



Tascam Studio Bridge

24-track Recorder & USB Audio Interface

Tascam break their Model range's recording facilities out into a standalone device that you can hook up to any mixer.

inputs and outputs are presented on six Tascam-format DB25 D-Sub connectors on the rear. Alongside these are quarter-inch jacks for a click output and a (not included) tap-tempo footswitch. There are also five-pin DIN MIDI in and MIDI out sockets, a USB-B socket for USB2 audio interfacing, and a 100-240 Volt mains IEC inlet with on/off rocker switch.

The analogue I/O can be routed to/ fed from either an integrated SDXC card recorder or a USB-connected Mac, Windows, iOS or iPadOS device. As well as delivering most of the functions of my ageing HD24, the Studio Bridge also loosely resembles the Alesis BRC, a remote control unit intended for multiple sync'ed ADAT machines that could, with some setting up, perform a similar role for an HD24. I've included a picture of the two units so you can see what I mean: the Studio Bridge just a shade smaller, but it comes in a similar desktop format and there are physical record-arm buttons for every track, while a master section handles transport and other functions. Of course, things have moved on in the intervening years, so that's pretty much where that comparison ends, and not least because the converters and recording are built

Tascam Studio Bridge

£899

PROS

- Sounds great.
- Easy to use.
- Individual track record arming.
- Manual and automatic punch in.
- Record standalone or to a computer.
- Built-in digital mixing for headphone monitoring.
- Useful tempo, click and MIDI sync facilities.
- Outstanding value for money.

CONS

- Doesn't support sample rates above 48kHz (but still sounds good).

SUMMARY

In an age where vintage multitrackers are getting harder to repair and maintain, the Studio Bridge has the potential to free you from the tyranny of the computer screen and breathe new life into your analogue console — but also to augment your DAW with plentiful I/O and hardware control functions.

MATT HOUGHTON

As I was dotting the 'i's and crossing the 't's of last month's Tascam Model 2400 review, in came the news that Tascam had exploited all of its recording and DAW-control features to create a standalone device called the Studio Bridge. Primarily, it's for those with a console who want to benefit from the Model-series technology without having to choose a Model mixer, but there are plenty of other potential applications. The 'Studio' in the name isn't just for show, by the way: as a multitracker, it boasts the sort of studio-friendly features that the live-oriented products of the last decade or so haven't, making it more a modern take on my Alesis HD24 than like a Cymatic uTrack 24 or JoeCo BlackBox Recorder.

Overview

The Studio Bridge is a multitrack digital recorder whose 24 analogue line



■ The Studio Bridge might remind those of a certain vintage of the Alesis BRC remote control — but this time the recording facilities are built in!

that allows you to select and set the level of each channel in that monitor mix (potentially very handy if you're recording from the direct outs of someone else's console!).

Above these buttons, each track has its own input source and Mon buttons. The former decides whether the track receives its input signal from the analogue or the USB input. The latter decides whether you hear the analogue input or multitrack playback signal in the headphone monitor mix.

The single headphone output has its own level

control and proved perfectly capable of driving my Audeze LCD-X and Sennheiser HD650 headphones to a decent volume. Beneath that is a click section, with a knob to set the click level in the headphones, and a separate button to switch the click on/off, or (when in the appropriate page on screen) to tap in the project tempo.

To the right, the SD card slot accepts full-size cards up to 512GB, though you must provide your own. SDXC cards are specified but my experience suggested that some other cards may work, even if they don't support all recording formats. For example, one older SDHC card did the job just fine at 16-bit/44.1kHz but the Studio Bridge threw up an error when I tried to use it at any of the other settings

(24-bit/44.1kHz; 16- or 24-bit/48kHz), whereas a more recent, faster SDHC card worked flawlessly at all settings.

The remaining top-panel section should be familiar to anyone who's familiar with the Model mixers. It comprises a compact, tilted screen, whose menus and commands are accessed using a Menu button, the Multi Jog push-turn encoder, and four function buttons. The Menu button accesses the main menu and sub-menus. You turn the Multi Jog to adjust on-screen parameters, and push it to make your selection, or you can hit a function button to more quickly access whatever item is displayed above it. You're never more than a couple of clicks/scrolls from any function you might need to use on the fly, and not many more from any other options.

The same top-panel zone includes the Shift button and the transport controls, with dedicated buttons for stop, record, play/pause, fast-forward and rewind.

Standalone Use

Basic standalone operation is child's play. Once you've hooked the Studio Bridge up to the mixer's tape sends and returns and inserted an SDXC card (and for first use formatted it, which takes a few seconds), you must create a new song project, and maybe change the word length and sample rate, which, again, is mere seconds' work. Then just check that the tracks on which you want to record are set to receive the analogue input signal (the other option being a digital signal over USB) and record arm them. When you're ready just hit the main record button, and whatever you play through those mixer channels will be captured to the SD card. There are no gains and other settings to fiddle with, of course, as you do all that on the mixer. Hit >>

into the Studio Bridge rather than being in separate rackmount recorders.

