

REVIEWS: IN BRIEF



EDIROL UA-4FX USB AUDIO/MIDI INTERFACE

I'm cleaning up the studio and in between a pair of racks I find what can only be described as the world's smallest USB audio interface. These things seem to be growing out of the woodwork! Roland (Edirol's parent company) has done an impressive job of cramming pretty much everything you'd need to get audio captured and mixed in a unit no larger than a video cassette – and a Beta one at that. So what's in the diminutive UA-4FX? Let's take a tour.

As mentioned, the unit connects via USB 1.1 and is completely bus powered. Compatibility extends to Mac OSX, OS9 and Windows XP, 2000, ME and 98. Traipsing around the unit you'll find stereo RCA inputs and outputs capable of recording and playing back 24-bit/96k audio streams. 96k sample rates only support single streaming unfortunately – a shortfall of USB's bandwidth no doubt. Digital I/O is via optical Toslink connectors, which also offer 5.1 playback under Windows XP. There's also Midi In and Out for connecting the odd keyboard or 'sound module' (now there's a term I haven't used in years). Along the forward panel there's a single headphone output and a jack input suitable for both microphone and guitar impedances, along with the strange inclusion of a 3.5mm mini jack for powered electret microphones. For a more professional touch there's an XLR mic input with phantom powering. The 48V switch is, however, mounted underneath the UA-4FX.

Across the console-inspired top surface there are three large knobs dedicated to mic input level, guitar input level and overall output volume. Above these you'll find four smaller pots for adjusting the 14 on-board COSM effects ('COSM' is Roland's own modelling-based effects algorithms). These consist of noise suppression, enhancement and high- and low-shelving EQ for some basic mastering. You'll also find high and low boost, a centre-channel cancelling algorithm (to strip out vocals), a reverb feature and the usual delay and chorus effects. The final effects section provides vacuum tube simulation to serve up that extra helping of 'fatness' when required. The little tube LED even slowly glows when turned on. A nifty and capable unit that won't put too much of a dent in your bank balance. *Brad Watts*

Price: \$399

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BEHRINGER F-CONTROL AUDIO FCA202

Now this is the kind of thing that technology, together with Chinese manufacturing, should be bringing us... a Firewire 96k-capable audio interface for \$160. Yes, that's right. Forget about USB, let's just head for an inexpensive Firewire version. Admittedly, the F-Control Audio FCA202 is about as simple and cheap as an audio interface gets, which for many could well be its most attractive feature. The unit is also quite small (measuring 28 x 115 x 95mm), so portability is no doubt high on the F-Control's agenda.

The F-Control sports two unbalanced ¼-inch jack inputs and two balanced jack outputs. Then there are two six-pin Firewire ports and a 12V AC power supply input. You can plug the F-Control into the wall but the unit will happily function via bus power if connected to another 6-pin port (a 6-pin cable is supplied). Alternatively, if you're operating the unit with the (supplied) four-pin cable with a PC laptop you'll need plug in the PSU as four-pin cables don't carry power.

On the front section you'll find a single headphone output and its corresponding level control. To the right is a red LED for power and a blue LED to indicate that Firewire connectivity is functioning.

The unit will work at 44.1, 48 and 96k sample rates and 24-bit word lengths. Drivers are supplied for XP and the F-Control is automatically recognised in OSX – addressing CoreAudio directly. Behringer has lashed out on the software front, packaging a copy of Audacity (a cross-platform audio editor), along with a Behringer edition of Ableton's Live Lite (version 4).

The pertinent question is: 'how does it sound?' Well, obviously \$160 doesn't buy the best converters. Line it up against something pricier and you'll hear a narrower stereo image and a certain lack of depth in the soundfield. But whether it sounds \$500 or \$1000 worse than a more expensive product, probably not.

The F-Control is a natural companion product for a laptop, and whether it's your first and/or only audio interface, or an additional interface for the odd foray out of the studio, then you can't go too far wrong.

When you think about it... \$160... it's absolutely incredible really. *Brad Watts*

Price: \$159.99

Behringer Australia: (03) 9877 7170 or www.behringer.com.au



PRESONUS EUREKA

With the market flooded by budget recording tools it can all become a bit confusing when making the decision of 'where to spend your hard earned dollar'. I recently had the opportunity to test out the Eureka channel strip, which hit the market some time ago now, and I must say PreSonus has definitely got it right with this bit of kit.

The PreSonus Eureka is a professional recording channel strip containing a discrete Class-A transformer-coupled microphone preamplifier, FET compressor, and three-band parametric equaliser. The microphone preamp features variable input impedance allowing it to be matched and 'tuned' to all types of microphones, as well as a Saturate knob for simulating tube warmth. Standard 48V phantom power, 80Hz filter, 20dB pad and a phase inversion switch are also included.

