PreSonus Studio One 4 Professional

A major update adds new features to the giant-killing DAW.
GEORGE SHILLING composes himself

PreSonus Studio One set out to streamline the approach to music production and has been steadily improving and winning-over users. In a relatively short space of time they have refined and enhanced the core functionality with a raft of improvements, and version 4 (£344 full version, £85 Artist version) adds even more goodness, (especially for musicians and composers) — although it is arguably not perhaps as big an update as V3 was.

A feature aimed squarely at musical rather than technical users is the new Chord Track, in order to identify and modify MIDI and/or audio. Using a context menu you can detect chords from a recording, these are displayed under the waveform, then you can send that to the Chord Track at the top of the arrange page. You can then apply that to other tracks, giving the opportunity to experiment with different chords when composing or rearranging music. A neat Chord Selector window shows a chord wheel with a sensible arrangement (fourths/fifths and relative majors/minors are adjacent). You can also set a key signature using this wheel when creating new songs. ARA2 support is now built-in, allowing better integration of Melodyne. This new standard (already integrated into Logic 10.4) allows for things like multiple track editing and the transfer of chord information.

Ripple Editing is a much-requested feature that is similar to Pro Tools' Shuffle edit mode, so that moving chunks of audio around leaves no gaps or overlapping, A great boon to anyone switching from Pro Tools.

Impact XT is a much-improved version of the MPC60-style sampler, which has been given a different look. This now spreads control of eight pad banks across your MIDI keyboard starting at C1, so all are easily accessible. There are now 16 stereo and 16 mono outputs. You can colour-code pads, and there are additions to audio processing: the Filter is now enhanced with Drive and Punch controls, and there is Soft Clipping. You have much more flexibility with Loop modes, with tempo conforming and time stretching, trigger quantisation and more. It is easy to import samples simply by dragging from the Finder onto the pads, optionally splitting CAF (and other format) loops across the pads for Recycle-style operations.

Sampling and Recycle-style loops
Sample One XT has also undergone a huge revamp. There is now a Record page for sampling, and you can map from any send, bus or instrument output to get audio in. You can pick up audio from the timeline and drag it in. Holding Shift detects transients and slices it up into a Recycle-style loop across separate MIDI notes. The Sample One XT now has comprehensive multiple effects built-in.

There is a new dedicated Drum Editor — reminiscent of the drum edit window in Atari Cubase. Seeing instrument names instead of the piano roll pitches is certainly helpful when working with MIDI drum parts.

The new Pattern mode enables song construction in a similar manner to old drum machines or hardware sequencers. Here you can have different elements of, say, a drum pattern utilising different loop lengths, rather like the old C-Lab Creator software. To make things more interesting you can use Probability to have notes randomly dip out or perhaps affect the Repeat function, which adds a chosen number of multiple echoes to notes. It's a lot of fun, and is of course not limited just to drums.

A useful new function for collaboration and/ or DAW switching is AAF import and export. This is simple to use; you can import by dragging in the file and locating the audio, or export using 'Save As...'

Import Song Data is another oft-requested feature and is akin to Pro Tools Import Session Data function, great for many situations, especially mixing albums with similarly recorded tracks. You can now set up a similar starting point for subsequent song mixes after doing all the hard work processing and balancing the first one. Instrument Tracks can be imported with all individual output channels and their effects.

You can use the new Notepad feature for individual track notes, much like Comments in Pro Tools. This is always handy for mix notes, and a record of the recording chain, for example. As well as having them underneath the faders, you can open a window to show them all.

The display preferences page has a new bunch of Light Scheme presets, so that you can lighten the look, although with big arrangements things can start to look a little bit cluttered. With multiple monitors you can detach elements like the Mixer, or move floating windows away, but on a laptop things can seem cramped.

Some small GUI changes have smartened the layout of mixer elements like channel Mute, Solo, Monitor and Record buttons, these are more neatly arranged above the redesigned fader. There are useful channel indicators to show if there are active Inserts, Sends or Mix FX. There are also new Show/Hide features. Filters have been usefully added to the MIDI Monitor window including things like Aftertouch and Poly Pressure, useful for de-cluttering as necessary.

Although apparently geared more towards composers, there are some excellent new features in this update. Studio One 4 still feels snappy and is a terrific platform for music production. ⓡ