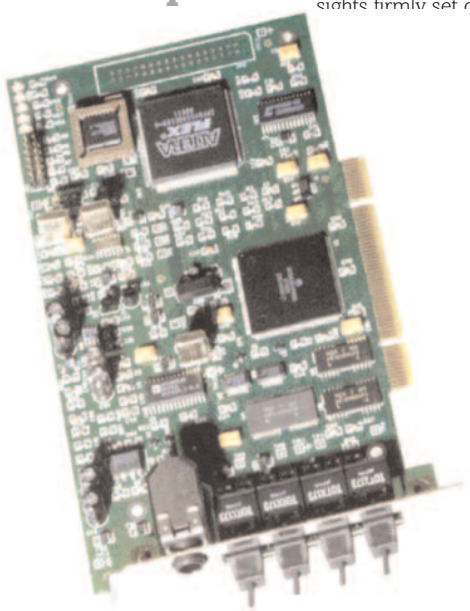
Sonorus StudI/O

Brett Mitchell explains why the StudI/O might just be the PCI card you're after.

With the new soundcards arriving on the market at an exponential rate, the choice for the punter is becoming increasingly confusing. Do I wait for the next XYZ card from manufacturer ABC, and if so, when will there be a driver for my preferred application? Or do I forsake the 'to be seen' benefits of the new card and go for something that works now and is widely supported?

It's a difficult dilemma, and one that this writer has been through for quite a while. However, the one major benefit from all the new soundcard options is that they are now becoming increasingly purpose-built for specific studio setups and applications. The Sonorus StudI/O has its sights firmly set on the digital domain market, namely uld benefit from achieving their ia a digital interface to avoid A/D and D/A conversion.



is a 16-channel interface for PCI Cs. It provides (24-bit capable) 16- eration by way of two (A and B) 8- DAT optical interfaces. To comple- there is also an 18-bit 6.5mm TRS- logue stereo output for monitoring s. The card also comes equipped r, 2m long TosLink optical cables, tion to a Mac/PC CD-Rom with a on of drivers and a neat manual in format.

orted drivers include all the major ages, as well as some of the more obscure ones – check the Sonorus te for up to date details. For addi- ync duties there is an optional plug- daptor which provides wordclock input, and ADAT 9-pin sync.

his review I used the StudI/O within the Cubase VST4.0 environment running on a 132MHz 604e Mac. Setting up the StudI/O to run on this application was a complete doddle and I can't see it being much harder for any other. After physically installing the card, I then dragged the StudI/O ASIO drivers into the Cubase drivers folder. Once inside the Cubase 'Audio System' settings the StudI/O can be configured in one of four ways – ADAT, ADAT+Mon, ADAT+S/PDIF and ADAT+S/PDIF+Mon. The first of these, 'ADAT' provides 16 channels of ADAT I/O with the Cubase 'Master' page defining the StudI/O 16 outputs. This would be the driver to use with a digital console or with two ADATs, (or compatible machines), and naturally uses both A+B lightpipe outputs. The next option 'ADAT+Mon', is the same as above with the bonus of the two analogue outs also separately available as another bus. ADAT+S/PDIF configures one of the StudI/O optical connectors as an eight-channel ADAT output and the other as a two-channel S/PDIF out, while ADAT+S/PDIF+Mon provides the same configuration with the addition of another analogue bus via the Monitor output. These last two options obviously facilitate the integration of two-channel S/PDIF out, such as a DAT machine in combination with an ADAT. I realise this might sound a bit confusing, but in practice it is quite simple. The most obvious benefits from having all these different drivers is that at the flick of the mouse you can have your StudI/O card configured for tracking or recording, or for two-track mastering, etc, or indeed both. Sonorus should be applauded for providing a very simple, yet flexible configuration approach that meets the demands of the modern project studio.

Also in the Cubase 'Audio System' settings is the option to set latency (varies between the different drivers), the monitor output level (adjustable between +8dB and -55dB), sample rate (44.1k and 48k) and the audio clock source, (Internal, Optical A, Optical B or External Wordclock). As mentioned earlier the StudI/O is also 24-bit/96k compatible which should secure it a lasting future, not to mention providing the added benefits of this format. Unfortunately I didn't have 24-bit/96k converter to hand so I was unable utilise this capability. However, like soundcards there are an increasing amount of new converters appearing on the market supporting this format, including Sonorus' very own AD/9624 and DA/9624 products.

StudI/O's sonic qualities are largely going to depend on the A/D and D/A converters you have attached to it. I found the card's analogue output to provide very good audio quality – maybe not the finest A/D conversion I've ever heard but perfectly acceptable for all but the most demanding of applications.

The StudI/O is a neat card. If you use a digital desk or rely on ADATs or the ADAT interface quite a bit I would strongly suggest you check it out. It will make life very easy for transferring large amounts of individual tracks on ADAT to a computer for editing or whatever. Sonorus have also done a good job with the driver configurations which make the StudI/O compatible with a broad range of applications. I know the 24-bit/96k facility will particularly appeal to many, including those with Cubase VST/24 or those looking to upgrade their version of Logic Audio to imminent Logic Audio v4.0.

As I said in the beginning of the review, deciding on the best soundcard to buy is now a decision about buying the soundcard that best suits your particular setup – a 'horses for courses' decision, if you like. So if your horse is on this course, then saddle up.

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