

Focusrite Scarlett 6i6/18i8 £200/300

Focusrite are now updating their Scarlett range with further USB interfaces. **Jon Musgrave** goes into the red with the 18i8 and 6i6

WHAT IS IT?

Two new mid range audio/MIDI interfaces for Focusrite's Scarlett USB line

CONTACT

Who: Focusrite Audio Engineering Limited
Tel: (+44) (0) 1494-462246
Web: www.focusrite.com/

HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Four mic pres on the 18i8
- 2 Near zero latency software cue monitoring
- 3 Two independent headphone outs on both units

PRICING

Scarlett 6i6
£200
Scarlett 18i8
£300

Focusrite's Scarlett USB audio interfaces have continued to impress with their most recent flagship 18i20 proving you

can get great performance and channel counts via a USB 2.0 connection. The 6i6 and 18i8 I have on the bench for review are mid and upper range units with the 18i8 sitting just below the 18i20 and the 6i6 just above the more compact Scarlett 2i2 and Scarlett 2i4. There are older Scarlett interfaces that deliver similar capabilities (the 18i6 and 8i6) and although these are still available, as stock runs out the new units will supersede them.

Up close

Both new interfaces carry the same styling as the 2i2 and 2i4, including the striking red anodised aluminium wraparound case. Operational aspects are very similar between the 6i6 and 18i8. All physical connections are on the case (so no break out cables) and both units include the Scarlett MixControl software (see opposite). This handles monitor and output routing as well as global sample rate and sync settings (both work at up to 24-bit/96kHz). Both units also include MIDI in and out and are powered via external PSUs (note, no USB bus

powering), and there are front panel LEDs for both MIDI and USB activity.

One key aspect of the Scarlett design is the high quality Focusrite analogue pre-amp design. This offers plenty of clean gain for mic, line and instrument inputs. Switching between mic and line is handled automatically by plug type. Meanwhile instrument input is selected via MixControl, and here you'll also find a software controlled 10dB pad to reduce hot levels from mic and line sources, and a software gain setting (high or low) for additional analogue inputs.

Rounding things off is the bundled software pack, including Focusrite's Scarlett Plug-in Suite (compressor, EQ, gate, reverb), Ableton Live Lite, Novation Bass Station virtual instrument and LoopMasters sample pack.

Different strokes

The most obvious differences between the two concerns audio streams and connectivity. The 6i6 is far simpler, with two pre-amp equipped front panel mic/line/instrument inputs, and two rear mounted balanced TRS line level inputs. There are four rear mounted balanced TRS outputs, and the six in/out spec is completed by rear mounted stereo S/PDIF in/out. Finally, the front panel phantom power switch activates





power for both mic pre-amps, and the 6i6's main monitor knob controls the level at outputs 1 and 2.

The 18i8 as the name implies offers a larger channel count. It has four pre-amp equipped mic/line inputs with the first two also instrument capable. Round the back are four line level balanced TRS inputs and an ADAT optical input (for a further eight inputs). The main output pair (1 and 2) are rear mounted on balanced TRS connectors and are labelled 'Monitor Outputs'. Outputs 3 to 6 are assigned in pairs to headphone outputs 1 and 2, and once again the channel count is completed by the stereo S/PDIF in/out. Phantom power is switched individually in pairs, and the monitor control knob also includes a mute button. In practice,

Scarlett MixControl

MixControl's purpose is to provide control over near zero latency monitoring and output monitoring aspects. It allows you to create up to four individual stereo mixes from the available hardware inputs and DAW outputs. Hardware inputs are as noted in the main text while DAW outputs

are 12 for the 6i6 and eight for the 18i8, which gives you a bit more flexibility for routing from your DAW into MixControl.

A MixControl mix can be assigned to the available interface outputs including the headphones, so you can use it to set up headphone mixes for zero latency monitoring when

recording. But you can also use it to create static routings for standalone use with the 'save settings to hardware' option.

Finally, you can specify which analogue outputs will be controlled by the main monitor control knob; again useful for headphones or setting up surround monitoring.

So how do they stack up?

Both units are very good sonically. Mics sound clear and open with plenty of gain for lower output dynamics and

halo'. The colour is green when the signal reaches -24dBFS and turns red at 0dBFS. In use, I think an interim colour prior to 0dBFS would also

be helpful.

These are both pretty tidy interfaces. Clearly the 18i8 is firmly angled toward someone tracking multiple inputs, who also needs

discrete headphone feeds and studio monitoring. While the 6i6 offers a more commonplace six in/six out set-up, albeit with two headphone outs. Either way, I like the way they look, sound and behave and they are priced very competitively. **FM**

It's great to see twin discrete headphone feeds on both units. This perfectly suits modern recording

although the 18i8 has eight output streams, you may have spotted you only have one standard analogue output pair, which could prove limiting.

However, on the upside both the 6i6 and 18i8 have two headphone outputs with individual level control. As noted for the 18i8 these are hard-wired to output assignments 3 to 6, keeping them clear of the main monitor outputs. For the 6i6 they are shared with outputs 1 to 4, but once again with a separate output pair for each headphone output. So although the 6i6 is less flexible, as you can't keep your main outputs free from both headphone feeds, it's great to see twin discrete headphone feeds on both units. This perfectly suits modern recording practices, where you're often recording and monitoring in a single room, and both monitoring on headphones.

ribbons. Meanwhile, guitars and basses via the instrument input sound solid and uncoloured. As interfaces go the Scarlett sound very modern, so I would expect plenty of detail from the outputs and that's what you get. You could say it's almost too much, but it means you can monitor at lower levels and still hear plenty of detail – great for mixing.

It may not be that obvious from the pictures, but the 18i8 is quite a large unit, somewhere between 1U and 2U high, and the 6i6 at 50mm high is also over 1U. So, with their rubber feet, both are clearly designed for desktop rather than rackmount use.

Both units feel solidly made and should withstand regular use for a number of years. One interesting feature is input level metering. This has been incorporated into the gain knobs themselves in what they call a 'gain

SPECS

System requirements

Mac: OS X 10.7, 10.8 or later

PC: Windows 7 or 8 (excluding 8 RT)

Scarlett 6i6

Inputs: 6 total – analogue 4, S/PDIF 2

Outputs: 6 total – analogue 4, S/PDIF 2

A-D Dynamic Range: 104dB CCIR-RMS (all inputs)

D-A Dynamic Range: 102dB CCIR-RMS (line outputs)

Clock jitter: <250 ps

Dimensions:

210 x 180 x 50mm

Weight:

1.18 kg

Scarlett 18i8

Inputs: 18 total – analogue 8, S/PDIF 2, ADAT 8

Outputs: 8 total – analogue 6, S/PDIF 2

A-D Dynamic Range: 103dB CCIR-RMS (all inputs)

D-A Dynamic Range: 104dB CCIR-RMS (line outputs)

Clock jitter: <250 ps

Dimensions:

227 x 180 x 66mm

Weight:

1.64 kg

ALTERNATIVES



Avid MBox

£399

The latest MBox is only a four in/out device, but with some nice on unit features and the Pro Tools Express software bundle, it's an attractive option.

www.avid.com



MOTU 4 Pre Hybrid

£375

This gives you four mic pres, two headphone outputs, and MOTU's excellent CueMix, although there's no MIDI in/out.

www.motu.com



Steinberg UR28M

£366

This offers more of an all in solution including monitoring, their dspMixFx cue software and two headphone outputs, but only two mic pres.

www.steinberg.net

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD



VALUE



EASE OF USE



VERSATILITY



RESULTS



Stylish and, by incorporating twin discrete headphone outs, well suited to modern working practices.