EMAGIC EMI26 - FUORI PRODUZIONE

199,00 € tax included

Reference: EMEMI26

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Emagic's EMI 2|6 is an audio interface that can be used with Mac or PC computers fitted with USB ports, making it particularly attractive to those wanting to add audio to their laptops. The small, transparent blue perspex unit comes in a neat carry case and derives its power directly from the USB port, though a DC PSU input is provided for situations where the host USB port or hub can't provide enough current — as turned out to be the case for my beige G3 (into which I have fitted a PCI dual-USB-port card).

Though the EMI 2|6 is an Emagic product, it comes with a low-latency ASIO driver so it should work fine with any ASIO-compliant application. Currently, Emagic recommend that even Logic users work with the ASIO driver, and all my tests were conducted using this and Logic Audio Platinum

USB has had some pretty bad press when it comes to audio, as its restricted bandwidth makes it difficult to shoehorn more than four tracks through it at any one time. It came as a surprise, therefore, to find that the EMI 2|6 has two inputs and six outputs (all analogue on unbalanced phonos) and can be used for 24-bit audio as well as 16-bit. Additionally, the device includes stereo S/PDIF input and output on co-axial connectors plus an integral headphone monitoring system with 3.5mm stereo jack and thumbwheel volume control. Sampling rates of 44.1 and 48kHz are supported and connection to the host computer is via a single USB cable (included).

PC drivers have been available from the date the EMI 2|6 was launched, but Mac drivers have only just been released, which made me keen to give it a try. On Windows platforms, the EMI 2|6 supports Wave Driver (MME), Direct Sound, ASIO and EASI, whereas on the Mac, it currently works with ASIO or Mac AV. Mac OS 9.2 or higher is recommended, and Logic users will need to upgrade to version 4.7.3 to run the EMI 2|6. Driver installation is via a straightforward installer routine, after which the computer needs to be restarted so that the newly added system extensions are loaded. It is important to do the installation without the EMI 2|6 connected, according to the manual. Similarly, if you need to switch from ASIO to Mac AV, there's a driver switch control panel to facilitate this, but it prompts you to unplug the EMI 2|6 from the USB port before doing so. This is apparently a problem Emagic are trying to fix, but at the moment, you have to live with it.

Plugging in the USB cable immediately brought up a message telling me the device was attempting to draw too much current, which left me looking around for a 5V, 500mA DC power adaptor. On connecting just such a device, I was greeted by the blue power LED, and once Logic was running and the ASIO driver selected, the green status LEDs inside the case started to make sense. There's a slide switch at the front of the case to select analogue or digital input, with a further switch selecting between internal and external digital sync. If no valid external digital clock is found, the unit automatically syncs to its internal clock. The green status LEDs show the analogue/digital input mode, the sample rate and whether the unit is recording or playing back at 16 or 24-bit resolution. There are also internal and external digital sync indicators as well as 'signal present' LEDs for the inputs and outputs. The headphone output only monitors outputs 1 and 2, as does the digital output.

The audio quality of the interface is surprisingly good, being both quiet and free from digital artifacts. Even with all six outputs running, I experienced no glitching problems, and overall, once everything is installed, you just use the thing and take it for granted. Having a headphone monitoring system is useful, especially when you're working on the beach with your laptop, and of course the S/PDIF I/O is an essential element of any audio interface with pretensions to seriousness. Three different latency settings can be chosen (PC users seem to have a continuously variable slider), the middle one being under 10mS and quite fast enough for most uses, including virtual instruments.

Taking on the role of Mr Picky for a moment, the clearance around the phono sockets is quite tight, so if you have a proclivity for big chunky professional phonos, you may find it hard to push them all the way home. Indeed, the use of phonos at all for analogue audio is open to criticism as phonos were never really designed for repeated plugging and unplugging, and of course there's no way to balance a phono as it is inherently a two-conductor connector.

In reality, these points are minor and won't affect a lot of people, but I really think that as the EMI 2|6 is being touted as a 'solution' to audio on laptops, it should have included at least one MIDI port, even if using it meant shutting down some of the audio outputs. Many laptops have only a single USB port, so the beach scenario for a MIDI + Audio package such as Logic Audio might have to include a laptop, an EMI 2|6, an MT4 MIDI interface, a USB hub and a carrier bag full of batteries and jump leads! Furthermore, there's no second USB port on the EMI 2|6 itself, so if you're using a laptop with a single USB port, you're left with nowhere to plug your dongle.