

Allen & Heath CQ-18T £899

Can one device solve all your studio and performance routing needs? The CQ-18T is giving it a go, says **Chris Corfield**

CONTACT WHO: Allen & Heath **WEB:** allen-heath.com **KEY FEATURES** 18-inputs, 8-outputs, 7" touchscreen, USB audio, 96kHz processing, WiFi, Bluetooth, Direct recording to SD card, Feedback assistant, App control



It's always baffled me that there aren't more devices that offer the benefits of both a multi-input mixer and a computer audio interface. It seems a natural fit, yet I could count on one hand the number of products that truly get it right. The PreSonus AR8c was one such device, which sat happily in my studio and rehearsal room for years. When I wanted to work free from the laptop, I could plug in every synth, drum machine and guitar pedal I wanted and it would happily whirr away in the corner of the room, facilitating totally fuss-free audio routing with tactile control of everything. Then, on the (rare) occasions inspiration struck me, I could plug it immediately into my laptop via USB and it would transform into an 8-input audio interface, recording each hardware device onto its own track in Logic. So simple, yet so liberating from a workflow perspective. So why aren't there more of these devices around? In the Allen & Heath CQ-18T, we may have found the new king, and it's brought the bells and whistles.

Essentially, the CQ-18T is an 18-in/8-out hardware mixer/audio interface, with plenty to get the home studio owner and live performer excited. Featuring eight XLR inputs, and another eight XLR/jack combi inputs (plus a stereo jack pair), the CQ-18T has all the connectivity a reasonably well-stocked studio or rehearsal space could need. At the centre of the fairly hefty unit sits a 7" multi-touch display, which gives you instant control over everything from faders to track routing. Thankfully, in my testing, the display didn't suffer from any noticeable lag or glitching, which kept my own personal nerd rage to a minimum. There's also a master rotary control knob, which switches functionality automatically depending which screen is displayed, and then three customisable rotaries for instant control over whatever settings you've mapped to it.

For live performance, the six jack outputs meant supplying on-stage monitor wedges was simple, with controllable EQ and effects on each. Where the CQ-18T really shone, though, was through its remote control functionality. Essentially, using the built-in wireless router, each performer can quickly alter levels using their smartphones, ensuring everyone is happy and



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minimising angst directed towards the venue's sound engineer. Venues, take note.

This functionality will soon be expanded to laptops via a forthcoming app too. In practice, it worked like a dream, without any technical hitches in the time we spent testing. Always nice when that happens. I also quite liked the built-in 'wizards', which helped 'automagically' combat feedback and offered preset gain and EQ controls tailored to a variety of different situations. If you don't need or want your hand holding, however, you can easily get in there and tweak just about everything.

The CQ-18T's usefulness is rounded out via the ability to record high quality 96kHz audio directly to SD card, so live performances can be captured quickly and easily. There's also a smattering of reverbs, delays and modulation effects to help colour your sound which, while they won't have the Strymons and Eventides of

this world quaking in their boots, will help in a pinch.

So who stands to benefit from using the CQ-18T? Honestly, it's rare we come across a truly useful, multi-application device like this, let alone one that does everything so simply and intuitively. For live performance, studio and rehearsal, the CQ-18T is as close to a eureka device as you're likely to find. **FM**

FM VERDICT

9.0

The perfect single device for routing, mixing, performing and producing in small to medium-sized setups. Expensive but worthy

THE PROS & CONS



The touchscreen is a dream to use: no annoying glitches

It seems to know what you're trying to achieve, often before you do

Build quality is superb. Could easily stand up to life on the road



An audio pro may not find the various wizards and automatic settings to be of use