

RME Fireface UFX | £1,649

The UFX adds USB, DSP effects and a whole range of goodies. **Robbie Stamp** racks up and explores

WHAT IS IT?

30-in/30-out FireWire/USB interface with MIDI, DSP effects and standalone operation

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Stunning routing flexibility
- 2 High AD/DA quality
- 3 Standalone operation

FutureMusic



The new flagship Fireface UFX may have dropped the 800MBit/s bus speed of its forerunner to the more

universal 400MBit/s, but the form has only been added to and upgraded. The host interfacing has been augmented with USB 2.0, which more or less levels in performance with FW400, and there are four more channels of I/O available taking the total to 60 channels. Add to this a colour display for metering and hardware control as well as enhanced standalone capabilities and you start to wonder how much RME can really pack into a 1U rackmount.

Like the Fireface 800, the UFX sports the signature light blue and silvered exterior which is, as ever, neat and clearly laid out while feeling sturdy and well built. The protective hoop handles on the front state the very German reliability that, for me, has accompanied all the RME products I've ever owned. It would be fair to say I am a little biased by experience, but there is always an opportunity for a company to get it wrong. The front of the unit houses four preamp inputs for mic, line

and hi-Z instruments, all of which are digitally controlled through the front panel interface or the software. The two independently configurable headphone outputs follow on to the right as do the

second set of MIDI I/O and USB socket for flash and hard drives to be used as recording storage, though this function has yet to be incorporated into the firmware. The rear of the unit hosts the remaining I/O: eight TRS line inputs, two XLR and six TRS line outputs, AES/EBU on XLR, two sets of ADAT optical (the second can also function as optical S/PDIF), BNC wordclock sockets, the first set of MIDI I/O, FW400/USB 2.0 connections and a socket for the RME remote control (for level/dim and storage/recall).

Display and control

The new colour display seems a bit small at first but in use I encountered no problems monitoring large track counts on the main metering page. In conjunction with two encoders and volume knob the display doubles as a menu for setting all channel

UFX DSP

The DSP power of the Fireface provides each input and output channel, an EQ and dynamics processor. The EQ comprises of two parts: a low-cut and a three-band parametric equaliser. The dynamics also comprises two functions: a combined compressor and an auto-level function. There is also an FX send control on each channel and an FX return on each output that are routed through a dual effects engine made up of a reverb and a delay. These latter effects are useful for headphone and monitor



mixes though their quality and range is surpassed by native DAW plugs. The EQ and dynamics offer more quality and make handy tools for monitor mixes during tracking and on send/return paths to external effects. The EQ and dynamics can be

globally switched in/out of the direct record paths so they can be used for monitoring without 'going to tape'. There is a DSP meter that I maxed out with the reverb and echo as well as 13 outputs using both their EQ and dynamics processors.





parameters. The only functions not available through the front panel are routing (carried out in the TotalMix software) and global hardware settings such as latency and clocking. Though this hardware-based control is useful and surprisingly easy to get to grips with it really comes into its own when the unit is used standalone.

There are six user and two factory setups that can be stored in the UFX so a variety of states can be recalled without need for a host connection. This allows the UFX to provide multiple routing, monitoring and AD/DA conversion solutions outside of the standard computer-based environment.

TotalMix

The Fireface UFX sees an expansion in the DSP capabilities for the series with the addition of effects for all inputs and outputs (see *UFX DSP* box), though powering the routing management of the TotalMix system is its primary purpose. From within the TotalMix software the user can set up absolutely any combination of routings between the hardware inputs and outputs as well as the playback channels from DAWs.

As well as the I/O faders and mixer matrix there is also a Control Room section to manage multiple monitor paths and headphone mixes. TotalMix is too comprehensive to describe here in

— The four combo mic and instrument preamps built into the UFX are of a suitably high quality to match the AD/DA converters. At high gain settings the self-noise is exceptionally low while the high-end and transient response is clearly uncompromised. With a wide range of mics, from valve condensers to ribbons, I found the 65dB of gain enough for capturing most sources with a transparent frequency response that neither clouded nor exaggerated.

