

Damian Taylor Employs Focusrite Red and RedNet Products at His New L.A. Facility



When six-time GRAMMY-nominated record producer, engineer, mixer and remixer, songwriter and programmer Damian Taylor relocated from Canada to Los Angeles, he took the opportunity to streamline his production workflow. At Studio Bonsai, located at his home in L.A.'s Frogtown neighborhood, Taylor has built out a Dante-networked setup centered on a new Focusrite Red 8Pre 64-In / 64-Out Thunderbolt 2 and Pro Tools | HD™ compatible audio interface, and which also includes a pair of RedNet 2 16-Channel A-D/D-A interfaces and a RedNet AM2 stereo audio monitoring unit.

Taylor has been on the move for much of his life, ever since he was born in Canada to British parents. When he was 10, he and his family moved to New Zealand, where he later learned audio engineering. In 1997, he headed to the U.K., spending the better part of a decade working freelance in many of London's major recording facilities before spending six years as Björk's personal engineer and programmer, in the studio and on stage. While touring with Björk he returned to Canada, working out of a home studio in British Columbia before relocating to Montreal and custom-building a facility known as Golden Ratio.

Taylor is no networking novice, having used Focusrite's Dante-enabled equipment

since the company's first RedNet units were introduced. "I got the very first RedNet 5s, which tied in with the Avid I/Os. But I've been really happy switching over to the Red 8Pre and getting rid of all my Avid interfaces. It's a far more integrated and slicker way of being able to integrate Pro Tools," he says of the unit.

Being based in L.A., Taylor has access to all of the city's state-of-the-art studios for the recording phases of his projects, so Studio Bonsai has a tighter focus on mixing, programming and writing. Studio Bonsai is set up in an acoustically accurate mastering room that was built by the previous tenant of the house. Now focused on mixing, programming and writing, Taylor has pared down his racks of vintage synthesizers to a more focused collection, including a Eurorack modular system, which interfaces to the Dante network via the two RedNet 2 units. "I just have one of each type of toy, so I have a much smaller setup now than I had in Montreal," he says. When combined with his outboard gear, which includes two Focusrite ISA 828 MkII microphone preamps and an ISA 430 MkII channel strip, "I'm using all 48 channels of analogue I/O, which is very unusual in a writing environment," he says.

But most importantly, "I'm able to have all of my instruments patched in. Everything is immediately available all the time, and that's really wonderful," he says. "When I was in Montreal, I had a whole bunch of stuff that I still hadn't plugged in. It's been nice just to focus down to a much smaller, yet still quite expansive, set of tools."

Taylor controls his Avid Pro Tools|HDX system, which is hosted on hardware from Pro Tools PC, with an Avid Dock. "I have a set of Focal Twin6 Be monitors, which I mostly just use for loud listening. But I get most of what I need out of the tiny little Avantone speakers; I've been really into those for years and years," he says. A RedNet AM 2 stereo headphone device is available for visiting vocalists, he adds.

With the hub of his setup, the Red 8Pre interface, offering both Thunderbolt 2 connectivity and dual mini-DigiLink ports, Taylor can easily switch between digital audio workstations. "I can use the same setup really seamlessly and jump over into different DAWs. I do a ton of work in Ableton Live as well, so not having to run everything through the HDX Core Audio drivers allows it to work brilliantly," he says. "Both in Pro Tools and Ableton Live I have templates with all my inputs, outputs and main routing there all the time. It really is a dream come true in terms of how smoothly it's all working."

During the coronavirus pandemic lockdown, Taylor has been hosting a webstream from Studio Bonsai on the Twitch platform three times a week, during which he provides insight into his creative process, speaks with artists and other creators and tests gear and technology. "So I've just set up a streaming PC as well," he says. "I'm now using Dante to link the two computers together. Dante Virtual Soundcard can handle some of my routing from my main workstation computer to that PC, which has all the broadcast software."

He has also implemented Rogue Amoeba's Loopback software. "It lets me handle

the additional level of complex routing between applications and between computers. But it's using the Red 8Pre's 64-channel interface as its journey in and out of the computer, and then Dante as the way to shuttle it over to the PC as well."

On that note, he says, "The new RedNet control software that the development team at Focusrite made is really, really great. They've made an application that makes a lot of complex routing really, really simple."

Taylor is additionally sending eight channels of ADAT into his modular synthesizer, he says. "It has a module by Expert Sleepers that allows me to use Ableton Live's control voltage tools. So the same system that's bringing in my vintage Russian microphones, Neve channels and Tube-Tech compressors is also sending stuff out to really weird, esoteric digital audio devices that allow me to control a huge Eurorack modular system."

As an early adopter of digital audio gear, Taylor says that he has long been wary of converters. "I would avoid converters as much as possible, but I'm very happy with how these Focusrite interfaces sound. It hits a level of quality where I know it's not messing anything up for me - and I think people forget how easy it is for your audio to get messed up."

Indeed, he has confidence in the accuracy and transparency of the signals in his monitoring path whether they are being sent from the Red 8Pre digitally or via its converters. "I have a high-end Grace Design m905 monitoring unit and the fact that the Red 8Pre also has really good digital connectivity lets me use Grace's mastering-grade single stereo converter, which I listen to all my mixed stuff through. But I have no qualms about my monitor mixes and sources coming up on different aux inputs on the Grace unit that are coming out of the analog outputs of the Red 8Pre."



Taylor is an ardent collaborator and a self-described “technical enabler” for artists. “I tend to work a lot with people who are somewhat interested in rubbing a little bit between different genres and even different technological situations. I’ve done a ton of traveling, and I think all the different global influences really have a big effect on my perspective and how I hear music,” he says.

With a credit list that already includes GRAMMY-nominated releases by Björk, The Prodigy and U.N.K.L.E. and projects with The Killers, Arcade Fire, TR/ST, The Temper Trap and Dizzy, Taylor is currently bringing his production and mixing talents to bear on a new album by Colombia’s Bomba Estereo. “And I just wrapped a second album with an Australian artist called Odette,” he says. “I produced her first album as well. I produced about 70% of this one and mixed all of it. I really love her as an artist and believe in her really long term.”

He adds, “I’m also in the process of launching a label, which is mostly for leftfield collaborations that I’ve done with artists that don’t really fit anywhere else. I’m really excited about that.”

www.pro.focusrite.com