



## Focusrite Control 2802

It's a logical extension and development of the thought processes introduced in the Zen, most particularly adding DAW control. **GEORGE SHILLING** had an Audient delivered that became a Focusrite during the course of his review.

In a slightly surprising move, Audient has handed over production and marketing of its ASP 2802 console to Focusrite, which has rebadged it as the Control 2802. The review model arrived as an Audient but there is no indication that the difference between the two models will be anything other than the screen print on the surface. Focusrite and Audient will work together on developing and delivering new designs, bringing Dual Layer and other technologies to a wider audience than Audient could access on its own. This in turn allows Audient to strengthen its position in the studio market and develop key new products, such as the ASP8024DLC, that use this same technology.

The Control 2802's Dual Layer system provides fader control for common DAWs and, by flipping modes, good old-fashioned analogue faders for the

console's eight channels. Despite its compact size, there is a lavishly featured centre section. There are some familiar ideas and some parts appear almost identical to the more expensive and larger Audient Zen, but this is not simply a cut-down Zen. The larger console features a unique automation system; the 2802 expands that, and also includes fully featured DAW control with fader banking (see sidebar), which the Zen lacks.

The construction of the Control 2802 is conventionally wedge shaped, and like its big brother Zen, the build is solid and weighty. Macho mottled rough black Hammerite-style metal panels flank the unit, and full-size generously-spaced faders dominate the surface panel.

At the top of each channel is a clear LED meter relating to the channel input, or globally switchable to show Direct Outputs. However, they can also switch

to show DAW meters. The channel strips' assortment of knobs and switches mainly relate to signal routing: there are no sonic manipulation tools such as EQ or dynamics apart from the mic preamps' 75Hz high pass filters. The preamps sound great, they're quiet and clean, but have power and guts. I especially enjoyed recording drums through the 2802, where they engendered a superb immediacy and punch. Polarity reverse and 48V phantom are provided; and the switch for the separate Line input is sensibly located at the top here too.

The mic gain knob goes from 6-60dB and that's plenty for most instances and in the following input selection there is a further handy +/-15dB Trim knob. The DAW button switches the channel source from Line/Mic to a second line input intended for monitor outputs from the DAW. Between the mic preamp and this though are a couple of pushbuttons to configure the direct output of the Mic or Line input. This provides for the signal to be tapped in four different ways. Post means post-fader, post-mute and post-insert. Pre-Ins is, as you might expect, before the insert and fader to provide a clean feed, but still allowing use of the Trim knob, perhaps using the insert for monitoring purposes, say to give a vocalist extra compression in the cans without committing to tape/DAW. Pre-Fader mode is useful when you do want to record with the insert but perhaps use the fader to provide a monitor balance. For purists, the fourth mode, 'Channel' takes the direct output immediately after the mic preamp. This is the cleanest feed and pulls the signal from before even the Trim knob. You can then use the DAW return in the channel for monitoring while recording the mic preamp output. These options can be quite a bit to take in, but the excellent manual explains everything clearly in plain English. Suffice to say that this flexibility makes recording and monitoring possible in all sorts of different ways.

Next is a useful Insert enable/bypass. The Stereo Cue (with level and pan) has a Pre/Post button, and an Alt I/P button (more below). Two further mono Aux knobs are below this, each governed by global Pre/Post selection in the centre section. Finally, above the fader panel is the centre detented Pan knob and Mix route button, determining whether the channel output is sent to the main stereo bus. Faders have a professional feel and nice big illuminating Sel, Cut and Solo buttons.

With just eight main channels it's likely you would create a Cue mix in the DAW (using the 2802 faders



in DAW mode) while using the onboard Cue sends to feed the live mics to the headphones. This is made especially easy here with dedicated DAW mix and FB inputs (on XLRs) that can be combined with the Mix, Aux and Cue buses, and an External source and an 'i-Jack' as required, in the CR and FB monitor sections.

On the rear, each channel has an XLR for mic input, and separate balanced jack sockets for Line input, Insert Send and Insert Return. The Direct Outputs from each channel are provided on a 25-pin D-Connector. There are XLR outputs for Mix Output, Main and Alt Speakers, Auxes 1 and 2 and Stereo Cue. The Headphone output on the rear (which might have been handier on the front) can be sourced from FB or Control Room signals and has its own gain and mute controls. A D-Connector is also used for the DAW Inputs. These can either be used for pseudo-in-line functionality, or summed into the mix (by pressing Alt IP and assigning Cue to Mix in the centre section) for another set of eight (non-automated) channels, with level and panning set using the Cue controls.

