

AETA 4MinX

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AETA 4MinX 8-Track Location Recorder

Flexibility is key with this new mixer / recorder from pedigree French manufacturer AETA. The 4MinX can be just about anything you want it to be. Record to multiple file formats from multiple sources simultaneously? Yes. Alistair McGhee gives it a whirl

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AETA has been a big name in radio reporter's gear for ever but it was only a couple of years ago that I had a chance to review its Mixy three channel location mixer. While working on the Mixy review I discovered AETA has something of a cult following for its now discontinued mic amps, and I was certainly impressed by the audio quality of the somewhat physically quirky Mixy. I still think it's a great product - it just doesn't present itself the way most of the competition goes about things; and I think that is a pretty good introduction to AETA's 4MinX mixer/recorder package.

The Main Event

Stand by for a blast of spec. The 4MinX has ten inputs: four mic/line inputs plus a separate stereo line input; two AES3 digital inputs, which can also be configured as AES42 allowing the connection of up to four digital microphones. Multiple output options include: Hirose ten-way, or an additional (making two in total) five pin XLR for balanced analogue, plus a stereo minijack for unbalanced analogue. There are direct analogue outputs to feed radio transmitters, three AES3 outputs on TA3 connectors, direct outputs 1 - 4 on a nine-pin D connector and, last but not least, a quarter inch jack for your headphones.

The 4MinX is powered by an onboard Sony-style camcorder battery very much like the Sound Devices 744T, or externally by the standard Hirose four pin socket. The machine contains on board charging for the Sony battery - though the review unit was supplied with a Hawk-Woods high-capacity 7200mAh replacement, which extends the running time of this unit by over an hour. Command and control is available via a three inch colour screen, a full transport section and some custom buttons running up the vertical edges of the screen alongside a large encoder. A comprehensive on-board Ambient timecode system is available as an option.

The 4MinX is well screwed together and the extensive use of high-grade plastics keeps the weight well down. Even with a battery on board I was constantly surprised by how light it is. The pots are on the small side but then so is the package; this really is a device you can use 'over the shoulder', rather than parked on a trolley. The audio quality is impeccable. I think the AETA mic amps deserve all the praise they get. Don't ask me if its better than the HyperTastic 414... The older I get the less I worry about that. More to the point, no one should spend three grand plus on a mixer or recorder without listening to it themselves.

The mixer side of the front panel has four knobs for level control of channels one to four, and each of these channels has a pair of dedicated control buttons and simple LED metering. Also on the front panel four assignable encoders and a master control. The AETA records to SD card and can back up to an external USB hard disk (note, not USB stick).

Your Flexible Friend

The clever bit is that you can record different file formats simultaneously, with the proviso that each input can be used only once within file management."

You will have gathered already that the 4MinX is all about customisation. For instance, it is not a track-based recorder but rather a file based one. You can specify eight different file presets in the file management menu. Each preset can be mono, stereo, or polyphonic. The clever bit is that you can record different file formats simultaneously, with the proviso that each input can be used only once within file management.

Each of the ten inputs is available pre or post fader, together with the main mix, which adds up to a total of twenty two options. A fully loaded 4MinX can record any eight of these sources in any combination. So you can easily set up your recorder to record inputs one to four post fader, but have a different file setting available to record the four mic inputs pre-fader, and changing will take two seconds. And we always want to save two seconds. In fact if you



have the eight track record enabled you could record both at the same time.

One downside of the flexibility is the initial investment of your time to explore the depth of the system and choose the workflow that suits you. It also makes reviewing a little tricky as there so many ways to set the 4Minx up. It's not always easy to gauge whether you really are using it in the optimum way. For instance, you have four function keys on the left hand side of the screen, each of which can be 'shifted' in conjunction with the shift key to give you eight options. These keys interact with the plus and minus keys on the four main inputs to offer rough gain changing (ten dB steps), solo functionality, enabling the limiters on the channels, applying the high pass filter and so forth. I'm very happy with that, though I'd rather the rough gain was variable rather than coming in 10dB lumps. One very cute touch - in solo mode the Plus key selects post fade solo while the Minus key offers preface soloing; very logical, n'est ces pas?

These function keys are also available to recall snapshots and choose between monitoring functions. Press the monitoring key and you have four different monitor options at your fingertips, the shift key gives you another four. While this level of customisation is a bit fierce out of the box or in a review, a long term user will be able to set the AETA up exactly how they want it.

Grade 8 Recorder

Soundfield and AETA have worked together to provide comprehensive configuration and monitoring for Soundfield mics.

One of the main strengths of the 4Minx is music recording. Not only does it sound good, it can record eight tracks at 96kHz. It can accept AES 42 digital mics and has custom monitoring set ups for the Soundfield system available as an option. I was fortunate enough to have a Soundfield SPS200 for review with the AETA and together the system was a joy to use. I was transported back to the olden days of marching into a venue, nominating the spot for the 'honk stick' (Neumann SM69), rigging in two minutes and having a cup of tea. Soundfield and AETA have worked together to provide comprehensive configuration and monitoring for Soundfield mics. This made using the SPS200 a joy - literally plug and play. You even get graphics of the mic to help you choose the orientation set up of the software, a really tidy implementation.



Needless to say you'll want a fast SD card to whack all the data on, especially at high sample rates. And you'll need a USB drive to back up your best work when you get a chance. There are two USB connectors, one full-fat A-style for keyboard or indeed a MIDI controller like the KORG nanoKontroller, and a micro A connector for hard drives for back up. With the nanoKontroller plugged in you have faders and pots nicely presented, and Record and Stop under MIDI control; and all for under forty quid.

Price & Performance

One very distinctive aspect of the 4Minx is the pricing. AETA offer the hardware as a stand alone mixer (in the UK the price for this configuration is under three grand ex VAT) and you can then add options recording two, four, six or eight tracks, timecode, Soundfield monitoring, and the Hirose ten-way option for camera connection. The good news is the ability to keep the cost down if you want a simple system and the recording options are software unlocks. The trickier decision is while not everyone wants say timecode, we'd all like to have it for that one off job and the machine would have to go back to France for the retro-fit. On the other hand the Sony batteries are inexpensive, as is the MIDI control option.

Summing up the 4Minx is as complex as the machine itself. The recording quality is undoubtedly at the high end of the scale and if you are thinking about a Nagra 6 or 788T you should certainly not buy one of those without having a demo of the 4Minx. If your TV or Film work demands 96kHz then you should have a demo of the 4Minx. I would flag up that it is a complex machine and half an hour in any sort of rush and you won't see the 4Minx at its best. I recommend getting hold of your local AETA rep (Sound-Link in the UK) and spending some time with the 4Minx. It's a machine with a certain je ne sais quoi!

Pricing

UK Pounds, Excluding VAT

- £2,821.00 (mix only) - £3,470.00 (8-track recording)
- Timecode option: £457.00
- Hirose 10 pts: £137.00
- Soundfield monitoring option: £452.00
- 4MinX extended guarantee: £137.00

UK Distributor Links:

[Sound-Link](#)

[Sound-Link 4MinX Product Page](#)

Sound-Link Phone: +44 (0)1869 600 817

Manufacturer Links:

[AETA](#)

[AETA International Distributors](#)

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