



Native Instruments Complete Audio 1 & 2

£79/109



Differing only in the specification of their inputs and outputs, one of these two audio interfaces should satisfy your basic recording needs

> Native Instruments' new two-strong line of entry level audio interfaces (the eight-year-old Complete Audio 6 can't really be considered part of the same range) is aimed squarely at newcomers to music production and recording.

The Complete Audio 1 and Complete Audio 2 are both 2-in/4-out bus-powered USB 2.0 boxes, differing only in the nature of those ins and outs. Made entirely of black plastic, they're aesthetically styled to sit alongside NI's latest Maschine and Complete Kontrol hardware, with the reflective halves of their top panels housing LEDs for two input ladder meters, USB connection and 48V phantom power, and the matt halves playing host to big output volume knobs. They both weigh just 360g, and measure 140mm wide and 52mm high, but the Complete Audio 1 is the slightly deeper of the two at 117.5mm versus 112mm. In summary, both Complete Audios look fab, and feel reassuringly solid yet conveniently light.

The same but different

Each Complete Audio interface has a single stereo headphones output and two main outs. With the Complete Audio 1, the latter are on RCA phons - appropriate for DJ mixers and domestic/low-end systems - while the Complete Audio 2 puts them on 1/4" jacks, for serving professional studio monitors and the like. The big knob on top controls the main out level, and

the headphones get their own volume control on the front panel.

Both interfaces can accept two simultaneous channels of input, with separate Gain knobs for each. With the Complete Audio 1, one input is on an XLR with optional 48V phantom power, and the other is on a 1/4" jack, switchable between line and instrument level. Ideal for recording a guitar and a vocal mic at the same time.

The Complete Audio 2 ramps up the versatility considerably, with two combi XLR/jack inputs, both phantom powered and independently switchable between instrument and line levels. Capture two mics, or bass and guitar, or the left and right outs of a synth, etc.

Latencies are in line with USB 2.0 expectations, from 7.55ms round trip at 44.1kHz with a 32-sample buffer, to 51.8ms at 1024 samples. Direct monitoring is supported by both interfaces, so you can hear yourself sing and/or play directly through the hardware with no latency (or plugin effects, of course), before the signal reaches the computer. The direct signal is blended with the DAW signal using the Input/Host mix knob, but unhelpfully, it only appears at the headphone output, not the main outs. Very strange and certainly not ideal.

Complete package

The inability to use direct monitoring through the main outs is a definite point of note for

anyone considering either Complete Audio interface, and could well be a dealbreaker for some, unfortunately.

Assuming you can live with that, though, it's got to be said that the combination of the small price tags, high audio quality and impressive software bundle make both of NI's diminutive boxes very solid offerings for the fledgling singer-songwriter or electronic producer who's looking to buy themselves their first audio interface. They also make eminently portable mobile recording systems for the more experienced user. **cm**

Web native-instruments.com

Alternatively

Focusrite Scarlett 2i2
cm181 » 9/10 » £130

Identical in spec to the Complete Audio 2 but with a better direct monitoring setup

Steinberg UR22 MkII
NA » NA » £111

Also very similar to the Complete Audio 2, but with the addition of 5-pin DIN MIDI I/O

Verdict

For Very small and light

Great sound quality

Recording at up to 192kHz

Attractive design and finish

Good software bundle

Against Direct monitoring to headphones only

Everything the music production novice needs to get started, and a very viable mobile solution for laptop recording

Bundle of fun

Both Complete Audios ships with the same sizeable collection of bundled software.

Ableton Live 10 Lite is a cut-down version of Ableton's ubiquitous DAW, with eight audio and MIDI tracks, and a healthy selection of instrument, audio effect and MIDI effect devices. It also offers the vast majority of the full Live 10 experience in terms of features and workflow.

The rest of the bundle comes from NI themselves. Monark is a Minimooq emulation

(8/10, cm191) that serves as the perfect introduction to virtual analogue synthesis; while Maschine Essentials is the full Maschine software with a reduced sound library. Complete Start comprises 15 Kontakt Player and Reaktor Player instruments, as well as the Supercharger compressor and Guitar Rig 5 Player effects plugins.

Last but not least, you also get two months of Sounds.com access and £22 to spend in the NI Online Shop.