

Focusrite Clarett 4 Pre | £500

With their new Thunderbolt interfaces Focusrite combine high-quality audio circuitry with super low latency. **Stuart Bruce** gets up to speed

WHAT IS IT?

A small format 8 in/4 out Thunderbolt recording interface with ultra-low latency

CONTACT

Who: Focusrite
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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Great sounding mic pres and line inputs and outputs
- 2 Excellent user interface, both physical and software
- 3 Very low round trip latency

SPECS

System requirements:
OSX 10.9 Mavericks, 10.10 Yosemite or 10.11 El Capitan

Supported sample rates:
44.1kHz, 48kHz, 88.2kHz, 96kHz, 176.4kHz, 192kHz

All inputs (mic, line and instrument)

Frequency response:
20Hz-20kHz +/-0.1dB

Dynamic range: 118dB (A-weighted) (Instrument 116dB)

THD+N: 0.001%

Line & monitor outputs

Dynamic range (line outputs): 119dB

Dynamic range (monitor outputs): 117dB

Headphone outputs

Dynamic range: 116dB

Focusrite have a number of excellent small format interfaces but with the new Clarett range of Thunderbolt-

only units they have taken advantage of higher data transfer rates to get the latency as low as 1.67ms on the round trip. This means you can potentially set your DAW buffer size higher and have more processing power available, even when monitoring through the system. There are four Clarett interfaces in the range, the largest being the 8X. Here we are looking at the 4.

The first thing you notice is its compact size. It's roughly two rack units high and about half a rack unit in width. The front panel hosts four Dual XLR/TRS sockets, each with independent level control, a large monitor control level pot and two smaller headphone level pots with corresponding 1/4-inch sockets. Nice and simple and all obvious. The only extra items are two phantom power switches which put 48 volts to channels 1 and 2 or 3 and 4 respectively. Next to the first two gain pots are two LED indicators, one to show if the input is switched to

Instrument (Hi Z) and the other to show if the Air circuit is enabled, channels 3 and 4 only having the Air indicator as they cannot be switched to instrument inputs. To the rear are four extra line inputs and four line outputs (all on 1/4-inch TRS), MIDI in and out, the Thunderbolt port, S/PDIF in and out and an optical input. Power is connected by the ubiquitous wall wart and that is it. Neat and compact, the pots feel positive in operation and the unit feels substantial despite its size.

Download and install the Focusrite Control software mixer, launch your DAW software and you are ready to go. I started by plugging in an electric guitar to channel 1 and pulled up an instance of Amplitude. The surround of the level pot lights up, green when there is level present, yellow as it gets hot and red when it overloads. Normally I just want a meter but this is an intuitive indication of what is going on so setting a level is straightforward. Popping over to the controller software, the mixer page is very simple. You can set up four independent balances selected by the boxes to the left-hand side. These are

Monitor out (line out 1 and 2), headphone 1 and outputs 3 and 4, headphone 2 and lastly for S/PDIF. The mixer itself is very simple consisting of up to eight inputs and eight DAW returns (which you can gang together as four stereos). So balancing direct signal to DAW return is very simple. In my case I had no direct signal going to Monitor as I wanted to hear the sound of the Amplitude instance in Pro Tools.

My buffer was set to 256. With my usual USB interface this would have meant a small but noticeable latency but with the Clarett it was fine – no slight latency pulling me out of time and still with enough buffer to get some reasonably serious plug-in action going. Moving on to microphones and an acoustic guitar and vocal, the first thing that struck me was the quality of the mic pres. They sound very good, better than I would expect at this price. Switching in the Air circuit adds a little presence to the sound and meant I had less need to reach for an EQ. Air actually changes the analogue circuit of the mic pre so you really are affecting the source signal, not just doing something in the digital domain.

Finally, the lines, the monitor and headphone outs all sound great, comparing favourably with units costing far more, making the Clarett excellent value for money. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD



VALUE



EASE OF USE



VERSATILITY



RESULTS



An excellent unit that punches well above its weight in audio quality, functionality and ease of use.

