



FutureMusic



Antelope Audio Discrete 8 Synergy Core £12,78

The Discrete 8 audio interface is back, with enhanced effects provision at its Core. **Jono Buchanan** gets synergised

CONTACT WHO: Antelope Audio **WEB:** antelopeaudio.com **KEY FEATURES** Premier Synergy Core FX processing, 36 included real-time audio effects plus optional additions, 8x console-grade mic pres (discrete transistor design), Monitor outs with 130dB DNR, 4th Generation 64-bit acoustically focused clocking, **I/O:** 8x Analogue line outs over DB25 (DC Coupled), Thunderbolt and USB connectivity, 2x Stereo headphone outs, 3x Word Clock outputs

THE PROS & CONS



Wonderful audio fidelity

Effects suite is impressive and promises to get even better

Huge I/O flexibility, including both USB and Thunderbolt connectivity



No Thunderbolt cable provided

Clearer instructions during installation would be welcome

Competing interfaces find room for eight dedicated audio outputs



The eight-fold processing increase will, deservedly, raise some excited eyebrows

options. The middle of the front panel is dominated by a set of rotary dials, one for each of the analogue input channels. I much prefer this way of working than offering a single gain dial with a button to cycle between input channel selection, as it means multiple channels can be changed at once and, of course, it feels much more like working with a console, so that's a big, shiny tick.

A colour display panel lies to the right, with 'soft' buttons to its side, which allow you to move between menus and make adjustments to assorted parameters, whilst a more prominent rotary wheel is also assignable (it adjusts main monitor output level by default). A red Talkback button comes next, letting you monitor through to performers wearing headphones, whose outputs can be cut or boosted from their twin

dials on the front panel, alongside their connectors.

Round the back, the input/output options give some indication of how seriously this interface would like to be considered. The remaining six analogue input channels are joined by two dedicated re-amp outputs, as well as stereo monitoring outputs. Two lots of ADAT I/O connectors provide up to 16 channels of digital output, whilst S/PDIF ins and outs push the digital count higher still. The interface can run over USB 2.0 or Thunderbolt (a cable is provided for the former but not the latter), whilst a D-Sub breakout cable is required in order to access the 8 individual analogue outputs. With sample rates of 32, 44.1, 48, 88.2, 96, 176.4 and 192kHz catered for, this is an interface which won't sweat even with the most taxing of rig requirements.

The battle for mid-priced, highly spec'd audio interfacing has become ever more intense in recent years, with a number of manufacturers now offering an awful lot for the £1000 mark. Amongst the RMEs, MOTUs and Focusrites, you may have noticed Antelope Audio gaining traction, helped by the high quality of their Discrete 4 and 8 interfaces, which combine high audio fidelity with some

neat 'extras', of which more shortly. The subject of this review is the Discrete 8 Synergy Core, which is a revised and updated version of the Discrete 8, with even more of those 'extras'. Is this the interface to propel Antelope Audio into even greater public consciousness?

Let's start with a tour of the features, as this will give a good insight into just how impressively specified this unit is. Working from left to right at the front, the first two audio channels provide flexibility by offering Line, Mic or Hi-Z input



CONTROL PANEL: You can oversee the interface from its software Control panel, configuring preamps and setting up Insert and Auxiliary effects to benefit from ultra low-latency tracking

REAR PANEL: Interfacing can take place over USB or Thunderbolt, though you'll need to use a Thunderbolt connection to run Discrete 8 Synergy Core's effects inside your DAW

PLUGGED IN: Plenty of I/O is offered via twin ADAT I/Os, S/PDIF and six more analogue input channels to complement the front panel's two

UP FRONT: You can adjust the input levels of all eight preamps from front panel rotaries; so much easier than doing this with one input level dial and a button to cycle through each input channel

THE ALTERNATIVES



Universal Audio Apollo XP £2,847

The original onboard-DSP processing audio interface, Universal Audio's Apollo is still going strong even now.

uaudio.com



Focusrite Clarett 8Pre X £828

Focusrite's top-of-the-range Clarett interface offers pristine audio conversion, an I/O count of 26-ins and 28-outs and an effects suite for use on your mixes.

focusrite.com



RME Fireface UFX+ £1681

If I/O count is your thing, RME's USB/Thunderbolt Fireface UFX+ boasts a whopping 94 ins and outs. With pristine audio conversion, its only drawback is its mic channel count.

rme-audio.de

So what does the 'Synergy Core' concept offer over the original Discrete 8? Well, here we come to the 'treats'. Antelope Audio's design offers onboard DSP processing, whereby the computational power required to run host effects is carried out on the interface itself, freeing up your computer's own CPU. This is a concept familiar to anyone who knows how Universal Audio's Apollo interfaces work, for example, and it's this aspect of the redesign which has benefitted from the biggest overhaul. Antelope Audio's proprietary processing tech is powered by 'FPGA' ('Field Programmable Gate Array') chips and the way in which it differs from other systems which handle their own onboard processing is that the FPGA chip can handle multiple

computations simultaneously, rather than one after another. This allows for multiple effects processors to run at once, with incredibly low latency during real-time monitoring. The Synergy Core offers the FPGA chip and two dedicated DSP chips, which allow up to 64 effects to be processed on the Discrete 8 Synergy Core interface, at any sample rate, at once. This is an eight-fold processing increase over the Discrete 8 Basic model and will, deservedly, raise some excited eyebrows. As far as those effects (and future inclusions) are concerned, see below.

If you were to make a checklist of 'must have' ingredients for an audio interface, you'd start with audio quality. The Discrete 8 Synergy Core sounds wonderful. The onboard mic

pres are open, smooth and rich, and they offer 121dB of dynamic range. Your next requirement might well be connectivity, to ensure your interface can accommodate your existing I/O needs and be expandable as those needs develop. Again, another box is ticked here. With eight analogue ins/outs, as well as up to 16 additional channels over ADAT plus S/PDIF, this is an interface designed with expandability at its centre. Next might come effects provision. It's common, these days, for an audio interface to offer its own effects suite, but it's much less common for those effects to be as extensive as this, and rarer still for DSP-processing to be handled internally. Discrete 8 Synergy Core couples Antelope Audio's proprietary FPGA's chips with dedicated DSP processors to provide an impressive amount of ultra low latency processing, which will prove equally popular at the tracking and mixing stages.

In short, Antelope Audio have got a winner here. If they can back up the hardware capabilities with a growing roster of third-party ratified effects (as looks likely), the Discrete 8 Synergy Core could prove a real hit. **FM**

EFFECTS APLENTY

Discrete 8 Synergy Core ships with 36 included effects, covering an array of guitar amps, alongside a handful of compressors, EQs, plus reverb and mastering tools. As was true for Universal Audio as the UAD platform began to take shape, much will depend on third-party partnerships, to see how the ecosystem around Discrete 8's effects provision develops. Early signs are good. The latest addition to the effects line-up is a 'Synergy' branded version of Auto-Tune, developed with Antares, while BAE, Lang and Gyraf Audio have also endorsed the platform. If you're happy with 'non-branded emulations', you can buy individual processors for between 55 and 95 euros direct from the Antelope site, meaning the price points are much lower (mostly) than UAD's. Notably, however, the endorsed AutoTune is 249 euros and may indicate the shape of things to come.

FM VERDICT

9.1

An impressive platform: audio conversion is precise and the I/O configuration is deep. The future looks bright for Discrete 8