Antelope Zen Tour Synergy Core €1995

Fancy a compact premium interface with onboard DSP? **Jon Musgrave** sizes up Antelope Audio's latest release

CONTACT **WHO:** Antelope Audio **WEB:** antelopeaudio.com **KEY FEATURES** **I/O:** 8-in/14-out interface, 4 mic/line inputs, 4 instrument/line inputs, Thunderbolt 3 and USB 2.0 connectivity (32 audio channels and 24 respectively), 4x DSP and 2x FGPA processors, 36 included onboard FX, 24-bit up to 192kHz operation, **DIMENSIONS:** 255 x 168 x 62mm, **WEIGHT:** 1.6kg

Antelope Audio is one of a small group of manufacturers that produce premium audio interfaces with onboard processing. In 2019 they launched an improved architecture, Synergy Core, that uses both FGPA and DSP chips to deliver near zero latency onboard processing during recording or mixing. Zen Tour is their 8-in/14-out compact desktop-style interface and this has now been upgraded to Synergy Core with 2 FGPA and four DSP chips delivering up to 256 FX instances.

The overall feature set is similar to its predecessor. On the front you get four DI inputs (switchable to line level if required), two individually configurable HP outs and two handy transformer-based re-amp outputs, so you can send your DI back to a guitar amp input. On the back are four combi XLRs for mic/line ins, one pair of monitor outputs on ¼" TRS jacks, S/PDIF in/out, ADAT in/out and eight line-outs on 25-pin D-type. All line outs are DC-coupled for use with CV-based synths. Computer interfacing is via Thunderbolt 3 or USB 2.0, and Thunderbolt is backwards compatible if you use a supported converter cable. Note the maximum stream count is 32 using Thunderbolt and 24 using USB.

Operationally, Zen Tour Synergy Core is primarily software-driven using the large encoder knob, three buttons (Gain, Headphones and the assignable Antelope button) and touch screen. I'm not a big fan of this concept but it works really well and lets them cram massive functionality in a compact box. Touchscreen options include selecting, muting and adjusting input, headphone and monitor levels, choosing which signal levels to monitor, assigning the Antelope button and using the inbuilt talkback feature. However, for more extensive changes including routing and FX processing you need to use the desktop Control Panel application. This uses a colour-coded drag 'n' drop methodology for routing connections and assigning effects. There are 32 AFX slots and each slot can run up to eight effects.

It comes bundled with 36 effects, including preamps, EQs, compressors, guitar amps and support for Antelope's Edge and Verge

modelling mics. The design of these is first class with some classic hardware emulations. Further effects can be purchased and include Antares Auto-Tune Synergy and further hardware emulations. There's also the AFX2DAW extension, which adds direct plugin style access to the Synergy Core AFX from your DAW (Thunderbolt for Apple only for now).

With a DSP-supported interface, it's easy to get wrapped up in the bells and whistles and overlook its main purpose. Thankfully Zed Tour Synergy Core delivers fantastic fidelity, with discrete ultra-linear preamps and premium clocking courtesy of Antelope's acoustically-focused clocking. The drivers also deliver minimal round trip latency times which makes DAW-based monitoring a realistic option.

Overall, Zen Tour Synergy Core is an incredibly capable unit that is pretty easy to use and sounds fantastic. Yes, it's expensive but you're certainly getting a lot for your money. **FM**

It's easy to get wrapped up in the bells and whistles and overlook its main purpose

THE PROS & CONS

+

Crystal clear discrete mic preamps

Excellent selection of onboard processing

Highly flexible routing

Compact desktop footprint

Integrated talkback and mic

−

Expensive

FM VERDICT

9.2

Zen Tour is a wonderfully compact yet impressively powerful interface that delivers flexibility and sonic finesse in equal measure