The compressor features a variable threshold, attack, release, and gain makeup. Soft-knee compression mode and a hi-pass filter on the sidechain for frequency-dependent compression, such as de-essing. There's also a fully parametric three-band EQ with overlapping bands and switchable staging for the EQ and compressor, enabling the order of the EQ and compression to be swapped. Line, mic and instrument inputs are included as well as an insert send and return. Dual outputs (TRS and XLR) can be used simultaneously, which is cool, as well as an optional digital output card capable of up to 24-bit/192k output on AES/EBU or S/PDIF.

During a recent session I recorded several different signals through the channel strip, including vocals, acoustic guitars, keyboards etc. I was quite surprised by how transparent and quiet this unit is. The lows and highs of anything recorded through it were very tight, and introducing the compression and EQ worked a treat. Even running some of my two-track mixes through two of these boxes helped smooth out a lot of digital harshness from internal mixing.

The PreSonus team has done an extraordinary job squeezing so many features into a single rack unit of this calibre. It's sleek, well-built and performs every bit as well as many of the more expensive units on the market. For those considering any new purchases, the Eureka is not one you should overlook. Oh and by the way, if the sound doesn't grab your ears the price tag will! *Adam Ellis*

Price: \$1250

Rode Microphones: (02) 9648 5855 or bill@rodemic.com

REVIEWS: IN BRIEF



BEHRINGER U-CONTROL UMX61

Behringer's new U-Control UMX61 is a Midi/USB controller keyboard and if you're in the market for a controller keyboard, the UMX61 is a cost effective option with some handy extras thrown in to get you up and running. The extras comprise of a simple USB audio interface and a swag of software.

As far as controller keyboards go the UMX61 has a bit to recommend it. It's one of the few controllers under \$300 with 61 full-size keys (velocity-sensitive, of course), and eight rotary encoders for real-time tweaking of Midi information. Connection is via USB or garden variety Midi. Plus the keyboard acts as a USB Midi interface, allowing the control of further Midi devices via the single Midi Out port. The keys themselves feel good, although they're somewhat 'squarer' than your typical synth-style keys – much more along the lines of a piano key. A mod wheel and pitch-bend controller grace the left hand end of the unit, keeping the device relatively slim for 'under-the-desk' mounting. There's a polarity-recognising foot-switch jack and power can be drawn from either USB, a separate 9V DC power supply or with three AA batteries. Finally, alongside the mod wheels are octave shift keys, should you need to quickly extend the keyboard's range – a feature possibly more useful in the 49 and 25 note versions of the UMX. Did I mention that – there's also a 49-note (\$279.99) and 25-note version (\$199.99) of the keyboard, both of which are identical to the UMX61 in every way... apart from their key count, of course.

As for the additional extras, Behringer supplies a special edition of Ableton Live Lite V4 and a nifty little USB audio interface. The interface is smaller than your average 1x1 Midi interface and provides stereo I/O on RCA connectors. Combine this with the swag of included freebie VST (Mac and PC) instrument and effects plug-ins (in combination with your computer), and you've got a nifty little composition rig. Good value overall, and possibly the cheapest un-weighted 61-note controller available today.

Brad Watts

Price: UMX61: \$299.99; UMX49: \$279.99; UMX25: \$199.99

Behringer Australia: (03) 9877 7170 or www.behringer.com.au



BEYERDYNAMIC OPUS 89

Beyerdynamic continues to roll out its new Opus line into Australia, the latest being the Opus 89 vocal dynamic. The '89' features rugged construction, a hardy basket, and a sturdy shockmount system. It has a supercardioid pickup, a smooth top end, and a present low midrange that gives the mic its robust sonic character.

Designed with touring use in mind, the 89 is seemingly based around the TGX-60, both visually and sonically (although, admittedly I didn't have the TGX-60 with me to draw a direct comparison)... and it also has the 'big' feel of the TG – one performer commenting "It's big isn't it?". Actually the shaft is only 10mm longer than an SM58, and in my massive paws, I could hardly tell the difference.

The basket is quite solid, designed in the now-familiar Beyer style: hemispherical screw-off end, vented rear with an open-cell foam insert behind, and a nylon screen over the capsule end – I'd suggest buying a stock of foam inserts and changing them regularly if you're intending to use them as part of a touring rig.

In practice, the Opus 89 did the job nicely at several gigs, as expected. Used on a hip-hop act, it sonically outperformed two different name brands radio mics that were being used alongside it, its fuller midrange adding good intelligibility to vocal and spoken word. As a main vocal mic with a rock act it proved to be much richer in the low mids, to the extent that for some vocalists there was a need for some tailoring of the EQ to avoid this affecting the clarity, yet on other singers it proved perfectly suited.

In terms of gain, the Opus 89 consistently required less power from preamps than most other dynamic mics on stage. There were some feedback issues, mainly in the aforementioned low-midrange, but these were relatively minor.

This microphone rounds out the Opus line with a high-quality hand-held dynamic. There are three ranges of Beyerdynamic microphones to choose from: 'Classic', 'Touring Group' (TG), and 'Opus' – each of which has definite stand-out mics. Happy choosing!

Price: \$499

Audio Telex: (02) 9647 1411 or www.audiotelex.com.au