



RME Fireface UFX+



The new RME Fireface UFX+ is here. Could it be the best interface about? With its sublime sound and workflow, top producer **Marc JB** puts this stellar studio wonder through its paces...

Details

Manufacturer RME
Price £2,220
Contact
www.rme-audio.de
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Features

- Pro-level Thunderbolt/USB 3 audio interface
- 94 Input, 94 Output channels
- 12x Analogue I/O
- 4x Instrument/Mic Preamp
- AES/EBU I/O
- 2x ADAT I/O
- Word Clock I/O/MADI Coaxial
- MADI optical I/O
- TotalMix FX
- Direct USB recording
- Optional USB remote control

These days, there's a bewildering choice of interfaces available on the market. We're at a particularly fortunate time to have good-quality secondhand gear at bargain prices and the features of new interfaces are very high-spec. So what sets the RME Fireface UFX+ above the crowd – what makes this such a sublime and silky bit of kit and worth the price tag?

Let's take a look at the specification, first of all – this is a monster of an interface, as it can handle 188 channels of inputs and outputs (yikes!), that's mic'ing up 10 simultaneous drumkits with room to spare. Looking at inputs, on the front panel there are four mic/line inputs all with switchable phantom power; to the rear, we have eight line inputs, a MADI (Multichannel Audio Digital Interface, not Musical Analog Digital Input) which can handle 64 channels at 24-bit 48kHz, AES/EBU which gives up two channels, 2x ADAT Optical giving 16 channels, 24-bit up to 48kHz. Outputs-wise, we have 2x stereo headphone connections on the front panel, 8x balanced line outputs including two on XLR, 64x MADI, 16x

ADAT and 2x AES; that is a pretty crazy channel count. If the sample rate is increased, the channel count drops as the individual bandwidth increases, at 192kHz, the MADI count drops to 16 channels and the ADAT drops to 2x2 channels. The UFX+ connects via Thunderbolt or USB 3 to the computer and works with pretty much any DAW using the drivers in the TotalMix FX software (we'll

input of 28 channels, which is enough for most studio sessions. If you need more, MADI is there to help. The all new AD/DA converters have improved SNR and THD values and there is a new PAD-free mic circuit design, with +18dBu max input level and 75dB gain range to cope with some very loud and quiet sources. Check this out – if you pop a USB thumb drive into the front of the unit,

This is a monster interface that can handle 188 channels of inputs and outputs

get into that later). In USB 2 mode, the channel count drops slightly, as only so much can be squeezed through USB 2 to the computer. To expand the physical channel count, the UFX+ allows connection of many third-party digital and analogue I/O solutions, including ADAT converters and multiple MADI devices. Connecting in two ADAT mic pres will give a physical

you can record 76 channels down onto the drive with all the audio files time-stamped, meaning the UFX+ can work on its own, without a computer. **Total control** Okay, so that's all the tech blurb out of the way. Let's have a look at TotalMix FX, RME's computer mixing interface. RME claim that TotalMix FX will completely

replace a standard studio mixer. Just before I plugged in the UFX+, I was working on a Mackie Onyx 1604i with 16 Channels I/O; the Mackie FireWire had packed up and I was feeling a little dubious about moving over to an entirely virtual mixing environment. I watched a couple of YouTube tutorials on how TotalMix works and, after a little practice, I got the hang of it. It's very

settings section, where control over the inbuilt reverb, delay, direct recording, scene memories etc can be accessed. The input channels have great pro features, they can be grouped into stereo channels, so changing a parameter will affect both channels or they can be mono. We also have pan, mute, solo, gain, auto gain set, 48v (mic channels only), width (on stereo), FX

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intuitive... in fact, I love it. Yes, ladies and gents, TotalMix FX has just changed my studio life – it's so easy to use and incredibly powerful. TotalMix FX is organised into four parts; physical input channels; software playback channels (outputs from your DAW); physical output channels (including speakers, headphones, external outboard FX, etc...) and the

send, mid-side processing (for stereo mic techniques) and phase. There's an EQ section with three-band parametric and high/low shelving, and a fabulous dynamics section with a compressor and expander. In default settings, the EQ and dynamics are not sent to the computer; these are primarily to give headphone and monitor mixes more flexibility for the performer, however

