



Presonus Atom SQ

£225

PC MAC

Atom is a stylish device with deep control for Studio One and Ableton Live, but should it push aside other controllers on your desktop?

> Atom SQ is a new PreSonus controller designed both as a compact melody and beat player with keys/pads that double up for both tasks. As ever with PreSonus controllers, you can expect deep integration with the company's Studio One DAW (the very good Artist version of which is supplied with it), and it is optimised for standard and step sequencing (within the Pattern editor) in that DAW. It also comes with Ableton Live support so you can get deep with that DAW too, but also boasts MCU, HUI and MIDI modes to get to grips with MIDI hardware and other DAWs (although not as deep as with Live and Studio One).

Solid control

Atom SQ is solid, compact and feels up to the job. It's not angled, which would be a bonus, but any worries about seeing the screen better with the unit angled quickly dissipate - it's pin sharp wherever you place SQ on your desktop.

The unit is powered by USB and connects up to Studio One straight away - the latest version that is. Studio One 4 didn't recognise it but the supplied 5 Artist did, as did the PreSonus Universal Control software.

We were very quickly impressed by the speedy integration with Artist. The 'keyboard' performs better than we had expected - we thought that the pads might be a little difficult to play, but they are much more sensitive than

anticipated and respond pretty well to changes in velocity.

The various modes on Atom SQ also reveal a lot of depth, with controls around that lovely screen allowing you to select modes and parameters while the dial, Arrow and Page keys home in and change the options.

Song mode controls your top layer, adjusting everything from tempo to zoom, through effects and arrangement viewing. Inst gets you loading up plugins and presets via the main browser. Load one up and play melodies with the pads, control native PreSonus instrument parameters with the knobs and options like octave select with the eight A-H buttons. Load up an Impact XT drum module and the pads become loop or hit triggers, the knobs select volume, pan etc and the buttons different banks of sounds. Most controls are, of course, re-assignable.

Several controls also double up, so the rotaries will control various parameters depending on what you have in focus (shown by a yellow tab on each controlled plugin) and a touch strip can be assigned to different MIDI options. Also, the eight A-H buttons can control events in your arrangement timeline (Select All, Copy, Duplicate and so on) when Shift is held down - a really good feature.

Elsewhere in the main Modes, you also get doubling up depending on which mode you are in. Within Instrument Mode there's a well-

featured arpeggiator and scale functions while in Edit and User modes (in the main setup) you can adjust how Atom's controls operate.

Conclusion

There's more to Atom than we have room to discuss here. When PreSonus talk about deep integration, they certainly mean it. This goes about as far into Studio One as we've seen - not to mention Live (see box) offering a wealth of different setups and options. It's an outstanding control solution, and a stylish one to boot. **cm**

Web presonus.com

Alternatively

PreSonus ioStation 24c
cm289 » 9/10 » £258

More channel than instrument controller but includes an audio interface. Reviewed last issue

Akai MPK range
£84 - £799

A range of keyboards in varying sizes with good Studio One (and other DAW) control

Verdict

For Very deep Studio One control
Lots of good Live (and live!) control too
On-screen arrangement event options are great
Easy to set up (with the right version)
Pretty cheap given the quality
Great screen

Against Angling options would have been nice

Atom SQ is one of the best controllers for Studio One that we have come across and also a great Live option. It's a stylish desktop solution and a good price too.

9/10

Alive in Live

Atom SQ comes bundled with Ableton Live Lite and is also optimised to control that DAW. You have to set it as a MIDI controller, but once up and running integration is pretty good. Inst mode has you, as with Studio One, accessing playable options including the Arp and drum pads. In Song mode, the top row of pads is used to launch clips (the Minus key stops them) and the bottom steps through tracks. It's easy to launch scenes and step through different ones using the cursor keys.

In Arrangement view in Live the rotaries control volume, sends and panning and you can easily switch in and out of windows - browser, devices and details etc. Editor mode gets you get into device detail, so you can step through each one on a track, the rotaries controlling Ableton ones (not all third party). You can't see which dial controls what but it soon becomes instinctive. In fact the whole Live experience is good; not as deep as Studio One but better than you might expect.