



Universal Audio Apollo x6

£1,800

Universal Audio's Apollo audio interfaces get an across-the-range update. **Jono Buchanan** finds out if 'X' hits the spot...

CONTACT WHO: Universal Audio **WEB:** uaudio.com **KEY FEATURES** 16 x 22 Thunderbolt 3 audio interface with 24-bit/192 KHz conversion, Realtime UAD HEXA Core Processing for tracking through UAD plugins, 2 Unison-enabled mic/line preamps, Surround monitor controller up to 5.1 format, Combine up to 4 Thunderbolt-equipped Apollos and 6 total UAD devices, Front panel monitoring functions include Alt Speakers and Talkback mic



THE PROS & CONS



Superlative audio performance

Increased power means more UAD capability per unit

Easy configuration of multiple Apollo devices within the Console software host



No Thunderbolt cable – why?!

Cheaper interfaces available if you're not interested in the UAD plugin universe



The UAD brand has gone from strength to strength

Universal Audio's Apollo Range has become a major player within the crowded marketplace of audio interface design for two reasons. Firstly, their hardware offers a great sound, with clean, warm preamp design and interface options to let you match your needs to an appropriate hardware set. Secondly, the UAD brand has gone from strength to strength, with a wonderful and

ever-expanding collection of plugins ready to be powered by the Apollo's onboard processors. This hardware and software ecosystem has proven irresistible to many a producer, but it's a competitive world out there and other manufacturers' interfaces have stepped up recently. Not wanting the quality of their interfaces to compare unfavourably, Universal Audio have returned to their rackmount Apollo series and have now added four models in a new 'Apollo X' range. Three interfaces – the x8, the x8p and the x16 – are direct replacements

for the previous incarnation of Thunderbolt interfaces. The review unit is the x6, a new Apollo player, which neatly bridges the gap between the Apollo Twin and the 'bigger brother' Apollo X interfaces.

Finished, like the rest of the 'X' series in an Apple-like brushed space grey colour, like the Apollo Twin, the Apollo x6 offers two Unison-ready mic preamps. Its I/O count goes higher, though, as it provides an additional four line inputs on the rear panel and a pair of Hi-Z connectors for guitars at the front. In terms of output, there is a main stereo pair and six more individual outputs, which can be configured for surround sound applications, should you wish. There are two headphone ports on the front panel, alongside controls which are largely doubled by the supporting Console software; changes you make

to front panel settings are immediately implemented in the software and vice versa. Accordingly, you can engage phantom power, enable the pad, invert phase (and so on) on whichever control set is most convenient. In terms of digital connections, the x6 offers S/PDIF I/O, two optical I/O ports and word clock too. Much of that will be familiar to existing Apollo users but under the hood, much is new. Apollo x6 contains six DSP chips providing 'HEXA Core' processing, which in real terms means that the Apollo X interfaces offer 50% more processing power than their predecessors. This is significant if you're intending to use more recent UAD plugins as Unison preamps across a multichannel recording; on my Quad-Core Apollo, running several of these can account for much of the total processing



HEXA CORE: With HEXA Core processing, you can run more UAD plugins simultaneously than previously. The bundled Realtime Analog Classics Plus collection will get you started

AUDIO: The redesigned audio architecture means the Apollo X range offers a big sonic improvement over preceding ranges. These are the best sounding Apollo interfaces to date

FOOTPRINT: You can run up to six Apollos in a single system, including up to four Apollo interfaces and two further devices, whether that's the desktop Apollo Twin or the Satellite Accelerators

CONSOLE: Once connections are made, Console lets you drive your system over software. Configure inputs, decide whether to enable Unison preamps, decide on further plugins and more

THE ALTERNATIVES



Apogee Ensemble £1,800

Eight wonderful-sounding preamps and up to 30-in, 34-out connectivity. For some, Apogee's sound is unrivalled. It's Mac compatible only, though

apogeedigital.com



RME UFX+ £2,418

94 inputs and 94 outputs, with 12 analogue-ins and outs, all of the digital interfacing you can shake a stick at, MADI compatibility and an optional remote control. This is RME's flagship model

rme-audio.de



Focusrite Red 4Pre £2,305

Focusrite's preamps are, of course, legendary, but it's the Dante connectivity which is another major attraction here

pro.focusrite.com

power available. But it's not only the processing chips which have been upgraded; this Apollo's specifications are also pretty box office. Universal Audio have been back to the drawing board to upgrade Apollo X's audio performance and they've done so by building new audio circuitry. The net result offers some impressive figures, including dynamic range of 122dB on the Mic Preamps, 123dB on the Line Inputs and 128dB on the Monitor Outputs. Sample rates are supported up to 192kHz but there are developments here too, as UA have adopted what they refer to as Dual-Crystal Clocking, which provides dedicated crystals for both 44.1kHz and 48kHz and their multiples (88.2kHz/176.4kHz and 86kHz/192kHz respectively), to reduce jitter.

To state the obvious, the Apollo X series will appeal most to those not only drawn to the high quality of audio interfacing but also to the UAD ecosystem. To that end, the Apollo x6 ships with UAD's Realtime Analog Classics Plus Bundle, which includes a host of plugins available both for tracking purposes and/or at the mix stage. These include channel strips, mic pre-emulations, amplifier clones, spatial processors and effects pedals and while some of the biggest names to be associated with the UAD platform are absent there's still a great collection of processors here. The software capabilities of the Apollo universe go further – whether your system is limited to a single interface or is maxed out, the Console control software is ready to respond. Console is where individual input channels can be configured with Unison pres

and where users set whether to use additional UAD plugins for monitoring or recording purposes. The Master section controls Monitor output levels (including any surround configuration preferences now too), while auxiliaries let you configure monitor reverb effects for performers, for example. Console automatically upscales its channel count depending on rig size, so everything is neatly joined up.

In fact, the Apollo X interfaces would be highly competitive interfaces in their price range(s), even without the call of class-leading effects hosting. All of the crucial audio performance numbers have been significantly enhanced, while the new processing chips allow for multichannel recording through Unison plugins without feeling that you've already cashed in all of the onboard effects capacity.

Add in new surround sound provision and Apollo X adds up to a hugely attractive audio interfacing package. If you're attracted by the UAD concept, there's never been a better time to jump onboard with Apollo, particularly as the x6 offers as much I/O as many users will need – at a great price. **FM**

THE FULL RANGE, AND A MINOR GRIPE

The other new interfaces in the Apollo X range are the x8, the x8p and the x16. Broadly speaking, these offer the same upgrades over their predecessors that the Apollo x6 provides – 'HEXA Core' processing for more DSP power and improved audio performance. However, whereas the Apollo x6 offers surround monitoring up to 5.1, the increased output spec of these larger Apollo X interfaces means that systems up to 7.1 are supported. Across the entire range, the output volume control has been switched to a digital design and it's also worth noting that while connectivity is still via Thunderbolt (Thunderbolt 3), the connector is a USB-C type. This means you'll need to buy a Thunderbolt cable and an adaptor. Neither are provided – the only Apollo X failing.

FM VERDICT

9.4

The new series is, sonically, now a match for any rival interfaces. If you're tempted by the UAD ecosystem, this is highly recommended