The record arm buttons, which flash red when armed, have smoothed edges that make it really easy to swipe to (dis)arm multiple tracks quickly, though there's also a menu option to arm all tracks at once. Those buttons have additional functions too. First, as with the Model mixers, the Studio Bridge can be set to run as a DAW control surface (HUI for Pro Tools, MCU for other DAWs), and in that mode they record arm your DAW tracks. A third function is accessed using a Shift button: hold Shift and press a record arm button, and you solo that track in the headphone monitor mix. While we're on that subject, there's a built in screen-driven digital mixer



■ The Studio Bridge isn't just about audio: it also has MIDI I/O which can be used to provide a sync signal to external devices, or as a USB MIDI interface for your computer.

» stop, and then play, and you'll hear the recorded tracks play back through the analogue outputs.

Of course, part of the beauty of the Model-series mixers lies in the fact that everything's so neatly integrated, whereas with the Studio Bridge the mixer is very much a variable, both in terms of the number of I/O and where those connections sit in the signal path. Some will have direct outs but no tape returns, for example, and you'll have to figure out another way to integrate the Studio Bridge physically. There usually is a way, though, and often more than one — I've discussed that more in the 'Ins & Outs Of Mixers' box.

There's plenty more than basic recording and playback that you can do with the Studio Bridge if you want to, and despite there being a decent manual I generally found it easy simply to dive into the on-screen menus. Here, you'll quickly figure out how to set up and name a song, and set its word length, sample rate, time signature and tempo. You'll soon discover how to set the tempo using the tap button too, and create navigation markers, manually or automatically punch in, and loop playback. There are equally obvious menu options to change the sounds used for the click, how to route the click to the click output, and how to set up a count in.

You can even send MIDI Clock/Timecode from the MIDI out, which might appeal particularly to anyone sync'ing and recording lots of synths, drum machines and other such devices. There are also helpful touches such as the ability to pair adjacent channels for stereo sources, and you'll see how to solo or invert the polarity of channels and set up a monitor mix, including options to monitor all tracks or just the record-armed ones, and an auto monitor option that changes the monitor signal for record-enabled tracks depending



With a push-turn encoder and five buttons, the simple on-screen menus are mercifully quick and easy to navigate.

on whether you're playing back (or not) or recording — helpfully, this is detailed in a table on the top panel, so you don't have to keep the manual handy!

Solo a channel and a monitor panel appears on screen, with track colours inverted to indicate which are soloed. You can use the Multi Jog to dial in anything from full attenuation to 18dB of gain, and while there's no instant way to reset it to unity, it's quick to do that with the Multi Jog.

Still, you'll discover more details in the manual, such as how to move one recorded track to another for playback, how to load new backing tracks from a computer, and any Shift functions.

The Studio Bridge is similarly easy to use as a USB interface. You must download an ASIO driver for Windows, but for other operating systems it's a generic interface. The same basic control/metering

software as for the Model 2400 is available for Mac users (and included with the Windows driver installation). As with standalone use you're limited to a maximum of 24-bit/48kHz, but that's hardly surprising given the sheer number of channels going in either direction over USB2, and subjectively it sounded very good to my ears — I never really felt the need for higher sample rates. Your DAW can access the MIDI I/O too, which is nice. And you can set the Studio Bridge up to work as an MCU or HUI controller, in which mode its record arm buttons arm your DAW tracks, and you can use the transport controls for navigation.

Model Citizen?

The Studio Bridge is already great value, even judged purely as a USB audio interface. Yes, you're limited to 16- or 24-bit and 44.1 or 48 kHz recording formats, and there are no niceties such as mic preamps or instruments inputs. But it sounds good, offers a vast I/O count and acts as a MIDI interface to boot. I can't think of any other device that offers this many channels of A-D/D-A conversion over USB2 for anything like this price. So let's also remember that this isn't even the Studio Bridge's primary purpose! As a standalone multitrack recorder, it's in a class of its own. As I've written before, I love the experience of recording performances without a computer and its screen dominating proceedings; it encourages a much keener focus on assessing the performance, and doesn't distract you with with endless options to fiddle with. No current product comes close to providing the facilities on offer here for so many channels, never mind at this price. In short, if you want facilities like overdubbing and punch-ins, you need a computer, something old and obsolete, or this. I'd take the Studio Bridge in a heartbeat. Of course, it still caters for basic one-take live recording too, and could also be a great option for playback of multitrack backing tracks.

The Studio Bridge doesn't quite offer every feature my HD24 does, but it's way more convenient, there are no fans or hard drives making noise, and it's much more portable. For me, then, it is a complete replacement, and I'm seriously contemplating a purchase. ■■■

Ins & Outs of Mixers

A traditional, large studio console will have dedicated tape sends and returns on each channel, and that's ideal for the Studio Bridge: you capture the tape send and play back through the tape return, the only real question being whether you want the Studio Bridge to capture only the main input channels or also some other outputs, such as any subgroups and the main mix. Many more affordable mixers will not have tape sends/returns on every channel, so if you're contemplating adding a Studio Bridge to your

setup it's worth thinking through how you'd connect things up. Sometimes that will require creative thinking. A mixer may, for example, feature a direct out after the preamps but no dedicated tape return for playback, or it may have neither, in which case you'll need to look at the viability of using channel insert points or any I/O on the subgroup channels. You'll want to be sure these are at the desired place in the signal path too. I've explored all this in a little more detail in the online version of this review.

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