

Allen & Heath ZED Mixers | from £95

Alex Blanco goes on a journey with two new portable mixers from Allen & Heath

WHAT IS IT?

Portable mixer suitable for live and studio use with built-in USB interface and onboard FX

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Affordable, portable and well built
- 2 Built-in DI and USB interface makes the mixers very versatile
- 3 Excellent sounding effects on the 10FX

PRICING

ZED6
£95
ZEDi 10FX
£239

Not so long ago, if you wanted an affordable low-noise, durable mixer for small band live performance and studio

recording your only sensible option was the Mackie 1202VLZ (mk1). But now there's a huge range and Allen & Heath's ZEDs are a big part of that.

ZEDs cater for a variety of purposes, from powered PA to 32 channel four buss options. They've just updated the diminutive but durable end of the range with the ZED 6 and ZEDi 8 mixers, plus a substantial update to their acclaimed ZED 10. All come in regular and FX flavours and the 8 and 10 include a

built-in 24-bit 96kHz USB audio interface (2 in, 2 out and 4 in, 4 out, respectively). I'm testing the ZEDi-10FX and ZED 6 options here but the major components are the same throughout.

ZEDi-10FX offers up four mono mic/line channels (with phantom power) plus three stereo inputs plus those built-in FX. The four mono channels feature separate balanced/unbalanced TRS and XLR inputs while stereo inputs come via TRS jacks. The GSPre preamps have bags of headroom and could go toe to toe with a dropped pin in the silent stakes. A&H say they are "developed from the revered GS-R24" desk and they sound nice on everything I tried through them, even my own voice.

Ditching EMOs

The first two channels feature a guitar mode, engaging high impedance DI inputs, which means less kit to worry about on the road and less chance of session guitarists/clients accidentally wandering off with your precious EMO 520. The next two channels have a Line/Pad button which drops the mic input level 20dB. There's also a low-cut button (100Hz) for all four.

Most controls are knob-based and the mono channels feature 5-60dB of gain (more than enough for sensible purposes), balance, mix level, FX-send, auxiliary send and a three band EQ. The swept-mid band of the original ZED 10 is now fixed and the centre frequencies (80Hz, 600Hz, 12kHz) are obviously tailored for live mixing. Allen & Heath's MusiQ system for automatically





adjusting the Q in response to the amount of gain keeps things smooth.

The stereo channels aren't so well-equipped, the first offering only high and low EQ and 15dB of gain, while the second and third offer only mix level (Stereo 2 shares a level knob with the onboard FX). Also, considering the obvious appeal of this mixer to small bars and restaurants I find the absence of any RCA/phono inputs odd.

Grateful ZED

The USB interface is class compliant for Mac users (PCs require a driver).

for Cubase LE for PC/Mac and Cubasis LE Mobile for iOS.

The FX sound excellent with 61 presets split between delays, verb-delays, echo verbs, plate verbs, hall verbs, chorus/doublers, phaser flangers, symphony and gated verbs. There's one controllable parameter for each and a tap tempo button. Unfortunately, when changing presets there's a second or two interval until the next effect is engaged. It would also be great to be able to route the FX internally to a free channel for basic EQing of effects and to send the FX out via USB.

The eight LED stereo level meters are a step down from the original ZED 10's 12, but it's not traumatic.

For monitoring there's a stereo RCA/phono pair with a level knob, and the signal can either be the main mix or headphone feed. And there's a button to redirect the PFL monitoring signal to the main outputs, allowing control room monitoring in the studio.

Apart from the mains input and switch, all controls and connections are housed conveniently on the top panel. The knobs feel tough and are bolted securely to the front panel but are

tightly packed and can be difficult to turn. But if you're buying this mixer you're happy to trade size for a little ergonomics. The whole thing feels very solid and

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Sound quality both in and out is excellent, with inputs wired into ST2 and ST3 and three output configurations: Mix1-Mix2-AUX-FX, Mix1-Mix2-MainL-MainR and, by default, Mix1-Mix2-Mix3-Mix4. It's also compatible with iOS devices (via the camera connection kit).

