Nick Mac expands Focusrite Arsenal



In his role as the chief engineer at Electric Feel Entertainment’s production studios, which houses a lineup of A-list artists, producers, songwriters, brands and partners, Nick Mac, whose engineering credits include Post Malone, The Kid Laroi, 24kGoldn, Machine Gun Kelly, Travis Barker, YG, Future, and more, has consistently relied on the Focusrite ISA 428 multichannel microphone preamplifier, ISA 430 channel strip and ISA One mic pre/DI. More recently, when Electric Feel recommissioned the studio with all-new wiring, a Solid State Logic AWS 924 Delta analog mixing console, Genelec monitors and an aesthetic facelift, acoustic improvements and more, Mac added a Focusrite Red 16Line multichannel A/D D/A interface, the ISA ADN2 two-channel A/D card and RedNet AM2 stereo audio monitoring unit to his equipment arsenal, to take his system to the next level.

“I have been using the Red 16Line quite a lot lately,” stated Mac. “My friends probably make fun of me behind my back, but I have my 16Line in a rack – it’s a four-space rack – with my Mac mini in a chassis. And on the front of the rack, I’ve created a panel that allows me eight in and eight out to my line in and output. Basically, everywhere I go, whether it’s at Electric Feel or at another studio or wherever, I’m dragging this rack around with my 16Line. I can track with it and I can mix with it. I most commonly track with that and use my ISA One as my mic pre to

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feed into my little patch panel I have on the front. And in some situations, because I just added the ADN2, I've used RedNet to break out to a couple other pieces of gear. I've used the ISA One with RedNet, which I really love. It lets you get incredible distances away from your setup, but still have control. All with pristine audio."

Because of the nature of the clients Nick Mac works with, he needs to have the flexibility to record in a wide variety of spaces. Recently he has added the ISA ADN2 two-channel A/D card for his ISA One. This card adds two channels of Dante, AES3 (AES/EBU), ADAT TOSLINK, and SPDIF connectivity to the ISA One microphone preamp, with operation at sample rates up to 24-bit/192kHz. Word Clock I/O on BNC connectors allows for synchronization to multiple digital sources, for syncing the Dante network to house clock, or for syncing external equipment to the Dante network. The Dante outputs provide the ability to connect to any RedNet device, further expanding the unit's functionality.

"RedNet has been providing the flexibility to work in a wide range of location situations," Mac commented. "Sometimes we'll get calls: 'Oh, we're going to set up a camp at this house and work there for a month, or a week,' or whatever it is. And now that I have RedNet capability, you can plug in and create whatever kind of setup you want. I'm a big fan of doing different stations for different things and having the flexibility without compromising the core of what we're doing, which is always getting the best high-quality audio. So the Focusrite gear allows me to have the kind of setup I need to have when capturing the tracks of my artists."



He continues, “I also have a Focusrite Control 2802 Mixer & DAW Controller from quite a few years back that I will drag out on the road with me on occasion. I use it if I set up at a place for an extended period of time, just for IO and for routing and things like that, and I really enjoy it. It makes me really happy. And it allows me to do things that I would typically do in our A room at Electric Feel anywhere else. I don’t want to compromise, because you start compromising on things, and then you kind of start to go down a few pegs, and then it just becomes messy and weird. And I’d rather have pieces of gear that allow me to do not only what the client needs to do, bare minimum, but above and beyond when they ask, ‘Hey, can we do this? Can we have a setup over here? Hey, can we play speakers downstairs?’ It’s like, ‘Sure, no problem. I’ve got the Focusrite AM2, it’s got outputs on it, so you could run a pair of speakers if you wanted to.”

Mac has been a huge fan of the ISA One for quite some time and expresses admiration for the unit, describing it as one of the most feature-rich devices he has encountered. He particularly appreciates the high quality of the classic Focusrite mic pre paired with an independent DI channel, both offering selectable transformer impedance settings. The device is housed in a durable and portable enclosure. Mac is enamored with the tactile control on the front panel, especially for the mic pre and headphones.

“By adding the optional Dante card, the conversion is phenomenal on the ISA One.

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And being able to go into the unit with my microphone is key. A lot of times these days I'm starting with the Soyuz 017 Tube V2 Large-diaphragm Tube Condenser Microphone, and I'll have a Sony C-800 and a Lewitt LCT 1040 Tube Microphone on standby as well. Those are my three favorites. But with those three options on hand, going into my ISA One with either an 1176 or a Distressor, that's pretty much it. So into the 16Line, I might add an EQ in the future. I'm not sure what yet. But as far as the signal chain, that's what I'm doing – going straight into my Pro Tools rig and working there. And I will say the benefits of switching to a 16Line from another unit has been night and day. The clocking is phenomenal. No pops and clicks. The low latency is incredible. I've had no complaints from any of my artists or myself. And the sonic quality of it, I think is incredible."

Currently Mac is working on a number of different projects and employing Focusrite as part of his workflow. "I've been using the 16Line with our SSL 924 to kind of do a hybrid mix situation, because I really enjoy faders and EQs and things that I can touch outside of the box – things that I think not only speed up but also improve my workflow. And I've been running vocals through the desk, along with strings and choir, and doing mix passes with those faders and automating everything as I'm printing – by hand in real time by doing fader moves – which I've really enjoyed. The 16Line makes that incredibly easy, especially having the patch points on the front of my rig. I'm able to run stereo pairs or whatever I want out onto the desk, do what I need to do, and bring it back. And the A-to-D conversion is incredible, and I feel like I'm not losing anything. If anything, I'm only gaining things, and there's no compromise. It's just been nothing but enjoyable to work like that, and the sonics are just incredible."

When asked if he had any final thoughts, Mac responded, "The most important part of being dependable for my artist is choosing the right pieces of gear that allow me to do what I do while being invisible to them. And Focusrite has always been at the cornerstone of me making what I think is the right decision for my artists. They don't necessarily know the brands and the gear or whatever; they're relying on me to do that. Especially in recent times, switching to the 16Line and carrying that unit with me every day, making the commitment to carry that into every session, has been really fruitful for me. It's about making the commitment to being the best engineer I can be every day, and Focusrite is a big part of that mindset."

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