



MixPre-3 & MixPre-6

RELEASED
23 MAY

Mixer-Recorders for the masses?

The new MixPre3 and MixPre6 from SoundDevices created something of a storm at NAB in April. Why? Because of the price point and their quality features. SoundDevices Mixer/Recorders are normally priced in thousands of pounds but these latest offerings are in the hundreds. They are clearly aimed at a different market - the prosumer - which has so far been dominated by brands such as Tascam and Zoom.

The new units arrived at dealerships on 23 May and I received my pre-ordered MixPre3 for review the following day from Pinknoise-Systems. It certainly lives up to expectations. Superb build quality and pristine sound from their latest 'Kashmir' mic pre-amps, specially designed by SoundDevices to give the lowest possible noise floor (-130dBV) with 76dB mic gain and a whopping 96dB of gain end to end.

The MixPre's are 'three-in-one' units: audio mixers, multi-track recorders and computer interfaces all rolled into one. They are small, solid and not too heavy. Ideal for use with DSLR's and for convenient location recording or as part of a Digital Audio Workstation. They can also be used to conduct Skype interviews AND record the output at the same time. They can be operated in Basic Mode to record multi inputs to Stereo on the fly with no setting up, or you can engage Advanced Mode to open up a whole world of recording possibilities to record separate channels on individual tracks as well.

MixPre3

The MixPre3 only gives you three separate input channels controlled by the three knobs on the front panel. If you wish to use audio from the Aux input you have to route this to one or two of the main channels, whereas on the MixPre6 the Aux audio can



Chris North takes a look at the latest offerings from SoundDevices released on 23 May

be recorded direct. USB inputs also have to be routed. So basically the MixPre3 can record three separate audio inputs plus a stereo mix at the same time, so it is really a three channel, 5 track recorder.

MixPre6

The MixPre6 differs in that it has four dedicated audio channels with knobs and will also record twin audio channels via the Aux jack at the same time - hence it is a six channel recorder. Both though can record the inputs to a separate stereo track at the same time - giving the MixPre6 eight recording tracks compared with the five of the MixPre3. The other difference is that the MixPre6 can record with a sample rate up to 192kHz, whereas the MixPre3 is 'limited' to 96kHz. But given that our video standard is 48kHz this will not matter to most of us.

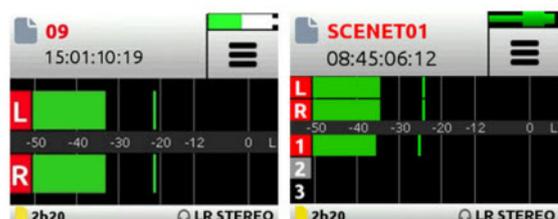


A closer look

There are analogue limiters on each input channel so you can't overload the digital circuits, and there are digital limiters on the outputs to protect recordings to your camcorder or relays to other external devices. The mic inputs give you 76dB of gain - more than enough for even the lowest output dynamic mics - and of course they romp home with anything else! The technical frequency range is also impressive - from a thumpingly low 10Hz right up to 40kHz - and given that we can't really hear much above 20kHz this should cater for the most specialist music recording situations also.

BASIC

ADVANCED



In Advanced mode you can record to individual tracks at pre-fade level, which you set up on the menu screen and adjust with the multi function headphone knob - and of course you can record a stereo output at the same time. SoundDevices say that the inputs are so clean and quiet that you can record at very low levels and boost the signal afterwards without introducing noticeable noise, although I always find it comforting to see a decent signal on the meters! There is also a useful Aux



input (3.5mm) jack which you can allocate to any of the 3 input channels at mic or line level - and this jack also provides 3 volts to power a lapel mic, which is a really useful feature. But you can't use this input for audio if you need to input Linear Time Code (LTC) via this jack. You can, though, input timecode from some DSLR video cameras via HDMI, which is also catered for on these mixers. In this case you still have the 3.5mm jack for audio line or mic input - and HDMI can provide the record trigger too, so the MixPre will start on the push of the camera trigger. The 3.5mm Aux jack will also operate as a camera return without taking up an audio channel - so you can monitor and verify the audio being sent back from your camera.

