



Focusrite

SAFFIRE 6 USB

MusicTech
VALUE

Focusrite's Saffire interfaces have become more affordable thanks to a new USB version. Mark Cousins takes a look.

KEY FEATURES

- 2 high-quality Focusrite preamps
- High-quality 24-bit USB Interface
- 4 outputs on RCA phono
- Xcite+ software bundle
- Focusrite VST/AU Plug-in Suite
- Switchable front-panel headphone buss

SAFFIRE 6 USB

Manufacturer **Focusrite**

Price **£139**

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With up to five different models now available, Focusrite's Saffire range has got an audio interface for every conceivable need – whether it's the souped-up input count and 'Liquid preamp' functionality of the Liquid Saffire 56 or the more portable approach taken by the Saffire PRO 24. However, the Saffire 6 USB is the first of the Saffire interfaces to feature USB connectivity rather than FireWire. But can a USB-driven Saffire really deliver the same high standards and functionality we've come to expect from the Saffire series, especially at this entry-level position?

Making connections

Measured against other similarly priced USB interfaces, the Saffire 6 USB sports a similar collection of inputs and outputs. At the front you'll find two Focusrite preamps on two combi-jack connectors, instrument-level operation and phantom power. A total of four outputs are provided, split between TRS connectors at the rear (outputs 1 and 2) and four RCA phono outs covering all four outputs. The single headphone output at the front is switchable between

outputs 1–2 and outputs 3–4 via a simple toggle control – a feature that could come in useful for anyone using the interface for laptop-based DJ'ing.

Rather than adopting the complex software monitoring solution of the other Saffire interfaces, the Saffire 6 USB

A GREAT-SOUNDING, EASY-TO-USE USB INTERFACE THAT'S IDEAL FOR BASIC RECORDING ACTIVITIES.

takes the Direct Monitoring approach found on the majority of other USB audio interfaces. A simple Mixer control on the front of the unit sets a balance between a direct, latency-free feed from the inputs and a 'Playback' feed from your DAW. While this simple solution lacks the finesse of the other Saffire interfaces' Mix Control software, it's much more easy to use and more than adequate for basic recording activities.

Championship driver

Unlike the majority of USB interfaces, which use class-compliant drivers, it's worth noting that the Saffire 6 USB has its own set of drivers. For Mac users, this means that you'll need to be running at least Mac OSX 10.5.7 or later; PC support covers everything from Windows XP to Windows 7. Additional software in the package includes the Focusrite Plug-in Suite as well as an Xcite+ pack including Ableton Live Lite 7, Novation's Bass Station

software synthesizer and more than 1GB of samples. Given that many potential Saffire 6 USB users will be new to the field of home recording, this is an impressive collection of usable software.

Precious stones

Inevitably, it's hard not to draw comparisons between the Saffire 6 USB and the rest of the Saffire product range. While it's clear that the Saffire 6 USB retains the all-important front end of the other Saffire interfaces, it's certainly a significantly different picture in respect to the input count (even the entry-level Saffire 24 has an impressive 16 inputs, assuming you use the ADAT connection) and the omission of the Mix Control software.

To be fair, though, this level of functionality isn't at the top of everyone's wish list, and if you're using a computer that isn't equipped with FireWire connectivity, such luxuries are difficult, if not impossible, to find elsewhere.

Ultimately, the Saffire 6 USB is a perfect example of a 'beginner's' audio interface – pitched at a cost-effective price point, bundled with a healthy collection of software and delivering a level of audio quality that's on a par with Focusrite's top-priced FireWire interfaces. Indeed, although there are

plenty of affordable USB interfaces available, few deliver the audio pedigree of the Saffire 6 USB. **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Good-quality mic preamps
- Switchable headphone buss
- RCA phono outputs useful for DJs

WALK ON BY

- Current Mac drivers require Mac OSX 10.5.7 or above
- I/O count fewer than FireWire-based Saffire interfaces
- Omits the Mix Control software of the other Saffire interfaces

VERDICT

While the Saffire 6 USB might not have the full functionality of the FireWire-based Saffire interfaces, it's certainly a great-sounding, easy-to-use USB interface that's ideal for basic recording activities.



MEASURING UP

A USB audio interface that we enjoyed using recently was the Lexicon I•ONIX U42S (£322). This is a much more expensive solution, although you do get an extra set of inputs by virtue of the fact that the interface connects via the USB 2.0 protocol. The Lexicon also has a stylised interface that's designed to sit behind your computer keyboard.