



Echo Digital Audio **AUDIOFIRE 12**

Echo's AudioFire 12 interface is capable of bringing together your computer and a whole host of outboard analogue gear. Mike Hillier is all fired up.

KEY FEATURES

- 12 1/4-inch balanced inputs
- 12 1/4-inch balanced outputs
- LED metering on each input and output channel
- MIDI I/O
- Two FireWire ports
- Onboard DSP mixing controlled via software

MEASURING UP

The MOTU 828mkII (£545) has a total of 20 inputs and 22 outputs and – unlike the AudioFire 12 – these are not all 1/4-inch jacks. The 828mkII has two XLR inputs with mic preamps and 1/4-inch send and returns; it also has S/PDIF I/O and ADAT I/O alongside eight analogue 1/4-inch inputs and eight 1/4-inch outputs. The RME FireFace 800 (£899) is capable of using FireWire 800 ports to carry even more audio channels simultaneously. It's equipped with eight balanced 1/4-inch line inputs and outputs and four XLR mic inputs, plus a dedicated Hi-Z instrument input.

AUDIOFIRE 12

Manufacturer **Echo Digital Audio**

Price **£650**

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California-based audio interface manufacturer Echo Audio is probably best known for its Indigo range of PCMCIA cardbus interfaces, but the company also produces a range of PCI and FireWire cards. The AudioFire 12 is its flagship FireWire device, with the smaller AudioFire 8 also available in the range.

Out of the frying pan...

Taking up 1U of rack space, the AudioFire 12 is an attractive device housed in a brushed aluminium case. The front panel of the interface has a simple, almost minimalist design, with only the power switch and the metering LEDs breaking up the stylish aluminium fascia.

The rear panel is an entirely different experience: two rows of 12 balanced 1/4-inch jacks line up next to a MIDI I/O, word clock I/O, two FireWire 400 ports and the power socket, providing the user with enough analogue connectivity options to link up all the hardware in a well-spec'ed project studio.

Unlike the smaller AudioFire 8, combo TRS/XLR inputs, preamps and a headphone output are absent. If you

already own a collection of mic preamps, a mixing desk or you simply don't intend to record using microphones, then the AudioFire 12 is the perfect piece of studio kit to connect all your existing gear to your computer. If, however, you do require connections from the AudioFire 8, both units can be used daisy-chained together via FireWire to create a total of 20 inputs and outputs, complemented by two auto-sensing universal mic/line/instrument combo XLR/TRS inputs complete with microphone preamps.

Thinking outside the box

Computers are not always as quiet as is required for working in a recording studio: cooling fans and whirring hard drives emit a low hum that can easily be picked up by microphones – which is why (where possible) the computer and mixing desk should be located in a separate room from the musicians and instruments.

One problem with this scenario, however, is that running long audio cables – particularly unbalanced cables – results in a sound with a slightly filtered quality and can even create a low-level hum in the signal. Generously, Echo Audio provides the AudioFire 12 with a 5-metre FireWire cable, enabling the interface to be placed much closer to the sound source – and consequently further from the computer – while the digital signal sent across the FireWire cable to the computer will not suffer from any loss of quality.

Out of the loop

To facilitate low-latency monitoring the AudioFire 12 is equipped with an onboard, 200MHz, 32-bit floating point DSP chip, which enables users to directly monitor the signal going into the interface without waiting for it to return from the computer. The mix of the monitored signal is controlled using the console software (which is both PC- and Mac-compatible) and in addition to facilitating direct monitoring also enables the user to define the recording level of each channel, output volume and what the nominal line level is on each input and output channel.

The metering LEDs on the front provide a useful means of visually monitoring all input and output channels simultaneously. Many audio interfaces skimp on metering, providing only signal and clip LEDs. By including four LEDs for each channel, Echo Audio has made the AudioFire 12 into a more useful studio tool.

For project studios equipped with a large number of outboard analogue devices, the AudioFire 12 is an elegant solution for connecting everything to your DAW. Its simple hardware design and easy-to-use software console will please anyone who chooses to use it as a hub for their digital recording studio. **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- 12 balanced inputs and outputs
- Easy-to-read meters on each channel
- High-quality 24-bit/192kHz A/D converters
- Sleek, minimalist design

WALK ON BY

- No mic preamps
- No Hi-Z inputs
- No digital inputs

VERDICT

A great interface for anyone looking to upgrade their studio and take advantage of up to 12 channels of outboard gear.



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