

Focusrite Platinum TwinTrak Pro

So you've got a DAW and you're looking for a method of overdubbing that dispenses with the mass of 'monitoring' gear.

GEORGE SHILLING says it can be done and has been done more elegantly than a Y-lead.



FOCUSRITE'S IAN HODGES has designed this unit as a one-stop solution for DAW recording.

With some very simple-but-effective features, this unit runs with the Voicemaster Pro's monitor section concept and enables high quality mono or stereo overdubbing without the need for a mixer. With the optional A-D card fitted, there are no less than 25 rear panel sockets, plus five on the front. By omitting some of the sound-sculpting features of the Voicemaster, and again outsourcing the construction to China, the price has been kept at a similarly low figure (UK£399 inc VAT; digital option UK£129 inc VAT). Both A-D and D-A include SPDIF phono and Word clock BNC connections and are 96kHz compatible, the latter featuring four switchable rates from 44.1 to 96kHz.

Two channels are logically laid out across the front panel. The mic input XLRs here are non-latching, but the mic input sections each feature a variable impedance knob, phantom power (now with an illuminating button that was absent from the Voicemaster), and an Air button that imparts a pleasant high-frequency boost using an inductor circuit.

The quality of the Class A mic pres is similar to the Voicemaster, as one would expect. These have a tendency to sound a little honky, especially with dynamic mics, where the Air enhancement seems less noticeable than with a good condenser or ribbon. In use, the Air button stayed in almost all the time, its character adding a 'Blue' range sheen.

The Impedance knob mostly sounds best would fairly far right, even with a ribbon mic. Turning it left thins out the sound and reduces the level. However, this can be a good way of compensating for strong proximity effects. The 60dB available gain is usually enough, but a little more would have been handy. The front panel Instrument inputs sound fairly lifeless with electric guitar, lacking top-end sparkle, and it's a pity an 'Air' circuit isn't available on this input.

A switch selects rear line input – these are balanced jacks

while line outs appear as +4dBu XLRs and -10dBV jacks – and all three types of input benefit from a switching high-pass filter and phase reverse buttons. The mic gain knob doubles as a Line trim with a range of +/-10dB, although there is no centre detente. A six-segment LED meter on each channel enables easy gain setting.

A Mid Scoop EQ is a simple but effective way of getting rid of the gunk, with a knob sweeping from 120Hz up to 2kHz, and 'In' and 'Deep' buttons providing two levels of mid cut. The Deep cut is a fairly severe 12dB, but the milder 6dB cut is often useful. More controllable is the Class A Optical Compressor section, although this features two fixed settings each for Knee, Attack and Ratio. The three knobs vary Compression [threshold], Release and Make-up Gain. The chosen ranges are useful, and the compression sounds great, but the 'Hard Ratio' is very hard indeed.

There is a Stereo Link button and TRS sidechain insert sockets on the rear. These are in addition to TRS inserts that enable insertion after the preamps and before internal processing. Another two LED meters show gain reduction. The snazzy looking blue illuminating VU meters show output levels and include Peak LEDs, but their needles are actually quite hard to see from a distance.

The clever monitoring section is below these. This is difficult to describe without it sounding complicated (*Sharp intake of breath. Ed*), but it is a sensible design with enough rear panel connections and front panel knobs to enable you to dispense with the traditional mixer for overdubbing with a DAW. Using the headphone output on the front panel and/or the stereo monitor outputs on the back, the processed signal(s) are internally split to the rear outputs for recording, and an internal monitor bus where they can be effected with echo and mixed with a stereo monitor source. Separate inputs are provided for this source or, when free, the digital input is normalised. Alternatively, with a front panel button push, the digital inputs are routed to the channel inputs.

There are stereo FX send and return sockets on the rear and these can be used to provide monitor echo to the source for monitoring purposes. There are knobs to balance between the two input channels with an accompanying Mono button, an FX Level knob to blend echo with the monitored signal, and a mix knob to blend between the Input and Playback sources.

The XLR monitor outputs on the rear can simply send the playback input onwards to an amp/speaker combination or, by pressing another front panel button, monitor the same mix as the headphones. There are separate level knobs for Monitors and Headphones, and a Monitor Mute button. In addition to the front panel stereo headphone jack, there are left and right headphones mix jacks on the rear.

Like the signal processing, the headphone output and internal mixer are very clean and clear sounding, and it is all straightforward to use, once the correct connections have been made. I liked the tweakable features on the Voicemaster for postrecording processing, but for getting stuff into a DAW this is perfect. For fuss-free overdubbing, this unit is great, with all the connectivity imaginable, and a logical and foolproof set of features. ■

PROS

Best zero-latency monitoring solution since the Y-lead; 96k capable; fantastic connectivity; good mic pres; excellent processing.

CONS

A-D not standard; hard to read VUs; case gets hot; disappointing instrument inputs.

Contact

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