



PreSonus Studio One 4 Professional £345

As it moves into the DAW mainstream, this software has shed its skin multiple times. **James Russell** attempts to keep up

CONTACT WHO: PreSonus **WEB:** www.presonus.com **KEY FEATURES** New iteration of PreSonus' DAW, containing upgraded SampleOne XT and Impact XT instruments, new ways of programming, editing and sequencing notes, chord tracks with global control over audio and MIDI, new colour schemes, improved mixer interface

THE PROS & CONS

New ways of programming MIDI give a new sense of creativity to the DAW

SampleOne and Impact now both look and feel slicker to use

Many other behind-the-scenes tweaks have expanded Studio One's functionality

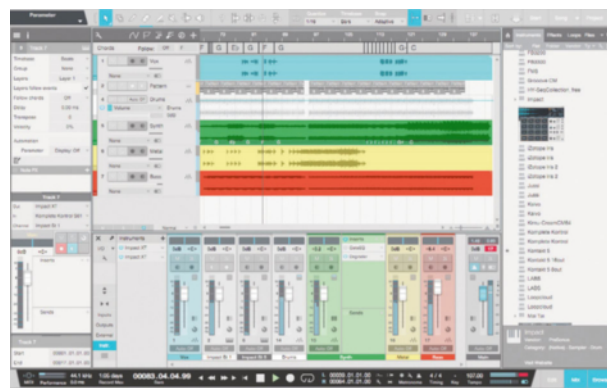


Chord Track is complex to set up, requiring multiple steps and tabs

This update won't bring features that are relevant to all Studio One users

THE LITTLER LAUNDRY LIST

There are a few smaller changes to write home about. SO4 now imports and exports AAF files, for project swapping with other DAWs. Notes can be written for tracks in the mixer and the inspector, and these can be viewed en masse for the entire project in the song inspector. Ripple Editing is now an option in the timeline, and you can remove the gaps between events. You can 'Import Song Data' to bring elements into one project from another, and there's a new plugin scanner for VSTs. Heavy Melodyne users can anticipate ARA 2.0 to be implemented in an update this year.



formation at the top. The Channel Editor and track Expand are still available at the bottom, and there are three 'lights' for each channel, which activate when there's something placed in the channel's Insert, Sends or Mix FX slot. The fader graphics have been slightly updated, and the track input/output displays disappear if you shrink the mixer panel enough. Oh, and it can now run with a white background. Small, nifty tweaks.

A big part of version 4 is the Chord Track. Taking its place alongside the Arranger Track, Marker Track and Tempo Track, the Chord Track, once activated, can determine what chords are played across multiple MIDI instruments and even polyphonic audio tracks, helping you test out progressions in a snap. Depending on the kind of producer or songwriter you are, or the type of clients you have to deal with, this particular feature may or may not appeal to you.

The Chord Track is a nice idea, and an ambitious one, especially

where repitching polyphonic audio is concerned. Making wholesale tweaks to single chords between multiple MIDI and audio parts is a great ability to have, and it can work wonders for quick experiments or fixes. The changes it can make to recorded audio tracks are nothing short of magical, although if you start to tweak pitches by more than a few semitones, the results end in quality, as you'd expect. Automatic chord detection is possible from multiple MIDI tracks, giving the program more harmonic information to work with.

It's the implementation, though, that's slightly off here. Working with the Chord Track takes you from the timeline to each track's Inspector panel, and then back to the timeline to open up a dedicated window. The amount of hoops the user has to jump through doesn't exactly make the Chord Track slick. The Chord Track's harmonic editing is certainly not infallible, though, sometimes falling short in the changes it chooses to

If version 1 of Studio One was PreSonus' proof that they could build a DAW of their own, then version 2 was the proof they could build a good one. 2015's Version 3, in turn, showed they could build a great one, throwing gauntlets to their rivals in the process with unique features like the signal-routing channel editor and the console-emulating Mix FX applied to the mixer's buses.

Which brings us to version 4. Studio One is now a fully mature DAW; part of the music production

furniture. The inevitable question: where does it go from here?

Studio One 4 is *not* a 'something-for-everyone' update, with most new features landing on the 'creative' rather than the 'technical' end. V4 updaters can say hello to Chord Tracks, two new forms of MIDI sequencing, and the overhaul of two of Studio One's built-in instruments: SampleOne and Impact.

