



## Studer Vista 5

Being heralded as the Vista for lower budgets and smaller rooms, the new Vista 5 also completes an interesting product range. **ZENON SCHOEPE** takes a look and finds a lot that is familiar and reassuring.

**IT IS QUITE AN ACHIEVEMENT** that the Vistonics technology that was introduced with the original Vista 7 around four years ago already boasts some 200 sales of the various models. All this from a technology that some were unconvinced by when it was first shown. Personally I've always thought that variety is what makes things interesting because it moves user expectations along and Vistonics also flies in the face of that surprisingly strong streak of conservatism that plagues our industry. You've got to applaud anything that challenges established work methods and dares to suggest a different way.

I was intrigued following my first encounter with the Vistonics control panels on the original Vista 7 but have subsequently become very comfortable with the idea. It's not nearly as radical to me now as it was when it was first introduced — particularly as it came from Studer a company steeped in tradition. It marked a modernisation of the firm and its repositioning as a manufacturer and designer of mixing consoles.

And they are imposing desks; there is something

dignified and brooding about a Vista 8, but that's not something I'd say about encountering a Vista 5 for the first time as it has less presence yet is substantially more modern looking instead. It is to do with the relative size of the Vistonics panels on the worksurface and how they take up a higher proportion of the real estate compared to other Vistas.

But then the 5 is the 'cost-effective' Vista. All the other Vistas weigh in at roughly the same sort of price but are differentiated by their target applications. To recap, the Vista 6 is a pure live broadcast console with no dynamic automation, simple and straight forward. You'd use a Vista 6 on a news show. Vista 7 is the production console focussing on dynamic automation and machine control. The Vista 8 is the chameleon in the pack — space saving layout, has some live theatre features, dynamic and static automation but is primarily focussed on live work with its output section and Contribution features and sits well in OB vans.

The Vista 5 is best looked at as a smaller brother of the Vista 8 but without dynamic automation. It's a pure

live desk for live broadcasters with some application to fixed installs, like theatres. It has the output section and the Contribution viewing of the Vista 8.

And it's light — I know because two of us moved it — and it's table-top mounted and can be flightcased. It's not a road desk — the Soundcraft Vistonics-equipped Vi6 is the Harman Group's contender for that task — but it has been designed to be moved and replugged if required.

I am not about to go back to the operating principles of Vistonics and Vistas as a breed as this has been covered before but I am going to look at what is different about the Vista 5 and contrast it to the Vista 8 with which it is most closely aligned.

The first important detail is that Vista 5 is fixed in worksurface size; if you want one then it will look like this. DSP and I-O are, of course, a separate issue but there is only one worksurface. Prices start around US\$120,000 and go up to around \$250,000. Blow for blow that's roughly half the price of a Vista 8. A comparably sized Vista 8 worksurface will be bigger, heavier, run hotter and use more juice. The Vista 5 is truly portable. Vista 5 also employs an S-Core Live as opposed to the Vista 8's Performa Core; a different iteration of the same sort of processing. The S-Core is much more compact — 6u includes a whole I-O rack, whereas the Vista 8 uses 9u just for the DSP. So it is substantially cheaper, but Studer has kept the functionality in terms of software so Vista users will find all the bits and pieces they would expect.

The desk is 96kHz capable. Redundancy involves



optional power supplies and as standard it has two RAID hard drives inside it. You can also order redundant cards.

The 32-fader desk has 20 channel strips (two blocks of ten) and 12 additional strips for operating output and input channels (the section on the right that I'll refer to as the Output section). By a combination of channel and Vistonics control you can grab 52 outputs immediately and arrange 240 channels on the surface through layering. There are cards for mic/line, ADAT, TDIF, AES-EBU, SDI and MADI and the I-O capacity may exceed 1700 inputs and outputs.

Visually there are differences, the absence of a meter bridge being the most obvious. Other Vistas effectively have three planes to their worksurfaces: the flat fader plane; the incline with the Vistonics panels below and the switching functions above; and the third near-upright plane housing the metering. Vista 5 has a deeper fader plane with switching functions and the Vistonics panel plane above it.

The keys located above the Vistonics panel on a Vista 8 have been redistributed on the 5 and accessed in some cases through screens. Channel input gain pots have been retained and moved down the worksurface but the Generator button, for example, has been removed from the panel and is now activated within software.

There are ways of getting around this, most notably by bringing selected functions onto the surface to the two programmable User Keys and I am assured by Studer that pretty much every switch and key-related function you can perform on a Vista 8 you can achieve



on the Vista 5 in one way or another. The compromise is therefore not on the features set, it is on the mode of access. We have to pay for the comfort of extended access, as indeed we should. Those who have a problem with this end up mixing on a workstation using just a mouse.

So, you're sacrificing a little speed of operation — particularly on the extended functions — on the 5 over the 8. There are also a few reductions in capability that are the result of Studer rethinking the packaging of the board to hit the lower price point. This includes such things as the Vista 5 only going to 5.1, while the Vista 8 can handle 7.1, and the implementation of the

monitoring I-O on the back of the desk.

