

M-Audio M-Track 8X4M £260

If looks are important, this stylish audio MIDI interface may be for you. **Jon Musgrave** gets tracking

CONTACT WHO: M-Audio UK **WEB:** m-audio.com **KEY FEATURES** I/O: Four mic/line inputs with Crystal mic preamps; two high impedance (1 Mohm) instrument inputs; four balanced line outputs; two headphone outputs suitable for 32 to 600 ohm impedances; compatible with USB 2.0 and USB-C ports (both cables included) **DIMENSIONS:** 259 x 189 x 82mm **WEIGHT:** 1.8kg





THE PROS & CONS



Tactile surface with clear single button or knob functionality

Two headphone outputs with independent source selection and level

24-bit 192kHz capable

USB C connector with USB A and USB C cabling included



No metering for DAW outputs

Requires external PSU

M-Track 8X4M is the latest C-Series USB audio and MIDI interface from M-Audio. It's a mid-sized eight-in, four-out desktop unit with a simple one-knob-per-function design and looks pretty basic. However, the slick black surface comes to life on power up, as a bunch of coloured button labels appear alongside large four-part LED signal meters. However, lights mean power, and the 8X4M is not USB bus powered (you'll need the included PSU).

Given the switch designs and overall shape there's something retro about the 8X4M's looks. Even so, in technical terms it's all but retro, with up to 24-bit 192kHz operation, M-Audio's transparent Crystal mic pres and USB C connectivity (they've included both USB C and USB A terminated leads). It's class-compliant for OS X, but for use with Windows 7 and up you'll need to download/install the M-Audio driver.

For input connectivity, the 8X4M comprises four rear-mounted balanced combi mic/line inputs, two front-mounted unbalanced instrument inputs, and two rear-mounted balanced line level inputs. All but the pair of line inputs

include individual gain knobs, and for the mic inputs phantom power is switched in pairs. There are four rear-mounted balanced (¼" TRS) outputs and two front-mounted (¼" TS) headphone outputs. Each headphone out gets its own Volume control and source Output selector (1&2 or 3&4). Meanwhile the large Monitor Level knob controls main outputs 1&2, with 3&4 following DAW levels. Finally, there's MIDI In/Out via 2" mini jacks (a pair of 5-pin DIN converter leads are included). As expected, the 8X4M comes with a software bundle, and this one is pretty decent (Ableton Live Lite and Pro Tools First M-Audio Edition, plus Eleven Lite guitar amp and a combo of AIR Music instrument/effects, including Mini Grand and Strike).

The 8X4M worked well with a small buffer size, making DAW-based software monitoring OK where appropriate. For situations where even minor latency is a problem (vocal overdubbing for example), or when you simply can't run a small buffer size, there's onboard zero latency monitoring. This simple, one-knob option balances between any inputs and your DAW outputs 1&2. By default, inputs are hard-panned in pairs, however there's a mono/stereo button that lets you centre just the input sources

(the DAW output remains stereo). The only thing to bear in mind here is that the balance control influences both the main monitor outputs and the headphones. So, to achieve zero latency monitoring for your performer's headphones and separate balance for monitors, make use of outputs 3&4. Minor gripes-wise, the input LED metering is excellent, but alas there is no metering for the outputs. And maybe it'd have been nice to include mono and mute options for outputs too.

Overall, though, the M-Track 8X4M ticks a lot of boxes, and while it lacks the monitoring flexibility of software enhanced interfaces, the ease-of-use, solid build and stylish tactile surface are major positives. **FM**

FM VERDICT

8.8

A great, compact desktop interface with decent input selection, separate selectable headphone feeds and simple direct monitoring