Focusrite Saffire 6 USB | £164

Saffire spawns a baby brother. ***Jono Buchanan*** finds out if it can stand on its own two feet…

WHAT IS IT?

An audio interface for musos and DJs alike providing high quality Saffire sound at the lowest price point to date

CONTACT

Who: Focusrite
Tel: +44 (0)1494 462246
Web: focusrite.com

HIGHLIGHTS

1 Great sounding pres
2 Designed with DJs in mind
3 Useful software bundle included

SPECS

System Requirements

PC: Windows Vista, Windows XP (64-bit), Service Pack 2 and above only, Windows 7 (inc. 64-bit)

Mac: Currently 32-bit only on 10.6 (Snow Leopard), Or Mac 10.5.7 and above

Latency (Minimum Buffer Size): 77 Samples

Dynamic Range: 105dB

MIDI I/O

Dimensions:
145 x 220 x 45mm

Weight:
1kg

Focusrite's Saffire range has proved popular with many a computer musician. Coupling frequently generous I/O with Focusrite's own highly regarded mic pres has proved irresistible for many. But, like other suppliers of audio interfaces, until now there's not really been a Saffire model for those whose I/O requirements are low but whose sonic expectations remain high.

The Saffire 6 USB is designed to redress that balance by providing just a pair of inputs and four outputs but as the former continue to offer Focusrite's clean, great sounding mic pres, this could just be the Saffire both musicians and DJs have been waiting for.

Making connections

The front panel provides two inputs for mic, line or Hi-Z instrument sources, with a switch to select between line or instrument below the gain dial. Each input offers up to 105dB of gain, with a pad switch on each for louder sound sources and there's a global phantom power button for both inputs too.

Saffire interfaces famously offer supremely low latency recording and the 6 USB is no different, with a minimum latency of just 77 samples. It offers a front-panel Mixer dial to set the balance between your input source(s) and the playback mix, while the headphone mix lets you toggle between the main mix, sent to outputs 1 and 2, or outputs 3 and 4. The outputs themselves come in two forms – line level outputs for 1/2, as well as RCA Phono connectors for both 1/2 and 3/4. DJs should sit up and take note – this is rare among interfaces of this type. Also, as the front panel headphone switch can be toggled to output 3/4, you could choose this as a cue for your sound sources.

Of course, this DJ-ready approach doesn't preclude the use of this interface for musicians with limited I/O requirements and there are some key features if that's your primary interest. For a start the unit forgoes a separate power supply, drawing instead from its USB 1.1 bus and then, of course, there are the high-quality pres. One of my favourite developments with interfaces of this size and kind is that manufacturers have realised they can't equate low cost to low quality and, to be fair, Focusrite have been instrumental in this revolution. Accordingly, the pres here are excellent – clean, clear and capable of producing high quality results when recording any source you can imagine.

Plus extras

Like other interface manufacturers, Focusrite don't limit themselves to just providing the box itself, as Saffire 6 USB comes with a useful bundle of 'extras'. For starters, you get the Focusrite Plug-in Suite, featuring an EQ, Compressor, Reverb and Gate, which integrate as AU or VST plug-ins.

Additionally, you'll find Ableton Live Lite 8 included, plus a series of drum loops and other audio samples including a collection made by LoopMasters as well as a software version of the BassStation plug-in.

Overall, then, a very tidy package which brings a new level of affordability to the Saffire range. If you prefer limited I/O and have been waiting to board the Saffire train, this could well be the ticket you've been holding out for. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

The perfect Saffire for those with restricted I/O needs and budgets. A quality package.

FMU225.rev_saffire 104 5/3/10 3:24:42 pm