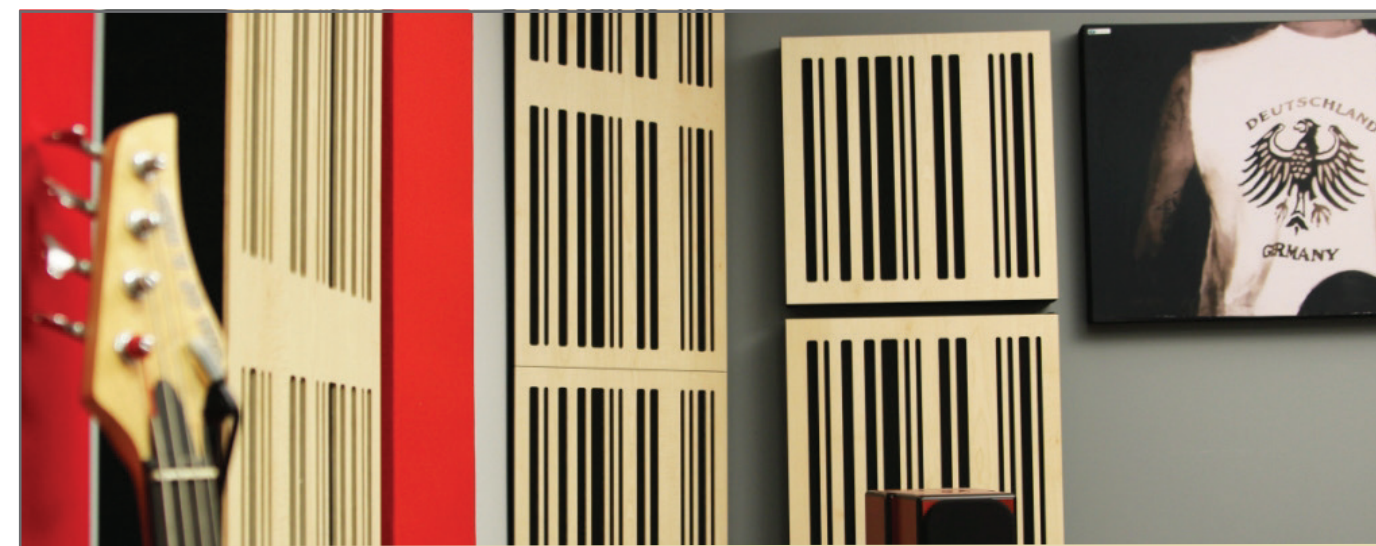
Alternatives

With a list price of £2,329, there are a few alternatives in a similar price bracket: Universal Audio Apollo 16 16x16 I/O which also has UAD's plug-ins, SSL Logic Alpha-Link MADI with PCIe card with plenty of I/O via D-Sub connectors, Focusrite Red 4Pre, Apogee Ensemble Thunderbolt 2 – and, of course, you can still have the benefit of TotalMix FX with some of RME's other products, including the MADIface XT and the small but powerful MADIface Pro.

they can be switched into the signal path to record onto the DAW. The EQ is clean and clear, excellent for creating air in headphone mixes when using old dull, spit-filled mics. This is also great for making a drum-monitor mix with the mix compressed and EQ'd.

Work it

The playback channels also have many features similar to the input channels. In my workflow, I wouldn't use so many of these features on the playback channels, as I just want to hear the audio coming out of my DAW clean. The output channels also have all the features, and EQ at this stage is brilliant if you want to notch out a nasty room →



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→ resonance or give some harsh speakers a little less 4kHz; dynamics would also be perfect here, to give a level of speaker protection if you're renting out your studio to some DJs. (Incidentally, DJs, look after your ears. Most of my DJ mates are missing all the treble. Get in-ear monitors – it takes a while to get used to, but you'll save your hearing.)

Reverb and delay are clear and clean and can be crafted to your liking with a generous choice of parameter control. And here is the real sweet spot when it comes the the UFX+ and TotalMix: ANY input can be routed to ANY output. This means that for every physical stereo output you have, you can make a separate monitor mix. The singer can have more of themselves, so can the lead guitarist, and the drummer can have as much click track as he likes! It's very simple, just click on the output to set up and then create your mix from the input channels.

An iPad can be connected to the UFX+, giving total control over the mixer interface using RME's TotalMix app. Also, RME have an advance remote control which can be set up to adjust volume, speaker selection, talkback, muting mics etc... very handy on the fly when in a recording session.

There are plenty of other features like Loopback, which sends the whole mix with all live channels and playback channels to your DAW... but enough of the dazzling array of features. What's it like to use?

Last week, I recorded an album in my live room, I had a small band called Earth with two female singers on acoustic guitar; then, tracking other instruments such as cello, hang and harp on top. First of all, the sound is very clean from Cubase to my Focal SM9 speakers. With all the mics and keyboards plugged in, it's very easy to set up the mic gains properly using TotalMix FX, also there was plenty of



TotalMix FX is RME's powerful software mixer, and you can use it on your iPad

Connect an iPad to the UFX+ for total control over the mixer interface via the TotalMix app

headroom to get a good level from the vocals to the harp, which needed plenty of gain. At first, I thought I hadn't plugged in a couple of my Sontronics mics, as I couldn't hear any hiss – but they were actually plugged in and the channels were super clean.

I created separate headphone mixes for the performers very quickly on the fly. I even found that I was able to change the level of the playback track from Cubase during recording on the headphone mix, so the singer could have the best clarity in her cans as the backing track dynamics changed. While everyone was swamped in reverb, I was in the control room listening to a totally dry mix. The UFX+ was stable, intuitive and a pleasure to have during the long hours of recording and reconfiguring the live room.

I asked some friends who are working in big pro studios what they recommended in terms of an interface and RME has a very good reputation for high-quality PRO products. Having a UFX+ simply helps sell my studio to clients, as it gives a recognised and reassuring stamp of quality – they know that they are going to get a pristine, professional sound. **MT**

Do I really need this?

"Ooh," I hear you say. "This sounds like it would work as a live mixing desk, too." And the answer is, yes, RME has made this so flexible, TotalMix FX would make a perfect live mixer. With the addition of ADAT or MADI preamps, every performer in a sizeable band can have their own in-ear mix with the versatility of EQ, Dynamics, Reverb and Delay on every channel. Plus, this can be operated with an iPad via the RME app. Plus... The whole performance can be recorded dry onto a USB thumb drive, all in the space of 1U and preamps. Stick that in your pipe and smoke it!

MT Verdict

- + 188 channels of pristine I/O
- + Superb workflow with UFX+ and TotalMix FX
- + Easy to set gain levels
- + RME's pro reputation impresses clients

- Has a 'pro' price tag
- Could go on holiday instead
- Not waterproof to 50m
- I didn't have one earlier

I want one! This is a perfect hub for a pro, futureproof studio. The Fireface UFX+ with TotalMix FX combine to deliver a sublime workflow and crystal audio quality.

10/10