As instrument inputs these preamps provide more than enough gain and remain clean and flat. I would happily rely on these preamps for numerous tasks without requiring more 'flavoured'

outboard and even with a range of choices in the studio there is no reason why the UFX preamps would still not see daily use.

It can do anything one can imagine except make toast (that should follow in a firmware update soon)

Issuing this new Fireface with both FW400 and USB 2.0 makes a whole load more sense than just making a USB version, especially as there is more on offer here than the previous model. Having trialled the UFX extensively using both interfaces I found the FW400 performance less CPU intensive (around 10% lower) than the USB, but this may have more to do with my chipsets than the Fireface itself. My time with the UFX using both interfaces was flawless: no crashes, glitches or hangs even when running high track/plugin count mixes.

detail but in short it can do anything one can imagine except make toast (that should follow in a firmware update soon): fader/mute/solo group assignments, copy and paste of submixes between hardware outputs, loopback of outputs for group/mix capture, MIDI remote control (using Mackie HUI or MIDI CC protocols), Mid/Side processing on any stereo inputs/software playback channels, Cue function for checking any hardware output without disturbing the mix and mono/stereo switching for all channels. Oh yeah, there is unlimited undo/redo for all changes within TotalMix and full snapshot storage/recall.

Conversion quality

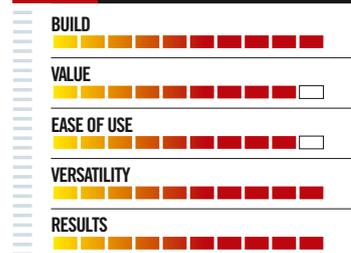
RME pride themselves on sound quality, especially in relation to price. Here the UFX does not disappoint. RME have continued to refine their AD/DA and preamp circuits as well as their software and DSP. There is real clarity and excellent stereo imaging on the analogue stereo outputs and headphone

amps. The overall conversion quality is excellent – for me it came closer than many to my Lavry AD/DA.

Peerless

The UFX manages to top the previous flagship model with quite some aplomb and offers unparalleled flexibility. The constant development and refining of the TotalMix system is key to the strength of the UFX and the standalone capabilities make sure there is nowhere this unit cannot be useful. The front panel control further enhances the package as well as providing a surprisingly good source of metering. The sound quality matches up with the sheer quality of function making the UFX a peerless recording solution. It's not the cheapest interface, but the price is more than fair and represents an investment that will truly last. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT



A convergence of flexibility, usability and sound which even RME will find hard to surpass.

SPECS

- Interface Type:** FireWire 400 and USB 2.0
- Sample Rates:** 28kHz to 200kHz (24-bit) with full digital vari-speed control
- Analogue Inputs:** 4x XLR/TRS combo mic/line (front), 8x TRS line (rear), 4x TRS line (rear)
- Analogue Outputs:** 2x TRS (front – headphones), 2x XLR (rear), 6x TRS (rear)
- MIDI:** 32 channels via 1x In & Out (front) and 1x In & Out (rear)
- Digital I/O:** 2x ADAT In, 2x ADAT Out, AES/EBU In/Out (2x XLR – can be used for S/PDIF)
- Wordclock:** In/Out on 2x BNC with 75 termination switch
- Clock Sources:** Internal, ADAT In, AES In and Wordclock In
- Buffer Size/Latencies:** 48 samples (~1ms) up to 1024 samples (~23ms)
- Mic Preamp Gain Range:** 65dB
- Instrument Gain Range:** 55dB
- Max. Line I/O Level:** +19dBu
- DSP Effects:** EQ, Dynamics (compressor, expander and auto-level) for every hardware input/output channel and a stereo FX buss available at any output

Dimensions:
483 x 242 x 44mm
Weight:
3kg

ALTERNATIVES

Apogee Ensemble
£1,443
FireWire and Mac only, less channels, but the pres have an extra 10dB of gain and if you love Apogee converters this may suit your whims.

apogeedigital.com

Metric Halo Mobile I/O 2882 Expanded +DSP
£1,849

Also FireWire only and possessing a lower channel count, but with the DSP comes a high quality plug-in suite.

mhlabs.com

MOTU 828 mk3
£649

28-in, 30-out and sporting USB and FireWire, two sets of ADAT plus DSP, this is closest on features and less than half the price.

motu.com