Let's start with cosmetics: Studio One 4 tweaks the mixer's channel strips, moving the Mute, Solo, Arm and Monitor buttons to a 2x2

THE ALTERNATIVES



Apple Logic Pro X £199

Frequently updated and cheap to start off with, Logic is a solid choice of DAW

www.apple.com



Steinberg Cubase Pro 9.5 £480

Thanks to years in the game, it's got a feature set that's nothing short of comprehensive, but Cubase also has a larger footprint than Studio One

www.steinberg.net



Tracktion Waveform 9 \$259

If you're fed up with your current number and are just looking for a 'rebound DAW', Waveform is a kookier and more esoteric choice

www.tracktion.com

make. Certain Follow types may have limited or no effect on certain material, and the note voicings chosen for certain chords can leave a lot still to be done. Some refinement of the feature would be appreciated.

Don't get me wrong here, I'm not expecting Chord Tracks to work brilliantly 100% of the time, but I'd expect them to work well at least 90% of the time, and I'm finding that they don't. And if I wasn't into music theory, it could add an extra layer of complexity to the already fraught process of chord selection.

Studio One has a lesser-known alternative to displaying the traditional keyboard in the piano roll, instead employing more tone-neutral lanes for when programming drums or playing with samplers. This editor has been souped up and turned into Drum Mode, a note editor offering triangular, flag-shaped markers to represent notes in a more logical, percussive sense (no MIDI note lengths complicating the view). It's a

great, on-point way to program drums, and its lanes are automatically named if you use it on an Impact XT track.

Confusingly, after seeing the bulked-up Drum Mode, the other new alternative to the traditional piano roll, the step sequencer (Pattern Sequencer) is actually loaded up as a type of MIDI region in the arrangement view. This is actually for looping and arrangement purposes, but surely access via the piano roll/drum mode selector would have brought these MIDI methods together.

You can specify a length and beat division for each lane, meaning that polyrhythms and simple timing

tweaks are available, and you can fill lanes with certain patterns then easily tweak them. Further fun is had in the so-called 'Automation Lanes', which actually allow you to specify a velocity, repeat and probability for each step. Repeat denotes the number of times a note is struck within that step, and probability is the percentage chance of whether the note on a certain step is played at all. These three properties are hard to access, almost hidden away.

A trend is emerging here, with additions feeling more 'tacked on' rather than 'built in'. Anyway, despite this, the Pattern Sequencer is a fun

Most new features land on the 'creative' side rather than the 'technical' end

NO CHANGES TO...

With every Studio One update, it's crucial to look not just at what's been introduced, but what has stayed the same. Here's a few omissions that have caught my notice.

There's still no direct mono export via the Export Mixdown dialogue, the repeated omission of which has made me the closest I've ever come to submitting a review with a sad-face emoticon in it. Elsewhere, the Channel Editor and Routing view were brilliant features when introduced in version 3, allowing you to control multiple parameters on a channel's plugins with one knob. What has been inexplicable, though, is the continued inability to automate one of those macros, which defeats a majority of the reason for

using this in the first place. As for the Routing editor, which allows you to customise the routing of all insert plugins on a channel, this is a great feature, but one that would be even better with the addition of more types of split, such as mid/side encoding and decoding. However, given PreSonus's history of actively upgrading version 3 in the last three years, hopes are high that these functions will be taken care of before too long.



alternative to the piano roll, as indeed step sequencing very well should be, and the extra timing and probability functions are both useful and inspiring, if you can locate them.

