



## RME Fireface UFX

While DAWs may be becoming more introverted with their attitudes towards their processing requirements, you still have to get the stuff in and out. **ROB JAMES** evaluates a box that integrates but also stands alone.

The DAW world shifts on its axis once again. All of a sudden native is cool. After years of skirmishing between hardware and native even players like Avid are now agreed; native works and it's getting better all the time. So, if you are no longer tied into buying expensive DSP and interfaces from a DAW vendor, what else should you be looking at? For a start, it's worth saying that interfaces and DSP that use a PCI or PCIe card are more effective than anything based on FireWire or USB. However, for sheer convenience and, of course, for laptops, FireWire or USB are the answer.

RME has long been a force to be reckoned with where PCI, FireWire and USB interfaces are concerned. The timing of the release of its latest, all singing, all dancing interface, the UFX, seems almost prescient.

Housed in a 1U box and finished in the RME house colours of blue and silver the UK£1699 (+ VAT) Fireface UFX is deceptively powerful for its size. The headlines are impressive, 60 channels of audio and a 90 channel mixer with 42-bit internal resolution. There are practical constraints on these numbers if you want to use the HD sampling rates (up to 192kHz), but the UFX is even more than this. It boasts a comprehensive and flexible routing matrix and mixer, a monitor controller, high quality clock source, very serious digitally controlled analogue preamps and some intriguing potentialities for the future.

On the front panel the left hand side is dominated by four XLR/jack combo sockets for Mic/Instrument analogue inputs 9-12, analogue outputs 9-12 are two stereo headphone jacks with abundant output level, two DINs do MIDI 2 In and Out, and there is a USB A socket labelled Memory. A quick perusal of the user manual reveals that, although this socket is not yet active, a future firmware update will enable recording to a memory stick or hard drive with the potential to record every signal passing through the unit. The excellent Digicheck suite of utilities already has a Global Record function so this shouldn't be too much of a stretch. It could be used as a backup location recorder and would make perfect sense.

Every input and output has gain options switchable individually from the front panel or via TotalMix: -10dBV, +4dBu, HiGain (equals +2dBV, +13dBu and +19dBu for 0dBfs). The balanced XLR outputs go up

to +24 dBu. The other half of the panel begins with a block of State LEDs for WC source, MIDI Rx and Tx and USB and FireWire active. A large Volume knob, which is also a push switch, sits next to four function selector buttons to the left of the very high resolution colour screen. On its right, two further rotary encoders/switches work with the display to change settings and levels without recourse to a computer.

The display is superb but titchy. This is of no consequence when displaying numbers and single parameter graphics but, when showing 60 audio meters, it's for the young with 20/20 vision. Around the back ¼-inch balanced

jacks access analogue inputs 1-8 and outputs 3-8. Analogue outputs 1&2 are XLR and intended primarily for monitoring use. AES-EBU I-Os are XLR and the UFX will also accept SPDIF signals here. Four Toslink optical sockets provide 16 channels of ADAT format I-O while the second pair can also be used for optical SPDIF. Word clock I-O is BNC and there is a 75Ohm termination switch and indicator LED on the input. A mini DIN is for the optional monitor remote, USB and FireWire sockets connect to a host computer, with USB taking precedence if both are connected, and two DINs are for MIDI 1 In and Out.

RME has an optional remote control, the ADI-8 QS, with a Volume knob that doubles as a dim toggle when pressed and a couple of buttons for setting and recalling calibrated level.

With Apple apparently going cold on FireWire and many PCs not so equipped as standard, the dual, either or, FireWire/USB2 interfaces are very welcome. Of course, it will also work with USB3 and FireWire 800. RME have eschewed a conventional off-the-shelf chipset for USB/FireWire. Instead it's developed its own solution using FPGAs. This technology enables simple firmware updates, if required, and is behind RME's justifiable (in my experience) claim to have the most compatible USB and FireWire interfaces available for real-time audio.

I really like the Quickstart Guide, silk screened onto the top of the unit along with the block diagram, 'Just fire it up!' Well, you can do that, but collaboration with a PC or Mac needs a simple driver installation. TotalMix FX, the digital mixer and signal router application, is far more intuitive than previous versions. Powered by

a couple of DSP chips it offers a comprehensive routing matrix and a full mixer with integrated 3-band EQ and high-pass filter, dynamics and reverb/echo effects. Mixer outputs can be rerouted back to DAW inputs for recording. Mackie Control Protocol is supported for hardware control of the mixer. The EQ is very good, as are the dynamics, and the effects are no slouch. The control room section even includes a talkback button. Although the mixer is resolutely stereo it is possible to use the Volume encoder to control a surround mix output by creating a 6-channel fader group that includes Outputs 1&2.

Six complete configurations can be stored in on-board memory locations and recalled, even when the unit is used standalone. This opens up possibilities of using the UFX to replace a variety of hardware boxes, for example; a 12-channel A-D/D-A converter, a monitor mixer, analogue/digital routing matrix, 4-channel mic preamp or digital format converter.

The mic pres punch well above their weight and the UFX uses Cirrus Logic A-D converters and a digital filter with latency of just 12 samples in SD. Each mic/instrument channel uses two converters to improve signal to noise and conversion accuracy.

Like other RME products the UFX is characterised by excellent engineering, accuracy and neutrality, all cardinal virtues. It might just be the only extra box many people will need for a DAW rig. It has a multitude of applications in other roles as a standalone and in conjunction with other kit. ■



**PROS** Studio in a 1U box; quiet and neutral; easy to grasp.

**CONS** Four mic pres may be insufficient for some; display is small.

**EXTRAS** Equipped with 192kHz A-D and D-A converters and two reference class microphone preamps the RME Babyface is bus-powered via USB 2.0.



It employs RME's SteadyClock and the digitally controlled preamps have individually switchable 48V phantom power. The feature set includes optical I-O, usable as ADAT port with SMUX support or SPDIF for sessions at up to 192kHz. In combination with an ADAT converter, like the RME ADI-8 DS/QS or OctaMic II, the Babyface provides 10 analogue input and 12 output channels. A headphone output is available directly on the unit and also on the breakout cable.

With one main control knob and two single buttons it provides direct control of volume, reference volume store and recall, volume dim, input selection/switching, and input gain control. The next generation of TotalMix delivers hardware mixing/routing and adds 3-band parametric EQ, reverb and echo.

### Contact

**RME, GERMANY:**  
Website: [www.rme-audio.de](http://www.rme-audio.de)