

ALESIS I/O26

► fashion, and the metering is much more detailed than that provided on the hardware front panel.

Testing, One Two Three

Given the Alesis badge, it almost goes without saying that the audio performance of the I/O26 is very good — but I'll say it anyway. My usual subjective listening tests, using a range of commercial recordings covering everything from orchestral styles through to contemporary R&B, demonstrated that the I/O26 coped admirably with anything I cared to play back through it. The stereo imaging appeared to be very good, the bass end was full and there was plenty of detail at the top end. The headphone outputs performed equally well, and while I didn't do any detailed blind testing I found little to choose between the I/O26 and my own TC Electronic Konnekt 24D interface, with the exception that the Alesis unit seemed to have a little more output gain to play with.

Recording via the analogue inputs proved to be an equally happy process, whether using a line-level signal, DI'ing a guitar or recording a vocal or acoustic guitar part via a decent condenser microphone. Recordings were clean and clear and, in the majority of home or project studios, I'd be surprised if the

I/O26 proved to be the weak link in terms of audio quality.

All these subjective observations were backed up with a set of more objective tests via Steinberg's *Wavelab* and Right Mark's *Audio Analyzer*. As might be expected, the exact figures varied somewhat with the different bit-depth and sample rate selected and depending upon which inputs were used. However, using the line-level connections at 24-bit, 44.1kHz, I was able to measure a signal-to-noise ratio of well over 100 dB(A) and a total harmonic distortion of around 0.002 percent. Yes, you might get better absolute figures from a more expensive interface but, providing due care and attention is paid to the rest of the signal chain, I'd have no reservations about using the I/O26 for serious recording tasks.

Keep It In The Family

The I/O26 is part of a larger Alesis family, and if you don't need the eight-in/eight-out analogue format, the smaller and cheaper I/O2 or I/O14 might appeal. The I/O2 (£139) provides two ins and two outs, while the I/O14 (£259), which looks a little like an I/O26 that someone has cut in half, is four-in/two-out. Both offer S/PDIF I/O, MIDI I/O, phantom power, *Cubase LE*, solid construction and those useful insert points. While the I/O14 supports sample rates up to 192kHz, the I/O2 only goes up to 48kHz. Those with a little more cash to splash might also consider the Alesis I/O Control or the Master Control units. These feature much of the same I/O technology as the I/O series but are mounted into a control surface that can be used to provide hands-on control of your DAW.

In Use

While I did the bulk of my testing with *Cubase* on my desktop PC, I also did some brief experiments with the I/O26 using a PC laptop and a range of other audio applications. In all cases, the I/O26 seemed to perform very solidly and I had no problems with *Acid Pro*, *Sound Forge*, *Wavelab* or *Sonar*. In my more extended testing within *Cubase*, I was also

However, if the I/O26 has a distinct feature that sets it apart from the majority of other multi-channel audio interfaces, it is the dedicated insert points. Inserts are an integral part of any serious hardware mixer, and their absence from most computer-orientated audio interfaces can make patching in your favourite hardware compressor or EQ a bit of a chore. With the I/O26, that problem disappears and, while the trade-off is a somewhat bigger footprint than some of the eight-in/eight-out competition, I suspect that those with access to high-quality outboard processors will find the insert points a very attractive proposition indeed. In terms of their operation, there is little to say about the inserts; they work as advertised and, like the rest of the I/O26, with a minimum of fuss.

Conclusions

With so many well-specified options available, the exact feature set of a particular interface model is obviously going to be a critical part of any purchase decision. The I/O26 has the 'eight-in/eight-out plus digital I/O' boxes well ticked, but it has enough additional features to give it a distinctive appeal. Top of the list here would be the insert points, which make patching in external hardware a breeze, but other advantages include the dedicated



impressed with the drivers. Even fairly busy mixes (including the various demo projects supplied with *Cubase 4*) played back smoothly with a sensible buffer size of 256 samples: the system never showed any sign of strain and playback was entirely glitch-free. Overall, the I/O26 gave me the impression of being a very reliable, 'no fuss' piece of equipment.

The MIDI and S/PDIF connectivity worked as expected, but more intriguing were the rear-panel phono inputs for use with a turntable. I only had my humble (dusty and ageing) domestic turntable with which to try this. That said, the results were good — including the hiss and crackle! — so the I/O26 provides a simple way to lift samples from vinyl or transfer a few favourite LPs onto CD. These inputs are perhaps not a major selling point, but they are a nice detail.

turntable input, the very robust construction and the no-fuss operation.

Overall, there is very little not to like about the Alesis I/O26. At this price, and in terms of audio quality, it is certainly able to compete with the slew of other multi-channel audio interfaces that are currently available. If this mid-level price point is where your budget lies, the I/O26 is highly recommended and most certainly worth auditioning alongside the competition. **SOS**

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