

Apogee has taken something good and made it even better, with the newly updated Duet 2, says **STEPHEN BENNETT**

Apogee's original Duet interface (reviewed in *Audio Media* in December 2007) provided two channels of high quality Microphone, Line, and Instrument inputs and a combined stereo headphone and speaker output alongside Apogee's renowned digital converters. The Duet 2 ostensibly offers similar features packaged in a nice new aluminium casing that complements the Unibody Macbook Pros nicely and, like the Mk.1 version, the interface only runs under OSX – though in reality there have been some significant upgrades and changes to the new Duet.

metering and indications of phase setting, phantom power, and soft limit status – the latter being Apogee's analogue limiter, which works surprisingly well at coping with digital overloads. An international power supply is provided for those occasions when USB power is unavailable, but the Duet 2 worked perfectly well when connected directly to a Macbook Pro.

Maestro 2

This is the same software that is used with Apogee's other interfaces such as the Symphony I/O, and offers the user a



APOGEE DUET 2

Audio Interface

The Duet 2

The Duet 2 itself is a sturdy palm size interface that slips easily into a bag or large pocket. It's a pretty weighty device and has a nice rubber base that should keep it firmly on your desktop. The unit's narrow depth is possible because all inputs and outputs are on a breakout cable that connects to the Duet 2 via a firmly fitting multi-pin connector. This design feature will probably be the reason some people are put off the Duet 2, as the interface is rendered unusable should the connector be damaged or lost. Personally, I'd prefer Apogee to make the Duet 2 slightly larger so that the connectors could be built directly into the casing; although as an alternative Apogee does offer an optional breakout box.

The Duet 2's inputs consist of a two Line/Microphone/Instrument balanced combi connectors and two balanced line monitor outputs on ¼-inch jacks. The front panel of the Duet 2 is dominated by a large, clickable, multi-function knob and the 'top' panel sports a ¼-inch stereo headphone output that drove everything I plugged into it at an extremely healthy, yet crystal clear, volume.

The microphone pre-amps and converters are new and based on those found in Apogee's Symphony I/O, and the unit now provides four separate outputs via either the line outs and headphone outs or the optional breakout box – which also acts as an extender for the inputs and outputs (not the headphone out - the panel HP out is always active). I could see this being a useful addition for those wanting to use their Duet 2s in an installed studio setting. The mic pre-amps provide up to 75dB of gain, and the Duet 2 worked beautifully with my inexpensive ribbon mics – which normally prove noisy through pre-amps designed for condensers and dynamics.

The most obvious change, apart from the casing, between the Mk.1 and 2 Duet is the move from FireWire to USB2 for connectivity. Modern USB2-based interfaces are proving their mettle, shifting multi-channel audio backwards and forwards, and the Duet 2 has no issues with stereo input and quadraphonic output at sample rates of up to 192kHz and at 24-bit resolution – although the Duet 2 has lower latency than the original Duet FW.

The front face has been completely redesigned, with OLED displays and two touch sensitive configurable buttons ('Touchpads') that controls output parameters such as mute, dim, sum to mono, and toggling the headphone source – all of which are set in the latest version of Apogee's control software, Maestro 2. The OLED displays provide clear

subset of the features relevant to the more limited Duet 2. Apart from the soft touch buttons mentioned earlier, you can set and review input and output levels, sample rates, and configure low latency mixer settings – which are eminently workable in practice.

Clocking details and speaker and headphone mutes can also be set from Maestro 2 along with input type, phantom power, and phase settings. It's a remarkably simple piece of software that nevertheless allows you to have full control over the Duet 2's inner workings – no manual needed here!

The Duet 2 In Concert

Once you've set the soft touch buttons and other parameters in Maestro 2, you'll most likely use the central knob to control the day-to-day running of the interface. The knob itself is made of brushed aluminium and feels positive and chunky – in fact the Duet 2 itself gives you the impression that it would survive being run over by a truck. Pressing the knob cycles through selection of the twin input channels, speaker and headphone output, while rotating the knob sets the levels – the values being shown in the OLED display along with the type of input. It couldn't be simpler, and it works beautifully in any illumination conditions.

Comparing the pre-amps and conversion to the Duet 1 clearly shows the superior sound quality of the 2 over its predecessor – which was no slouch itself – and it's definitely approaching the transparency, weight, and detail of the Apogee Symphony I/O and my Metric Halo ULN-2.

Conclusion

Apogee has taken a robust, high quality interface and improved it in the areas that matter – sound quality, ease of use, metering, and overall robustness.

While I still have some reservations about the mini-loom arrangement for connections, I use Duets on a daily basis and have had no problems at all with them. As with the original Duet, there are no digital connections and the upgrade to four outputs still makes 5.1 mixing impossible. But, as a high quality two-channel interface, you should definitely consider trying the Apogee Duet 2. **AM**

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INFORMATION

① **GB£449.00 (exc.VAT)**

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