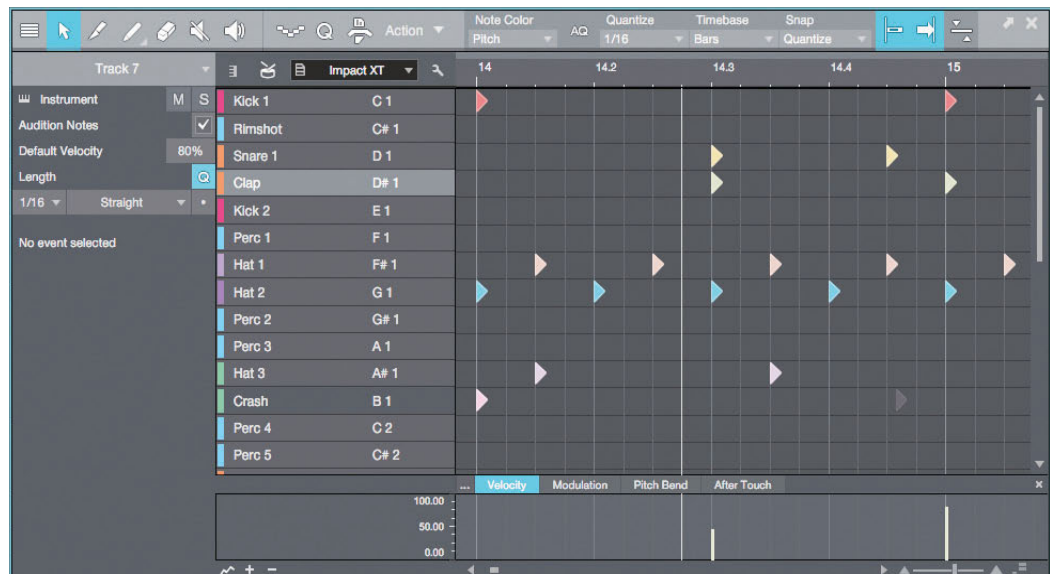
Also new are a couple of revamps to inbuilt instruments. Judging by v3's improved Presence XT ROMpler, it seems that PreSonus are going through their old repertoire and making improvements as and when they deem it necessary.

Impact XT is the upgrade of Studio One's drum sampler. Sporting eight banks of 16 pads (for a total of 128), each able to load many sample layers split by velocity, round-robin, random or the new stack mode (all samples play at the same time), Impact has a lot of flexibility. The XT version offers 32 Choke Groups compared to the previous Impact's four – and the colour of Impact XT can be changed by clicking the PreSonus logo at the top. The filter has been zapped up with a 24dB ZDF mode and Drive and Punch controls, and as another welcome addition, playback can now be reversed for individual layers. There are loads more tweaks that change how Impact works for experienced users, and the instrument plays host to the only new bundled soundware added for Studio One 4 – a 1.7GB collection of kits and sounds.

Also done up to the nines is Sample One. In the new XT version of the in-built instrument, there's sample recording, and since it runs in Studio One, you can sample audio tracks, other inputs or virtual instruments running in the project.

Once you've recorded your audio (or imported it from the Pool or your browser), Sample One can attempt to automatically slice and map the file to different keys based on the information it detects. Anyone familiar with the mapping system from Studio One's Multi Instrument keysplit setup will find this system familiar. There's also timestretching capability built in, meaning you get the same great pedigree of warping you're used to from Studio One's audio editing in the sampler itself.

Envelopes are then available for the sounds, as are Pitch, Filter and Amp modules, similar to but slightly more comprehensive than those seen in Impact XT. Oh, and elsewhere in the DAW you can right-click audio and Send to New SampleOne. All in all, SampleOne is now a competent



Chord Selector: The Chord Track's pop-up friend helps you to select between chords arranged in fifths, with relative minors and extensions in tow

Drum Mode: Housed inside a MIDI region, this step sequencer can program notes, velocities, note repeats accents and loads more

SampleOne XT: This impressive gadget can capture audio from just about anywhere, auto-slice it, repitch it or warp it to fit

Impact XT: Impact now caters to 128 pads, offers 32 choke groups, and has a more sensible look. A lot of the under-the-hood operation is the same though

sampler that can hold its own against the industry heavyweights, and going back to the non-XT version reveals exactly how low-rent it was until now.

So, is it worth the upgrade price? It depends. As noted, the feature set is very much tilted towards certain types of task: music creation rather than sonic technicalities like mixing. Only you can decide if those features make it worth it for them. What's there is generally well made, if a little tacked-on in some cases.

It's also worth pointing out that in the three years since v3 hit shelves,

PreSonus made some significant point updates to Studio One, meaning it gave a larger bang to buck ratio as months went by. Then again, there are certain things that've been neglected in successive updates (see *No Chances To*).

But either way, for users coming to Studio One fresh, some truly original features, and a no-nonsense workflow await. Studio One remains a comprehensive, well thought-through package that gets the job done – even more so with every new iteration that they bring out. **FM**

FM VERDICT

8.6

Studio One 4's new features are well-implemented, if not relevant to all users. A useful upgrade to your musical arsenal