It's a nice and versatile system suitable for studio or live show capture and, sensibly, the USB Mix outputs bypass mixer and EQ controls (apart from low-cut). And for bands just starting out, there are download codes

The master section is straightforward. 1/4-inch headphone monitoring features plenty of level. By default you hear the main mix. Engaging PFL for any channel cuts the main mix monitoring and you can also choose to monitor the FX Send, Aux Send or Stereo 3 in.

Main outputs are XLR with a 60mm master fader, TRS Auxiliary out with a dedicated level knob, a TRS FX Out (from FX sends, not built-in FXwet signal) which cleverly doubles as a foot-switch input for muting built-in FX.

I know it's portable as the first thing I did with this review model was put it in a carry-on bag and take it on a plane.

Allen & Heath's ZED series of mixers are all well designed, well built, well equipped and suitable for a variety of studio, live and mobile recording duties so it's no surprise I like these two. The ZEDi-10FX is clearly the more versatile, but both accomplish the jobs they set out to do and at very reasonable prices for this level of quality. Truth be told, I find the older models easier on the eye, but in terms of features things have improved in many important regards. If either mixer ticks your particular feature boxes then you can trust them not to disappoint... for many years to come. **FM**

Stripped To The Bone

The Zed 6 is essentially a bare bones version with four channels: two stereo with line/instrument inputs as balanced XLR or 1/4-inch jack (and those DI inputs). Then there are two stereo channels offering TRS jacks. All four channels feature input trim (infinity to +15dB), high and low frequency EQ, pan, level and headphone monitoring. The output section is almost as

simple, offering a 60mm master fader, 1/4-inch headphone jack and dial (loud but not too loud), eight-step stereo LED meters, a phantom power switch and 1/4-inch outputs. It also retains the internal power supply of the bigger models.

By design, the small feature set and channel count greatly limit ZED 6's range of applications. For solo live performers, for example, featuring,

say, a mic, guitar and laptop backing track feed, it's a tough little option for stage and studio (although even then we'd suggest at least one set of phono stereo inputs alongside the jacks). But for most broader applications it runs out of channels and features pretty fast. And in the absence of any send/receive options, I'd suggest looking at the FX version.

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD [Progress bar: 10/10]

VALUE [Progress bar: 10/10]

EASE OF USE [Progress bar: 10/10]

VERSATILITY [Progress bar: 8/10]

RESULTS [Progress bar: 9/10]

If you're in the market for a small mixer you'd be daft not to take a look at these durable gems.

SPECS

- Inputs:** 4xXLR, 4x TRS, 2 x stereo TRS pairs (incl. 2x DI, 4x 48v phantom)
- Outputs:** Stereo XLR, stereo phono/RCA, 2 TRS
- EQ:** 4x three band (high, mid, low), 1x two band (high, low)
- Fader:** 1x master 60 mm
- Rotaries:** 46 regular, 1 with push button
- Buttons:** 24
- Headphone output:** Stereo 1/4"
- FX:** 9 types, 61 presets
- USB audio:** 4 in, 4 out (with three output configurations), 24-bit 96kHz
- Power:** Mains 100-240v, 50/60Hz
- Dimensions:** 333 x 275 x 97mm
- Weight:** 2.3kg

ALTERNATIVES



Mackie ProFX12v2
£299

More channels, bigger metering and FX returns make this USB-audio enabled mixer with built-in FX a strong contender at a similar price.

<http://mackie.com>



Behringer X1204USB
£125

Behringer might not be held in quite the same esteem as Allen & Heath but it's hard to ignore the features on offer at this ridiculously low price.

behringer.com



Alesis MultiMix 8USBFX
£115

An even lower price, but this time at the expense of some channels and features. But still features built-in USB audio and FX.

alesis.com