The technical realisation of the monitoring is a good demonstration of how Studer has managed to get the price down. On the Vista 5 the monitoring is done digitally and it's fixed whereas on the 8, and indeed on the 6 and 7, it involves the use of a separate rack in analogue. Studer has simplified the setup and connection process with the Vista 5. When you take it out of the box you need to connect two Cat5 cables between the desk and the core — one for the Gigabit link to the core for data and the other is a MADI link. The monitoring on the back offers 32 outputs and 16 inputs, which you could regard as a type of breakout box. There's a lot of connectivity on the back of what is a dumb worksurface. The loudspeakers outputs are available in analogue and digital, you have control room 5.1, direct outs in digital for your third party multichannel metering, Studio A and B, talkback input, producer talkback input, PFL speakers also doubling as nearfields, digital inserts for the control room monitoring in 5.1, two other outputs and six more inputs plus Word clock.

Vista 5 doesn't have machine control built in to the surface. Input and output metering is down by the channel fader together with displays of gain reduction and gate and N-1 status. You also get two main stereo meters in the Master section but if you want to do multichannel confidently you need to add a third-party meter.

One of the byproducts of this rationalisation process is that it has opened up other means of control. When you take an established operational method and

rethink it you can often offer different ways of doing things that can in some applications be regarded as more convenient. From this standpoint the Vista 5 is no operational slouch; it's a very, very capable desk. Predictably you can move projects between all Vista desks, subject to configuration constraints.

The setup procedure still involves the labelling of sources, which are retained in the signal path configurations. The channels have direct access to EQ, dynamics and pan using the usual Vistonics access method and you can view the rest of the channel on the panel for auxes, inputs, etc, bus assignment and a condensed channel view.

Isolate keys remove a channel or a section of processing from the Snapshot automation allowing you to take manual control or to make a tweak before de-isolating it. You can also Trim to create an offset that is retained for the course of a show, for example, but doesn't change the values in the snapshot list permanently. A Recall and Update key fixes the offset into the snapshot list permanently. You'll find this on a Vista 8 too and it amounts to a sophisticated static automation system that slaves to MIDI.

The channel blocks have six layers that are accessed on dedicated buttons but the desk doesn't scroll left and right like a Vista 8 because that doesn't make a lot of sense on such a compact surface.

The Vista 5's Output section can also contain reduced access channels in a manner that has fewer constraints than the Vista 8. You'd expect this section of the worksurface to be less able than the Vista 8 whereas in fact it is very smart. In terms of Output control, it's very close to what the 8 offers. You have the very useful Contribution function that allows you to interrogate backwards from a selected output to find which channels contribute to it while being able to adjust their levels, for example, from the pots on the Output section's Vistonics panel.

Global switches allow viewing of things like auxes, groups, masters, direct out and bus outputs and a Follow key flips the bay's function to that of a channel block. There is no denying that for the potential channel count and I-O capability the worksurface is very compact but it has to be said that Studer has done a good job of keeping the operator's options open and flexible with only 32 faders and three screens to play with. You can arrange things in a lot of different ways.

The Master section features are more than adequate and the Talkback and setup of conference groups is the same as on the Vista 8 and, as such, comprehensive. Typical broadcast facilities are included, such as N-1 outputs, off-air conferencing, and GPIO. The desk's internal matrix can be controlled by third-party controllers and video routers.

The screen, which is required for the setup and configuration routines, is attached on a bracket to the back of the surface and works in conjunction with a very neat little keyboard that pulls out of the armrest. Configuration Editor Software is used to specify the number of channels, buses, processing within the channels and the signal flow within the console.

You also get Studer's rather good VSP (Virtual Surround Panning) included which you instigate by sacrificing a little DSP in the configuration procedure. VSP offers amplitude and time delay and frequency response panning together with artificially-generated early reflections for sound source placement.

The whole promise of Vista 5 is to bring Vistonics to lower budget and smaller facilities and as such I think it delivers. It's a real contender for smaller studios than you'd traditionally expect to see a Vista in and it will fit into any OB van.

Another thing that it achieves by reflection is to

show just how fabulous a desk the Vista 8 is through its extended control. There is a hand on benefit to this. Existing Vista 8 drivers are likely to get on fairly quickly with the 5 and either find it adequate or limiting. They'd almost certainly look at it favourably for smaller installations within their organisation, particularly as there is mix data compatibility across the range. Vista 5 drivers will also become well trained to drive any other Vista board.

Whether the operational improvements and convenience offered by the Vista 8 over the Vista 5 are worth twice the price is a decision that can only be made by someone who has the cash to make the choice!

However, the Vista 5 is a very capable desk and will do a lot to popularise the Vistonics cause among a new profile of user. It is also a perfectly logical addition to

the Vista range. From where I'm sitting it's a triumph of down-marketing a technology because it's been achieved without it feeling the slightest bit cheap. You should try one. ■

**PROS**

Vistonics on a lower budget and for smaller rooms; operationally clear and powerful; compact and portable; quite a bit of Vista 8 functionality.

**CONS**

Compact worksurface controlling a whole lot of desk; by definition convenience and some speed is sacrificed; it only comes in the one size.

**Contact**

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