



Apogee

# Duet 2

The first Duet was a compact interface, offering ergonomic desktop control. **Liam O'Mullane** gets his hands on number 2.

## Duet 2

Manufacturer **Apogee**

Price **£539**

Contact **Sonic Distribution**

**0845 500 2500**

Web **www.apogeedigital.com**

### Key Features

- Loads of mic preamp gain
- Solid performance
- 24-bit/192kHz
- Low-latency mixer mode
- Separate master/headphone routing

Apogee is a company with a reputation for taking audio very seriously. In the past it's created high-end converters, digital clocking systems and the UV22 dither system, while more recently the company made a move into the portable interface market.

The debut product was the first Duet. This was also a compact and minimalist interface, looking more like a monitoring control than an audio interface. What's more, Apogee's Mac-only policy coupled with the brushed aluminium finish appealed to those wanting to marry their Mac with stylish hardware.

Both the old and new Duets are aimed at recording and music-appreciating audiophiles. But beyond the even sleeker-looking case revision of the Duet 2 are notable improvements under the hood. Let's have a look at what you get for your money...

## Lifting the lid

The first Duet could be fully powered via FireWire, whereas the Duet 2 has been designed for USB 2.0 connectivity, so there might be moments when USB simply won't provide sufficient juice for phantom power-hungry mics, especially if you're running high headphone output levels at the same time. Apogee has therefore provided a

power supply to supplement what your Mac can provide. However, we successfully ran various stereo-pair condensers without encountering any issues. The first Duet also had XLR/jack inputs but only unbalanced outs. Duet 2 has TRS balanced outputs.

## Beyond the even sleeker case are notable improvements under the hood

The output count has also been increased from two to four, with two running through the balanced outputs and the other being routable to your headphones. This enables you to create independent monitor mixes or preview separately in a live situation.

Installation was a breeze on our MacBook Pro; indeed, it's incredibly easy to use this as your complete audio hub. Apogee's software is renowned for well-implemented automatic OSX integration and a beta release for Lion OSX is under test at the time of writing.

## Touch control

The stepped rotary dial on the Duet 2 can be pushed to cycle through which input or output you wish to change levels on. The included Maestro 2 software is used to control various aspects of the interface and inputs can be grouped if you want to change the recording levels for a stereo pair in one movement. The hardware also has two touch-sensitive tap buttons above the dial, which can be assigned to user-definable functions. Controls such

as output mute, metering reset, sum to mono and output dim can all be assigned depending on your needs. The only issue we had with this was that phantom power and input type can't be controlled in this way. We're not big fans of software-only control.

Metering comes in the form of a detailed graphical display – a serious improvement over the previous LED segments. The preamps have bags of gain (75dB) and we didn't fall short of level even when using some of the less powerful dynamic mics we had to hand or when recording delicate sources with a condenser.

## In session

We recorded a demo session of guitars, bass, vocals and various percussion instruments for our tests. The inputs are very quiet and we found the latency to be both incredibly low and, at the same time, rock-solid – and by this we mean NO moments of dropout (remember: we were doing all of this on a laptop). All of the recordings had great dynamics as well as a rich and consistently smooth

### Measuring Up

The Mbox 3 (£550) from Avid is another option around this price point. It has similar analogue IO but includes MIDI and S/PDIF as well. Onboard DSP is also featured for computer-independent monitor mixing. It doesn't offer the same desktop operation, though. An equally portable interface is the Babyface (£469) from RME. This is very similar in its hardware design but the breakout cable offers additional ADAT and S/PDIF IO along with MIDI. Again, onboard DSP effects make direct monitoring a lot easier if you don't want to set this up via your DAW.

## MTM Verdict

### WHY BUY

- + Excellent mic preamps
- + Simple to install and use
- + Rock-solid performance
- + Separate software outputs for headphones

### WALK ON BY

- Can't control phantom and input type from hardware
- Mac-only

*It's always nice when something works as expected! The Duet 2 manages this while delivering high-end sound quality. It has an almost perfect balance between features and hands-on control.*

★★★★★★★★★★