If you are using the DAW as the main channel source, pressing the Alt IP button takes the Mic/Line signal through the Cue section. Either way, that's 16 inputs at mixdown, but there is a third D-Connector for bringing in yet another eight channels of audio into the equation for mixdown summing. These are configured as four stereo pairs that feed the mix bus and/or Cue via overall Level and Pan knobs, and there is even the option to Mono them. Two stereo FX Returns are also provided with similar controls, their inputs on balanced jacks. So adding all that up, it's a bountiful 28 inputs to sum at mixdown.

## Automation and DAW control



The 2802 connects to the DAW computer via Ethernet. Setup is straightforward; you must install the AuNet software and have that running in the background; it indicates to the console when it is connected but network and DAW setup is achieved on the front panel

of the console using the OLED display and associated encoders. Host software supported is currently Pro Tools, Cubase/Nuendo and Logic. With Pro Tools selected it was a simple matter of enabling the MIDI inputs for Automation and/or Control Surface. For the latter, HUI protocol is used and set as normal from the Peripherals dialogue in Pro Tools. Flipping from analogue faders to DAW faders is simply a matter of pressing the DAW button, which then lights up red, and the faders zip to the correct settings. Large coloured brightly illuminating buttons for Select, Mute and Solo above each fader make operation a breeze, and the fader motors are snappy yet smooth. The ninth fader is merely an analogue master fader for the console and is not part of the computer layer.

Full transport controls are provided including a smooth jog/shuttle wheel, and along with Fader, Mute and Select on each channel, a number of other functions are possible using the four rotary encoders and OLED display, and a number of smaller buttons. The channel

Ah, that explains the model number!

Useful monitoring functions include Variable Dim, left channel polarity flip, Mono and Alt Speaker level trim. Solo modes are comprehensively covered, including variable Solo-In-Front. There is an in-built Talkback mic and a nice big TB button with level knob, sensibly located away from the mic, but there is even an external input with switchable phantom power for an external talkback mic.

The Bus Compressor is a great feature. It blatantly takes many of the controls and settings from another well-known bus compressor, but adds some in-between positions and even provides a dedicated parallel compression Blend knob. It sounds great and is a terrific way of adding some mastering 'glow' to the mix. Furthermore, its inputs and outputs appear on the rear panel so it is available for tracking or other use. If you fancy some different mix processing there is, of course, an Insert, and even this is switchable with an extra button to Sum dry and processed signal.

The Control 2802 covers many bases with very few compromises. The design team has done its homework and addressed just about every need of the hard-working engineer who wants to break out of the box, in a compact, sturdy and affordable package of remarkable high quality. ■

### PROS

Abundantly featured; extremely flexible and powerful; great centre section with bus comp; excellent mic preamps and clean, punchy sound.

### CONS

Scribble strips not directly over faders and only four service eight faders; some DAW functions are fiddly; no signal processing other than summing and routing.

### Contact

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Select buttons have a number of possible uses and modes for DAW control and for the analogue layer that can be set with dedicated buttons, such as Record Enable. There's a clever way of selecting DAW automation modes in conjunction with the OLED display and encoders — by pushing the encoder with the appropriate label you can apply any of Pro Tools' automation modes to selected channels. Once proficient with this, it can be quicker than using the drop-down menus, although you are hampered slightly in identifying tracks by the lack of scribble strips directly on the channel fader strips.

A similar function is available for creating and suspending Groups. In the analogue layer, Select button functions are available for setting unity gain, SIP Safe and Automation Safe. Four arrow keys provide window scrolling and (using Shift) zooming. Four function buttons are set up to open and close Edit, Mixer, Plug-in and Transport windows in Pro Tools, but why not another four with the Shift button such as Big Counter, Markers, Automation Enable, etc? Auxes can be selected and controlled, usefully flipped onto the faders, and even assigned, but like Plug-in assignment and editing on the 2802 that task is rather fiddly and less direct than just using a mouse.

To automate the analogue console faders, you must set up 8 dummy MIDI tracks within Pro Tools, as the console uses Mod Wheel controller data for automation fader moves. It's a simple matter then of recording and playing back the tracks, the only proviso being that you cannot easily draw MIDI controller data in Pro Tools with the pencil tool, so to edit moves it's either copying and pasting or performing the move again. I understand that an audio plug-in called FaderLink (RTAS for Pro Tools) is in development that will include controls to enable you to write and read Pro Tools automation to the associated channel, negating the requirement for dummy tracks and I suspect that this will be substantially better.