

# M-AUDIO PROJECTMIX I/O

## FIREWIRE CONTROL SURFACE AND AUDIO INTERFACE (MAC, PC)

by Stephen Fortner



### WHICH PRO TOOLS?

Digidesign owns M-Audio now, which begs the question, "How easily can I use ProjectMix with Pro Tools?" Its control surface features will work with any version via HUI emulation, but to get audio in and out of PT, you'll need the "M-Powered" version that works with M-Audio interfaces. To create music for film or video (in Pro Tools, that is), go for a Digi 002 with PTL E instead, as M-Powered does not support Digidesign's DV Toolkit.


I was pleasantly surprised to get to know ProjectMix I/O, whose four-digit price feels more mid-market than the high-quality entry-level gear M-Audio is known for. You certainly won't see many computer recording solutions with moving faders for much less, though. Project Mix doesn't skimp on analog inputs: all have XLR and 1/4" balanced jacks, and a 1/4" guitar input for channel 1 is smartly located on the front. Dedicated word clock I/O is a nice — some would say essential — pro feature, and a footswitch input is for punching in and out.

I used the control surface with Apple Logic, MOTU Digital Performer, and Digidesign Pro Tools on my Mac, then Steinberg Cubase SX and PT on my Windows laptop. While I needed some time with the online manual (a quick-start card comes in the box) to learn all the controls in each program, studying was handsomely rewarded. The PM handled like a controller built exclusively for whatever DAW I had running, from simple volume changes to writing passes of plug-in automation. Switching programs requires turning it off, then on again while holding down the right button. That's easy enough, but possibly a workflow de-railer. The manual says to shut off your computer during this process, but on the Mac, I could get away with just putting it to sleep. Whatever you've heard about FireWire, do not hot-plug this rig: The digital noise burst ensuing from my attempt was by far the least enjoyable way I've ever killed brain cells. Another word to the wise: your ProjectMix must be the last device in your FireWire chain; with only

one FireWire port to work with, you'll figure it out pretty fast.

As for sound that's supposed to come out, an A-B with my old faithful MOTU 1296, which still holds its own next to newer and pricier interfaces, was nano-close. After a lot of listening to everything from a 24-bit, 88.2kHz jazz recording I'd made to low-bitrate MP3s, high-end transients and reverb tails seemed to have ever so slightly roomier living quarters in the ProjectMix. On the input end, mic inputs were low-noise and detailed, and I'd have no qualms using them for anything in a demo or pop recording, though I might reach for a dedicated preamp to capture every nuance of an intimate vocal.

Competition? The comparably-priced TASCAM FW-1884 has more I/O, including four MIDI ports and eight analog outs; four on the ProjectMix mean you can't hook it directly to a 5.1 powered-speaker setup. On the other hand, the Pro Mix's LCD scribble strip is on the unit itself where it belongs; on the FW-1884 it's on the computer screen to keep costs down, requiring a precise line-up between the box and your monitor. The Pro Mix can't double as stand-alone digital mixer (unlike Yamaha's O1X), but its 100mm skin-sensitive faders are superior.

In a word, compatibility is ProjectMix's trump card, and it's what pushes it into Key Buy territory. It's the box to buy if you use multiple applications, especially if you want to have Pro Tools as one of your options. It handles and sounds thoroughly professional, and should further elevate the recording world's perception of M-Audio. 

### VITAL STATS

#### ANALOG INPUTS

8 channels, mic/line, XLR and 1/4" balanced.

#### ANALOG OUTPUTS

4 channels, 1/4" balanced, 2 stereo headphone outs.

#### DIGITAL I/O

8-ch. ADAT lightpipe, 2-ch. S/PDIF.

#### MIDI

In, out.

#### DISPLAYS

2 line x 55 character LCD; 2-digit LED.

#### AUDIO FORMATS

CoreAudio (Mac); ASIO, DirectX, MME, WDM, GSIF2 (WinXP).

#### PROGRAM TEMPLATES

Steinberg Cubase, Digidesign Pro Tools, Apple Logic, Cakewalk Sonar. MOTU Digital Performer, Ableton Live 5.

### CLAIM CHECK

M-Audio says, "ProjectMix I/O is a centralized control surface and audio interface for any size studio. It exploits HUI, Mackie Control, Logic Control, and standard MIDI protocols, making it a perfect companion for any combination of software, even Pro Tools M-Powered, since many musicians use a wide variety of programs when composing. Controlling software is only half the solution, so ProjectMix I/O's integrated audio interface completes the feature set, sporting multiple mic pres, line ins and outs, and digital connections. Any way you cut it, the ProjectMix I/O is a great value for the studio."

### GORY DETAILS

ProjectMix supports 24-bit recording at sample rates up to 96kHz. Though it won't do lightpipe and S/PDIF digital I/O at the same time, it will take eight channels of ADAT lightpipe alongside the eight analog ins. Add an 8-channel mic pre with ADAT out, and you can record 16 mic inputs at once; not bad! At 88.2 or 96kHz, lightpipe carries four channels, thanks to support of the SMUX protocol.

### PROS

Open, detailed sound quality. Tight, thorough control surface integration with all programs tested. Low-latency direct monitoring. Endless rotary knobs.

### CONS

Power-down routine required to change modes. M-Audio software control panel can't be addressed by the physical faders at this time.

M-Audio,  
[www.m-audio.com](http://www.m-audio.com).

\$1,599