

# Studer Vista 8

Latest in a line that is proving to be a great dynasty, the flagship Vista 8 combines the best of the Vista 7 with the best of the Vista 6 and adds some tricks of its own. **ZENON SCHOEPE** finds his attitude has changed.

**SOME TWO YEARS AFTER** the launch the Vista 7 as the original vehicle for the introduction of Studer's Vistonics control surface, I find that my attitude has changed. The thing about the Vistonics interface is that it challenges, in a subtle and slow-burn kind of way, some of the things you have probably learnt to take for granted. At the same time it causes you to question what all the fuss is about. After all, it's only a screen with some knobs and buttons on as yet another take on a 21st century worksurface, which some will like and some will tell you is really not that much more radical than what a variety of other manufacturers have rolled up.

My attitude has changed because I am no longer distracted by all the aforementioned arguments concerning Vistonics and I found I could come back to it and accept it for what it is — a perfectly valid take on the 21st century worksurface. I liked Vistonics when I first saw it on the Vista 7 but I have now grown to appreciate it far more and believe that a long-term operator would learn to love it and be hugely unhappy about going back, certainly, to an analogue board.

However, that said, I still think that Studer has its work cut out marketing this concept. The problem is that if you look at a Vista from a distance it doesn't look terribly different from any other modern iteration of worksurface. See a close-up of the actual Vistonics panel and it looks like a fancy controller screen. The only real way to take in what is truly being offered is from the panoramic view afforded from the operator's chair.

Vistonics is central in the design concepts of the Vista 7, Vista 6 and now Studer's new flagship model the Vista 8. The V7 is a production desk, the V6 is more on-air — without the V7's dynamic automation but with sophisticated filtering of snapshots. The V8 combines the extended snapshot and extended functionality of the V6 with the dynamic automation of the V7 and then adds some flavour of its own. It's targeted at the live market in the widest sense of the term to include live broadcasting, OB trucks (it has a space saving layout), but also fixed PA installations.

The processing engine is effectively that of the D950 (which is still current) but with the V8 Studer has introduced the D21M I-O system, which has been offered with the Vista 7 as a 96kHz I-O but was previously limited to a distance of 10m from the DSP core. The new stagebox concept of the D21M is extremely compact and gives 48 mic inputs in a 3U that is connected over one MADI connection to the system. This involves a D21 rack near the Core, called a Hub and available in multiples, that can include local interfaces, like ADAT cards, but also MADI cards that extend out to the stagebox. You can hang six stageboxes off a hub. Hub to Core connection is proprietary on CAT5 sending 192 channels of 96kHz.

Redundancy-wise everything remains the same as with previous models with automatic switching over of DSP cards in the event of failure. There's also the



worksurface's ability to bypass a bay should it malfunction allowing you to continue working on those that have not. Calls for redundancy in the integral PC means that Studer offers a redundant control system PC as an option, they are built into the worksurface, and there's a dedicated button on the meterbridge that permits switching over to the back up.

Physically, the smallest you can go on a V8 is a three bay frame although you only need to fit one ten-fader 'input' module in addition to the centre section — the extra blanked off space is required to house the internal power supplies. The biggest has a total of 70 faders for a very large and impressive looking board although it is a bay shorter than a comparable V7 that doesn't have the extra ten faders under the centre section.

Despite all this, it's a silent worksurface that employs no fans — the business of heat dissipation being described as a Studer secret. In terms of price it is slightly more expensive, bang for bang, than a V7 and Studer clearly sees the V8 as a natural replacement for existing D950s.

It's important to acknowledge that there has been an on-going series of software updates for all the desks, some of which even apply to the D950s, and these are new features not just bug fixes. The addition of hierarchical groups is a case in point as is a Motors Off mode. Data can be transferred via USB stick from the front panel of the V8 or by internal CD-R. On-going changes to DSP functionality will trickle down to the V7 and V6 although the improved m-1 functionality will only be available on the V8.

It's difficult to look at the V8 without reference to the V7 and V6 but there are some obvious and immediate differences. The V7 lacks the V8's central faders and is a production-postproduction desk with dynamic automation and machine control working together with external synchronisers and special programmable keys. It also has the main screen integrated into the surface as opposed to the V8's separate arrangement.

A convenient way to manage the description of the

V8 is to assume some knowledge of the V7 and V6 and a passing acquaintance with the D950 and to compare and contrast to the newer V8. Visually it is the meterbridge that catches your eye first as it employs TFT-style displays with a fantastic depth of contrast and excellent viewability. These are Studer custom made and offer an extremely informative window on signal levels and headroom.

The live production target market for the V8 manifests itself most obviously in the workings and arrangement of a centrally located Output bay. This adds distinct functionality to the V8. The familiar Vistonics panel, with its columns of four pots and switches, is pressed into a role as the output section (you can still use it for input channels if you want) and it is optimised for masters and outputs of the console. The great thing about this panel is that in its 'normal' default setting it shows the various outputs that you have, complete with faders and small meters with headroom indication and overload. The panel's rotaries give you access to 40 outputs. You could of course do this on faders but this twist gives an extremely compact and concise way to look at a lot of outputs very quickly and to make necessary adjustments directly and immediately.

In this section you have access to 40 on the screen, ten faders below, two Grand Master faders that can be assigned freely but remain separate from any paging or scrolling activity, and 48 meters (40 on the Vistonics screen and 8 on the bridge). You can interrogate the system at the push of button to show you all the auxes, masters groups, direct outs and bus outputs.