(Note : the MixPre's can read and stamp time code to their sound recordings but they can not generate their own time code - although they do have an accurate time clock).

Meters, Menus & Controls

Metering and menu selection is on a small but excellent, daylight-viewable colour touch screen. You can even see the level meters in sunlight. Everything is very intuitive and easy to access. The logic is basically - press a channel knob to call up the channel control screen and touch the relevant screen button then scroll the options with the headphone control knob. So it is quick and easy to set up the system or adjust pre-fade levels. The



headphone knob is also used for text selection or to audio scrub during playback. The fader knobs are surrounded by a variable LED which shows increasingly green when there is a good signal and red when peaking - so you have a very clear indication about levels without even looking at the meters on screen. I found the touch screen a bit fiddly to use at first due to the small size of the button areas but I soon got used to it. Fortunately the menu logic is clear and easy to follow.



Outputs

Output options are one of the compromises with the MixPre's in order to keep the price down. There is no balanced XLR output. You just get an unbalanced 3.5mm jack and the latest (micro) USB-C connector. But given that these mixers are really intended to be used with a video camera of some kind, balanced outputs should not be needed since cable connections will be short. You can, though, configure what you want to send to the output - for example for monitoring or broadcast, in addition to the headphone output. It is worth mentioning here that the headphone output is a really high spec and powerful, low-noise 'audiophile' output so there is no compromise on what you hear - and of course you can route any output or USB signal to this for monitoring.

Powering

The unit as shipped runs on 4 AA cells carried in the sled supplied - which is said to run the MixPre3 for about 2.5 hours, although I need to do my own real world tests to verify this since it will depend on the type of batteries and your set up - phantom power drain etc. You can also buy an 8 battery sled to double the run time - or a sled to take one or two 'L' type Sony camera batteries, which will last for ever - well for several days anyway. The MixPre's can also be powered from their USB-C or USB-A sockets (cables supplied) - either from a USB adapter, computer or a USB power pack - so there's no excuse for running out of power on the job. I have a USB power pack for my phone so with the right lead I should be able to use that.

Build Quality

It goes without saying that build quality is excellent. SoundDevices have not risked their reputation in

order to capture a different market. Superb engineering, a cast aluminium enclosure with a precision finish - and a nice bit of orange flashing on the corner posts to give it a bit of designer class.



The knobs are plastic not metal but nicely made and finished with a metal locator so you can feel their setting position without looking. You have to sacrifice something to get the price down and this was a sensible choice.

And also...

These little devices can do so much that it is difficult to cover everything - they have BlueTooth to enable you to link them to an iOS device to see the level meters and control recordings remotely via the free Wingman App. but being an 'Android' user I have not been able to try that. Both devices will appear as a 2-in, 2-out, audio interface when connected to a

computer, but if you install the latest ASIO drivers all the channels will show. You can also connect a standard keyboard to the USB-A socket in order to enter text, file names, project details, etc. You can also store user presets so you have a one-touch set up of everything for various situations or mics. And there is a 1/4 inch bolt and bush to enable the unit to be mounted beneath a camera and on a tripod.

Summing up

It's not surprising that the MixPre's are selling like hot cakes - I put in a pre-order for the MixPre3 with John McCombie at Pinknoise-Systems as soon as I saw them on the NAB reports. I think Sound Devices delayed the release by a couple of weeks in order to get sufficient out at one go to meet the early pre-release orders, which I suspect took them by surprise. If you haven't ordered one you'll want one - but you may now have to wait for the next batch.

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MixPre3 supplied by Pinknoise-Systems :

www.pinknoise-systems.co.uk

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What I liked most
 Build quality and design
 Clean sound and big gain
 Analogue limiters
 The price !

What to get used to
 Small knobs
 Touch Screen



Useful pre-release videos

SoundDevices Paul Isaacs :

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c3hrJm6uQLU>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-E5gyHtGPg>

FULL DETAILS

For full details and specifications see the Sound Devices web site :

<https://www.sounddevices.com>

and

<https://www.sounddevices.com/news/sound-devices-news/introducing-the-mixpre-series>