

TapeOp Magazine, 2008 HP60



By Joseph Lemmer

The PreSonus *HP60* solves two of the worst home-studio problems by providing individual headphone mixes for up to six people as well as a convenient talkback system. There are two main stereo inputs in the rear, marked *A* and *B*, which feed the six high-power stereo headphone amps inside. A mix knob for each front-panel 1/4" stereo headphone output allows for a customized blend between *A* and *B* for each output. Each amp also has its own 1/4" stereo input (TRS jack) marked *External*. Stereo-to-mono Y-cables will be needed to get stereo from your interface or mixer into the *HP60*'s External inputs, unless of course your device has stereo outputs on single TRS jacks (or you're using your device's headphone outputs). If you don't have insert cables handy, as I didn't the first time I connected the *HP60*, then you can use an unbalanced 1/4" cable and hit the mono button (there's one for each headphone amp). Finally, there are stereo outputs (also on single TRS jacks) for each channel so you can daisy-chain additional *HP60*s (or other downstream devices). I also found you can quickly hear what somebody else is hearing by bridging to an unused *HP60* channel with a TRS cable.

The External inputs on each amp are intended as "more me" inputs, but if you have an audio interface with a zero-latency matrix mixer and enough outputs, like the PreSonus FireStudio or RME Fireface 800 for instance, then you can give up to six people completely different mixes. Even when recording guitar and bass with two mics and two DIs, this was a huge luxury. Doing all of the headphone mixing from the computer also made it easy to keep track of what was going on. Being able to tell people "you can have any headphone mix you want" removed an entire layer of bad psychology from the recording process. This reduced the stress for both the musicians and me, thus leading to better performances all the way around.

The built-in mic preamp for talkback works wonderfully. Plug in a dynamic mic (the preamp has no phantom), and either hit the momentary button on the front or use a foot pedal to turn on the mic and talk to the headphone outputs. I grabbed an old sustain pedal, switched the polarity, and it worked great. No more setting up a channel on a mixer and

forgetting to hit the mute button after the take starts—again less stress for the recordist! (Check in with me later to see if it’s the secret weapon mic preamp of 2008.)

My only (tiny) wish is for a global “dim” knob, so you could choose to duck the input signals by the amount of your choosing when the talkback mic turns on. As it is, the A/B mixes dim a preset amount (quite a lot), and the External inputs do not dim. You can adjust the talkback mic volume globally, so the only time this would really be an issue is when the External input volumes are so loud that you have to blast the talkback mic to give a cue. Which brings me to the final point. Even with inefficient headphones, with all the stages turned up and a full signal going in, the outputs on the *HP60* can get loud enough to be violent. This is a huge plus over most headphone amps which poop out too soon, but please be careful with people's ears.

I looked at other solutions out there and did not see anything with all of these features in one box. Overall—and I know this might sound weird in reference to a headphone amp—I can’t put into words how much joy this simple device has brought me. It brought back that glowy feeling I used to get when I first started recording—probably by removing some of that nervousness I experienced after the first time I screwed up a session. If you record more than one person at a time, especially without a big-console talkback/headphone section, I think the *HP60* will bring you joy too. (*\$299 street; www.presonus.com*)

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