tasks it will be ideal and a great deal more convenient than attempting to achieve the same results within the workstation. ■

PROS Good value stereo monitor and talkback controller; sensible extra features; largely passive circuitry.

CONS No Dim defeat switch when using talkback; more inputs would be nice.

Contact

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Hardware Front and rear panels on the main unit are divided in sections by function. Design follows Presonus house style with blue graphics on brushed alloy, knurled blue anodised knobs and translucent round buttons, internally illuminated blue when active.

In the Talkback/Phones section a mic level pot sits close to the square momentary action Talkback button with the internal electret talkback mic to the right. Two headphone level pots are also push switches independently toggling headphone source between Cue and Main signal paths. Blue LEDs indicate the current selections.

Cue and Main sections are superficially similar. Each has four buttons to select source from a choice of TRS1, TRS2, Digital and Aux. The Cue section pot controls cue output level while the Main section pot controls Aux In level. Two buttons determine whether the digital input is to be SPDIF coax or Toslink optical. Dominating the centre ground, two 30-segment LED bargraphs are marked with both dBu and dBfs scales. Clear Peak does what it says and Calibrate, when held for two seconds, invokes the auto calibration mode with an overall range of +/-12dB. Last, but not least, the Passive Speaker Control section has buttons for selecting speakers A, B and C. A and B are mutually exclusive but C can be active alongside A or B. Further buttons select Mute, Dim (around 20dB) and Mono. Six recessed trim pots allow for speaker calibration. A pleasantly chunky knob controls main level. All the pots, curiously except this one, have a detented feel.

On the rear panel digital inputs are phono and Toslink 24-bit at up to 192kHz auto locking. The six speaker outputs, Main and Cue outputs and TRS 1&2 analogue inputs are all 1/4-inch balanced jacks. Aux LR inputs are phonos. An unbalanced jack allows for a footswitch to control talkback and an XLR provides for an external dynamic talkback mic, activated by a latching push switch. Power from the external in-line supply connects via a locking 5-pin XLR, much better than the usual flimsy coaxial specimens. A 15-pin compact sub D connects the remote and a latching switch activates it.



The optional remote duplicates the Input Select, Speaker Select, Talkback (including another mic with level control), and Main Level controls. With the exception of Main Level both sets of controls are active when the remote is switched on.