The output section is isolated from the rest of the desk's channel scrolling abilities, which is how it should be given its purpose. However, the output section does offer you four fader pages that are separate from the rest of the desk and you do still have access to the traditional Vistonics curves and parameter adjustments on this screen but at a reduced level. The idea is that you would set up the finer tweaks of the outputs elsewhere on the desk and then run them with restricted control

possibilities from the output screen and section.

What is special is the presence of a Contribution button at the top of each fader block in the output section. On the Vista 6 you can reverse interrogate a master bus assign button by pressing and holding it and it will show all the contributing channel assignments. The V8's output Contribution button when pressed removes the output display from the Vistonics screen, which now shows all the input channels that are assigned to it allowing for individual adjustment of the values. If you apply this to the context of a foldback mix on auxes, you can very quickly adjust the balance and then flip back to what you were doing before. That's fast. And you have meters and levels viewable.

A button called Reduced On adds to this. Hitting a Contribution key displays the signals that are contributing to the output but when Reduced is deselected the contributing channels are shown on the desk surface, which allows you to go in and change assignments as opposed to just viewing them.

Outputs can be PFLed and Modifier buttons allow modification of key functions allowing a PFL to become a talk button addressing an output or a mute button.

There are some differences in the channel strips although the top parts are very similar to the V6. Alternate m-1 allows you to define a signal to send to a contributor and this can be programmed on a channel by channel basis.

The Vista remains fantastic in its ability to copy channels and channel component settings across the desk and across whole



chunks of the desk simply by touching channels and using copy and paste and multipaste keys or saving to the library. You can also copy fader positions to a mono or stereo (with pan positions) aux and isolate that aux from the automation quickly. Similarly ganging faders is a very tactile process and once you grasp the underlying and consistent logic at work, you fly.

MPX — multiplex conferencing — allows participants to hear each other when not on-air and can be defined to a very sophisticated level and is very easy to set up with just a few button presses.

Blank panels in the centre section can be fitted with machine control and intercoms and there are options for the meterbridge also. The whole monitoring section of V6 (although you have access to two studio feeds directly) is included together with the dynamic automation of V7.

V8 goes a long way to providing the sort of features that broadcasters like that are often found on live PA-style consoles. To this end, MIDI will be integrated into a Cue List, which will allow snapshots to be sorted and attached to desk snapshots or fired via MIDI. Snapshot crossfades are set from the worksurface rather than from the screen as they are on the V6. You can also localise a snapshot's activity and isolate channels, or a portion of a channel's processing, locally from global snapshots.

Those who have not sat in front of a Vistonics panel will have missed the intensity of the display and how quickly, once you have got your eye tuned in, you can detect information that needs your action. It is a peculiar thing, but I believe one of the real strengths of Vistonics is the amount of



information and the manner in which it is presented to the driver. There is absolutely no way that traditional analogue pot positions come even close to giving you a comparable amount of info. I think this is a significant point because the Vista is by design an involving worksurface, it doesn't so much sit in front of you as keep trying to attract your attention. Consequently, it'll be a bit demanding for those who want to sit down with a pipe and a cup of coffee and look forward to minding a couple of faders for an evening. It's not an old man's worksurface.

What I like about the V8 is the freedom to have access to and grab the same parameter in a number of different ways. A given channel can exist in a number of different layers and locations and while this will

undoubtedly confuse the casual user, the benefits to a power user of the desk are clear. It's what an advanced digital worksurface ought to be able to do in my opinion, so you can customise the layout to suit the application, the production and yourself.

As an industry we get a little too tied up with the requirement to satisfy the lowest common denominator in operational terms. Much is made of a desk's immediacy and speed of operation on first encounter. This translates into ergonomics and a familiar feel. What the Vista can do is provide a depth of complexity. On the surface it can be configured to be extremely fixed and simple but it also has the capability to be configured for complex highly customised and, it has to be said, very individual configurations for an operator that drives it regularly and wants it arranged the way he knows it can be.

To me this is a big issue and I believe that the desire of desk manufacturers to provide accessible and friendly worksurface operational methods should not preclude them, or hold them back, from developing tools and functionality that allows the operator to harness the power that digital mixing undoubtedly offers. There, I've said it and Studer has got this balance right.

The approachable persona of the surface is reflected in the default value settings that the desk appears with initially. The hidden complexity can then be accessed by the more experienced or adventurous operator.

As a very quick illustration of this, the simplest and clearest way to move channels along the desk surface is via the accepted process of scrolling and paging them on dedicated buttons. However, there is an L2 button (normally disabled) near each fader that allows you to show another channel locally and 'fix' it underneath a worksurface channel for direct access. Similarly the default level of the dynamic automation is set to be simple and you have to consciously activate the more advanced functions yourself.

What you witness with the V8 is that as software revisions move on and add features, Studer has reappraised its worksurface priorities and features on new releases accordingly. It's a subtle process of moving forward but I believe each subsequent iteration of Vistonics sits more comfortably within the worksurface it serves. That or I have become extremely comfortable with it.

One of the desk's biggest strengths is the way that it plays at a very friendly and largely benign sort of a thing at its default level, while it has the capability to provide extremely powerful, complex and user-specific functionality for the more demanding power user. As such it can be appealing to a variety of jobbing operators who might have to use the desk infrequently and it can create loyal ties with an operator that uses it every day.

Yes, it's a great package but you have to have a go at driving one yourself to appreciate it fully. ■

**PROS**

Good combination of targeted functionality; Vistonics remains excellent; a desk with an approachable demeanour but hidden depths.

**CONS**

May still be a little radical for some as it requires you to re-evaluate the way you work; not for old men.

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