



Arturia PC MAC MiniFuse 1 & 2 £89/£129

If you're in need of a sturdy and compact audio interface, Arturia might have a firecracker or two for you. Stand back and light the fuses

> One part of the hobby or entertainment market which has ballooned exponentially in recent times is the home recording market. This leads us to two conclusions: 1) that there's an incredible appetite for good quality, budget audio interfaces, and 2) that there was a lot of music being made last year.

Lighting the fuse!

Arturia's first foray into the audio interface market came after many years of development, via the AudioFuse. This relatively substantial and capable product has been quite a success, spawning similarly branded devices, and competing at a price point that is occupied with some serious contenders.

Arturia's newest batch of interfaces provides a completing of the circle; MiniFuse 1 and 2 are smaller, tidier versions of the larger AudioFuses, with less functionality, but with everything you realistically need for great results.

Let's start with the build quality; the MiniFuses are both very sturdy, with a chassis which will withstand plenty of knocks. They are

perfect for throwing in a laptop bag, and an even better prospect when you consider that they are USB-powered, so don't require the additional accessory of a power supply brick. Both interfaces are USB-powered, and conform to USB 2 protocol, but wisely adopt a USB-C connection point, along with a USB-A style thru-hub, which is useful for adding USB keyboards or sticks, if you're out of ports elsewhere.

These two interfaces are intrinsically the same, operating at a sampling rate of up to 192kHz and depth of 24-bit, with the main difference being the number of available inputs. The MiniFuse 1 adopts a single combo XLR and 1/4" jack connector, so you can connect mics, guitars and keyboards, but in a mono-centric capacity. MiniFuse 2 doubles the input quota, while adding a couple of other niceties. Both units feature +48V phantom powering, which in itself is incredibly clever! How do you generate 48 volts of power, from a USB power source? Very clever indeed!

Both units also include a front-mounted headphone jack, with accompanying volume

control, while a larger pot governs monitoring level, via the L/R audio output on the rear, in a 1/4" mono-jack format. MiniFuse 1 also includes a 'direct source' button, which allows low-latency performance monitoring while recording.

Meanwhile, MiniFuse 2 adopts a see-saw pot for the same purpose, allowing the dictation of balance between playback and live signal. The larger of the two units also includes MIDI I/O through the use of conventional 5-pin connectors, which will be of great use to anyone who's working with more conventional hardware, but wishing to use traditional MIDI connection points.

Audio Fusion

Upon taking the Fuses out of the box and plumbing them into our system, they quickly spring to life. Arturia are keen to point you in the direction of their website, for registration, but we needn't have worried; we tested with a relatively up-to-date Mac, using a single included USB-C cable. Thanks to their class-compliance, Logic Pro X (our DAW of choice for

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this test) immediately identified the interface, and we were away without any additional software or drivers to install.

Our first audition involved playing back on-screen audio through the MiniFuse, while comparing to other interfaces. Initial tests reveal a relatively colourful signal; the bottom end feels slightly loose and flabby, with what feels like a little bulge in the low-end mids. Surprisingly, the top end did not seem to swell to a similar extent, but the overall picture is of a sonic spectrum which is gratifying, albeit a little coloured and bloated at a couple of frequency points. We're being hyper-picky here, but in doing so, we have to reflect on the budget price point - and for the money, there is no doubt that these perform well.

Adding a microphone into the equation, we tried recording some trombone and vocals. Using a good quality budget condenser, both signals performed pretty admirably, but there is a slight lack of depth, especially in the mid range. This is hardly much of a surprise, as the mic-pres are also at the budget end. In *Star Trek* terms, it's running on auxiliary power, supplied by a mere USB cable. It's a perfectly usable signal path, but could considerably be improved with the addition of some form of voice channel pre/compressor.

Check the connection

One constant with any USB-powered audio component is that you sometimes have to be a little careful with your plug-in points. We initially plugged the MiniFuses into a top-notch Thunderbolt hub; this resulted in quite a bit of erroneous background noise, which we eradicated by connecting directly to our laptop. This absolutely has everything to do with our setup and cable organisation, but it may have to be a consideration for any personal setup, where there are plenty of USB requirements. One other bizarre point is a lack of any reference to iOS connectivity. We plugged our review Fuses into an iPad Pro via USB-C, and were pleasantly surprised to discover full functionality and compatibility. This might still be under testing at Arturia, but it seemed to work seamlessly.



Bag-a-bundle-o'-software

As if the prospect of a feature-laden MiniFuse interface isn't enough, at this competitive price point, Arturia's worthy desire to ensure that you have everything you need to get going helps to seal the deal.

All MiniFuse interfaces guide you in the direction of registration with Arturia, at which point you will be able to download a very large bundle of software, much of which offers considerable use outside of simple recording, no matter where you intend to roam musically.

Firstly, there's a free DAW in the shape of Ableton Live Lite. While many OS platforms will offer their own

freebies, (and in the case of Mac OS, GarageBand is an excellent starting point) the option to jump on a popular commercial DAW is tempting.

But that's not all; Analog Lab Intro brings plenty of vintage synth nostalgia to your desktop, while Guitar Rig 6 LE will provide guitarists with plenty of cab and effect simulations. Whichever camp you're in, the Arturia FX bundle offers preamps, plates, tape echoes and chorus, for thickening up those recordings. This is quite a package, none of which should be sniffed at, with the latter plugins being open to use in other DAWs, should you move up the DAW food chain.

Ignition!

The MiniFuses are undeniably competent interfaces; their exceptionally sturdy build quality, coupled with mainstay features, provide a tidy package which works straight out of the box. A third unit, MiniFuse 4, is due next year and you can probably guess the number of inputs on offer. This could be important, depending on your intended use. If you need a cheap little box to take on the move, the MiniFuse 1 is ideal, but the added MIDI extras that complement MiniFuse 2 make it a better prospect for studio use, as long as two simultaneous inputs are enough for you. Otherwise, that's where Arturia's forthcoming biggest brother could help you out! **cm**

Web arturia.com

Alternatively

Audient iD4 Mk2
£119

Another class-act within the budget interface market

Focusrite Scarlett Solo
£99

A range that also offers several I/O options, with the Solo being the budget mono-input version. Another robust performer

Verdict

For Convenient input via XLR/1/4" jack
Bundled software is superb
No PSU required - USB powered
Portable and class compliant

Against Slightly lacks sonic solidity
Can be noisy, depending on USB used

Both of these units are budget heavyweights, each providing an inexpensive interface solution, with a large menagerie of really useful software