Universal Audio Arrow £435

The latest, smallest, most portable, most affordable UAD-2 system ever. **Daniel Griffiths** asks, 'What's the catch?'

CONTACT **WHO:** Universal Audio. **TEL:** +44 (0)1447 765765 **WEB:** www.uaudio.com
KEY FEATURES 24-bit, 192 kHz conversion, 2 x Unison mic/line preamps, 1 x Solo DSP, Thunderbolt 3 bus power, 2 x 4 ins and outs, 48V phantom power, 20 dB pad **DIMENSIONS:** Width: 179.9mm, Height front: 25.2mm, Height back: 46.7mm, Depth: 121.1mm **WEIGHT:** 0.63Kg

Arrow is a tiny gun-metal box which slips under UA's universally loved Apollos at the base of the range. It's ideally suited to power-user music makers on the move or as the ideal entry system for those 'going pro' with UA's plugins.

As background, the UA universe is an ever-growing collection of world-class plugins most of which emulate classic bits of studio gear. These plugins are second to none, but require UA's UAD-2 DSP hardware to take their strain and free up your computer for more audio and MIDI. It's a luxurious way to make music but one that means shelling out for both hardware AND software.

Fortunately Arrow comes complete with their Realtime Analog Classics Bundle including hardware luminaries the Teletronix LA-2A, UA's own 1176, Pultec's EQP-1A and even a stunningly on-point Marshall Plexi amp emulation. The result is that you'll have hours of fun out of the box before you even think about 14-day try-before-you-buying the Galaxy Tape Echo, Lexicon 224, Studer A800 tape emulation or SSL 4000 G Bus Compressor to name but a few. The Console software manager works like a charm, seamlessly installing and getting you hooked before you part with about £150 per plug or get a 'pick any ten' bundle for £999. They're not cheap, but they're damn good.

Which is partly why Arrow is such a welcome arrival. While it's small, portable, and their only bus-powered box, it's also their cheapest, so now you've got spare cash to load her up.

At its most basic level it's a simple two-in, four-out interface with two quality mic/line ins on the back and an alternative Hi-Z (guitar) in on the front. There's two jack outs and stereo headphone out. The inputs are notable in that they use UA's Unison technology to – with an appropriate plugin in place – accurately emulate preamps from Neve or Api for example, or the impedance and gain staging of amps from Fender or Gibson. All nigh-on latency free. It's a real bonus that this signature feature has been included on this baseline box and they sound as great as they do on the bigger units.

The plugins are second to none but it's a way of working that requires shelling out for hardware and software

The box itself is half the size of a Jackie Collins novel, all metal, super rugged and a single Thunderbolt 3 lead is all you need to power up and start work. Arrow is the perfect portable partner to Apple's current Thunderbolt 3 based MacBook Pro (or less portable) iMac Pro machines. This of course will limit its audience but given that you don't even get a Thunderbolt 3 lead in the box, it's just as easy to buy a USB-C to Thunderbolt 3 which will at least let you use it on some less up-to-the-minute Macs.

Similarly limiting is the fact that Arrow is 'only' equipped with a single 'Solo' UAD-2 DSP chip while its bigger brother Apollos comes in 'Duo' and 'Quads' able to run two, or four times as many plugins. That means that big projects – think 25 tracks each with a plug or two – will max out this (currently) Solo-only box depending on the plugins at play.

In all, if you've the right computer, have simple input requirements and value quality, portability, ease and elegance, Arrow is unbeatable – the perfect gateway to UA's world-class plugins. Once you're there, you won't want to go back. **FM**

FM VERDICT

9.0

The portable gateway to UA's world. Well-built, keenly priced. But compatibility and Solo-only power may mean it misses your target

THE PROS & CONS

+

Small, rugged, well built… and 'affordable' for a UAD-2 box

One lead to connect and power, keeps it simple and sleek

The best installation and management software in the business

Great included plugin bundle with pay-to-play access to perhaps the best library in the world

−

Thunderbolt 3 limits its ability to work with anything other than the latest machines

Ultimately it's a bit pricey for a simple two-in, four-out interface

Only Solo-powered. Dual or Quad power would have been far preferrable