

TapeOp Magazine, January 2006 INSPIRE 1394



By Chachi Jones

Here is the box that makes good on the promise Digidesign's Mbox never did. The Inspire 1394 is a truly affordable, great sounding, easy to use, entry-level recording interface bundled with a suite of user-friendly software. It has the capability to record four channels at a time, selectable from two XLR mic with phantom power, two hi-Z 1/4" instrument, and two RCA jacks, the latter of which are switchable between line-level and RIAA-filtered phono for direct recording from turntables. The Inspire's stereo outs also come in three flavors (all unbalanced): RCA, 3.5 mm mini, and headphone mini. The outputs support zero-latency monitoring, and you can mix between input and playback tracks. For a FireWire audio interface, four ins and two outs may seem like a scant amount of I/O channels until you realize that PreSonus designed the Inspire to be daisy-chained, allowing you to expand to 16 simultaneous input channels using four units. The unspoken premise is that each member of a band could have their own Inspire for song writing at home, and then when the group gets together to rehearse, they can daisy-chain their units together to create a legit multi-track interface. Even if the daisy-chain idea doesn't take off, the Inspire is still a hard bargain to beat at its \$200 street price. There are some sacrifices PreSonus made in order to meet that price point. First, the absence of balanced outputs in favor of unbalanced RCA may turn some people off (though it's not a big deal for me and my desktop studio). Also, the fact that levels are adjustable only through a PreSonus software control panel (and not with any external knobs) might make technophobes a little wary; but considering that cheap volume pots are often the weak (and easily breakable) link in the design of many budget interfaces, PreSonus probably realized

they'd be better off without them. The inputs channels also have switchable, built-in limiters that can take some of the pain out of misjudging level settings. Anyway, the bottom line is that it sounds great—much better (and considerably less buggy) than my last FireWire interface that cost me twice as much. I think PreSonus did an amazing and innovative job at creating an expandable and extremely affordable FireWire interface that doesn't compromise their reputation for superior sounding audio gear.