

Mac PC What is it? Pro audio interface **PRICE: £430**

CONTACT: Arbitrator, 020 8207 7880 www.echoaudio.com

► **SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS**

PC: Pentium or Athlon CPU, motherboard with Intel, AMD, VIA or NVIDIA chipset, 256MB RAM (512MB recommended), Windows Me/2000/XP

Mac: G4 processor, 256MB RAM (512MB RAM recommended), OS X 10.2

► **TEST MACHINE**

PC: Athlon XP 2700, 1GB RAM, Windows XP, Cubase SX 3

ECHO **computer music PERFORMANCE**
Layla 3G

The Layla brand has been around for a long time in the world of soundcards. Is it still thriving, or has the time come to pension it off?

► **ALTERNATIVELY**

M-Audio Delta 1010
 N/A >> N/A >> £399
 Eight analogue I/O, MIDI, S/PDIF, word clock and solid drivers

TerraTec Phase 88
 cm71 >> 8/10 >> £230
 Loads of connectivity, comprising a PCI card and breakout box

VERDICT

FOR

- + Clear and simple design of hardware and software
- + Fully featured
- + Excellent audio quality
- + Full-duplex 16-channel I/O using ADAT optical
- + Rack mountable

AGAINST

- Can't use it with a laptop
- No phase inversion

Excellent performance, great sound and professional connectivity make this an excellent interface

RATING

9

Although FireWire and USB audio interfaces are now extremely popular, the fact is that if you want top performance and rock-solid reliability, your best bet is still a PCI-based system (though obviously, this isn't an option if you're running a laptop). Echo's Layla is just such a beast – it's based on a PCI card that connects to an external breakout box via 5m of translucent cable.

The box is a lengthy construction. It's 1U in height and can be installed in your rack using the two metal mounting plates that are included in the box. The front of the unit is pretty minimalist: each of the two XLR/instrument inputs has a trim control and three-LED metering; to their left is the global phantom power switch; and to the right are the headphone socket and level control.

Round the back we're treated to six analogue inputs, two channel inserts and eight outputs (all on balanced TRS jacks). There's also an In and Out each for ADAT optical (see boxout), S/PDIF, word clock and MIDI. Finally, there's a D-plug connector so you can link the breakout box up to your computer.

Putting most of the connectivity on the rear panel makes good sense. This ensures that the front panel is fast and efficient to use, and those who do

choose to rack-mount the interface will find it helpful not to have cables spilling out over their other gear.

Installation requires you to first load the drivers then plug in the hardware – it's all very quick and painless.

Plug a condenser mic into one of the Layla 3G's Neutrik universal inputs and you discover that the preamps are transparent and have a low noise floor and good dynamic range. DI'd guitar recordings sound great too – overall, the sound quality of this interface is very nice indeed.

The unit's two insert jacks are intended for use with effect and dynamics processors. However, you could use them as line level inputs and thus keep all input connections at the back of the interface.

Life in 3G

The Layla 3G is a pleasure to use. It's well built, stable and comes packed with professional features. Offering a maximum of 16 channels of full duplex I/O – all of which are controllable using the simple but effective Console 3 mixer software – this is a suitable interface for professional and home studio setups. Add a 16-channel MIDI interface and excellent audio quality to the equation and you're not left wanting for anything. **cm**

Professional features

If you use the analogue I/O in conjunction with the ADAT optical I/O (which supports eight digital tracks in and out), the Layla is capable of 16-channel full duplex operation.

Word Clock In and Out is also catered for by means of a pair of BNC connectors. This enables the interface to sync with external devices.

Layla's features are controlled using the Console 3 software mixer which is clearly laid out and easy to use. All of the occasional controls and configuration options are tucked away under a settings button, leaving only the input/output level, bus and digital mode selection controls on permanent display. This contributes greatly to the software's simple layout.

Inputs default to +4dBu but can be switched in pairs to -10dBV. Input phase inversion isn't supported, but most sequencers are capable of doing this anyway.



▲ Nice 'n' neat – just how we like it

