

Audient Nero £375

As your monitoring setup grows, so does its complexity. **Jon Musgrave** takes control of the situation with the latest device from Audient

CONTACT WHO: Audient **WEB:** audient.com **KEY FEATURES I/O:** 3 stereo speaker outputs, 1 mono sub output, 4 headphone outputs, 4 stereo source inputs, including digital (up to 192kHz), Customisable speaker and headphone assignments, internal and external talkback mic options, Precision match stereo output, **DYNAMIC RANGE:** 113dB, **THD+N:** 0.0015% speaker, 0.009% headphone



Nero is a high fidelity desktop format monitor controller from Audient, designed to act as the final communication device between your DAW, monitors and anyone you're recording.

To that end it delivers a precision-matched left/right image across all output levels, and also includes headphone monitoring and talkback. What it doesn't include is DAW interfacing or input stages like mic pres or instrument inputs. At £375 it bridges the gap between a swathe of cheaper options and more expensive ones.

Robot DAW Nero

Nero supports three pairs of monitors (Main, Alt 1 and Alt 2) and one mono Sub, and connections are on balanced ¼" TRS jacks. You also get four stereo headphone outputs (on ¼" TRS jacks) with headphone 1 also available on minijack. On the input side, there are three balanced stereo analogue options (on 1/4" TRS jacks) labelled SRC 1, SRC 2 and CUE. A fourth input, ALT, is switchable between S/PDIF digital (either coax or TOSLINK optical) and analogue auxiliary (either RCA or minijack) inputs. This input also includes level trim (+/- 10dB). Nero has an onboard talkback mic and an XLR input with phantom for your own mic if you wish.

Knitting this all together is a central routing matrix with inputs and outputs either side of the main Control Room level and output metering. Additional options such as Dim, Cut and Mono are found at the bottom. Here you'll also find the polarity switcher (Pol), which when used in conjunction with the Mono button handily lets you check out either the mono or sides aspects of your audio. Rounding things off, the Talkback and Alt source options are on the left, and the four Headphone controls are on the right.

Leading lights

When you fire up Nero it quickly becomes clear that there's extra stuff going on under the hood. First up, the backlit buttons are soft-touch rather than mechanical (you can hear the relays switching



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for the Input and Output buttons). What's more, the backlight colours change to reflect functionality (orange for monitors, green for headphones). It transpires that Nero has an onboard management system that adds functionality to specific buttons (they call them Smart Touchpoints). Some of these, such as the headphone source (SRC) you simply select; others, like the monitor outputs, need to be held until they flash. Options include setting up headphone sources (including assigning talkback to specific headphones) and assigning the sub to specific monitor outputs. Dig deep and you can also make specific outputs mono, adjust the Dim level and trim the alternate monitor out levels (+/-15dB). You can also save the settings to memory in case you power off. This lets you customise Nero so that it works for your needs.

Impressive stuff. However, there are a few things to watch out for. First up, if you make a monitor

Output mono then the Mono button doesn't illuminate when you select it. Next, there's no way to select the Sub on its own. Finally, the Control Room knob, which is essentially an encoder, does have an inbuilt 'fade' time, which can be obvious if you move it quickly.

Still, these are minor issues and shouldn't detract from what is a flexible and incredibly well-conceived device, and one that I really enjoyed testing. **FM**

FM VERDICT

9.1

Nero really hits the mark: well-conceived and executed, it offers a modern, unique take on the monitor controller concept

THE PROS & CONS



Precision stereo monitor and headphone outputs

Integrated assignment and level customisation

Plenty of inputs and outputs

Onboard and external talkback mic options

Polarity switching



Can't select sub output on its own