RECORDING

The magazine for the recording musician

ReC's HOLIDAY BUYER's GUIDE

Great Gifts For Your Studio

MICS   EFFECTS PROCESSORS   HEADPHONES
IN-EAR MONITORS   STUDIO ACCESSORIES
INTERFACES   CONTROLLERS   SOFTWARE   PLUG-INS
VIRTUAL INSTRUMENTS   SOUNDWARE   AND MORE!

LEARN HOW TO LISTEN
What Are Your Ears Really Telling You?

35 NEW PRODUCTS REVIEWED:

AirTurn • Apogee • Arturia • Audified
beyerdynamic • Black Lion Audio • EarSonics
Fluid Audio • GFI System • GForce • IK Multimedia
iZotope • LEWITT • Lounsberry Pedals • Modartt
Nektar Technology • PreSonus • Pyro • Roland
Schiit Audio • Serpent Audio • Spitfire Audio
Toontrack • Ultimate Ears • Universal Audio • Zynaptiq

VOL. THIRTY-TWO
NUMBER THREE

DECEMBER 2018
USA $5.99
CANADA $5.99

$5.99US $5.99CAN

12>

0 09281 03050 8

Fluid Audio SRI-2

$229; fluidaudio.net

While Fluid Audio is best known for its line of small studio monitors, the SRI-2 is something quite different—it's the company's first foray into audio interfacing.

The SRI-2's angled desktop chassis is made of aluminum and feels quite solid. Its top panel is dominated by an enormous main volume knob that's silky smooth in its long throw, and is surrounded by controls for the rest of the interface. Everything is backlit aside from the main volume knob, with tiny blue LEDs in the pots and red or orange backlighting for the buttons.

The two input channels feature gain controls, LED level meters, and line/instrument switches for each channel, plus a global 48V phantom power switch. A Sum button combines both inputs into a mono signal for direct monitoring (useful for when you're playing two mono sources, such as guitar and vocal). When Sum is disabled, the two inputs are panned hard left/right to your speakers, and USB recording isn't affected by it—the two signals are always recorded as separate mono channels.

The forward part of the top panel has an A/B switch for two sets of speakers, a DAW/Input mix knob, and a separate pot for the headphone output, which is on the front edge of the unit beside the two XLR/TRS mic/line/instrument input jacks. The rear panel has $^1/_4$" TRS balanced outputs for two pairs of speakers, a USB-B connector for hookup to your computer, and a separate USB Micro-B connector for external power when using the SRI-2 with an iOS device.

The SRI-2 supports up to 24-bit/192 kHz audio recording and playback and is plug-and-play with most Macs and PCs, although there is a downloadable Windows driver for features like buffer size control (which is app-based on Macs). The unit we received worked fine with our test computers and iOS devices right out of the box; it comes with licenses for Cubase LE (Mac/PC) and Cubasis (iOS).

In use, we found the SRI-2 to sound as good as it looks and feels. The inputs are clean and clear, leaning toward the "do no harm" clean side of things rather than trying to impart any character of their own; at 1 MΩ input impedance, the Instrument setting let us capture guitar and bass without harming tone, and the 40 dB of available gain range works great for line-level signals, condenser mics, and all but the most finicky dynamic and passive ribbon mics. Output levels are monstrously loud, both for the speakers and the headphone out, which drove even my 600Ω AKG K240M headphones with aplomb.

The SRI-2 is a dandy little interface that combines exceptional build quality and great-sounding electronics with some nice added features that recording musicians will appreciate, like the ability to switch between monitor sets. It's not as cheap as some other "starter" interfaces, but its quality and features make it a bargain.

Fluid Audio SRI-2

USB Audio Interface

Fluid Audio's SRI-2 keeps things simple but doesn't skimp on build quality and design.

PAUL WHITE

Solidly built and attractively priced, the Fluid Audio SRI-2 combines the functions of a two-channel recording interface and a basic monitor controller/headphone amp in a desktop package. It can run without drivers on Mac OS and a Windows driver is available to download. A firmware update for use with iOS devices is also available from the downloads section of the Fluid Audio website. In normal use the device is powered directly via a USB 2 connection, but a micro-USB powering port is fitted so that the SRI-2 can be externally powered from any USB power adaptor when used with an iOS device. Bundled with the package is a USB cable, a manual and a code to obtain a free copy of Cubasis LE DAW software, with versions available for Mac OS, Windows or iOS. Oddly, the manual contains no technical specifications and I couldn't find any on the Fluid Audio website either.

Liquid Assets

Built into a weighty aluminium shell, the SRI-2 features two 'combi' XLR/jack inputs with globally switchable 48 Volt phantom power, a single headphone outlet and two sets of balanced speaker outputs on quarter-inch TRS jacks, with A/B speaker switching from the front panel. There's also a fixing point for a security cord to deter unauthorised removal. Each input channel has its own six-segment level meter and gain control, with switching for line or instrument use when using the jack input. All the buttons are illuminated in appropriate colours, there are illuminated blue marker lines on the pots, and the monitor control knob is a large and weighty affair with a rubbery periphery that feels extremely smooth and precise in use.

Operating at up to 24-bit/192kHz resolution, the SRI-2 uses Class-A circuitry in the mic preamps and includes a DAW/input mix knob to allow direct source monitoring to be mixed in with what comes back from the DAW for latency-free source monitoring while overdubbing. By default, the direct signal from channel 1 is only present in the left headphone (or speaker) output, and the input from channel 2 is only present in the right. This is ideal when working with a stereo input (and perhaps for performers who like to work with one earphone off), but for mono sources, it can be distracting. To compensate, the design includes a Sum button that puts both source inputs into the centre of the monitor mix. Sum doesn't mono anything coming back from the DAW.

Opinion

Given its price, the SRI-2 feels very professional and well thought out. There are

no level trims for the speaker outputs, but then most active speakers have on-board level controls anyway, so balancing the volumes of two connected sets of monitors shouldn't be a problem. The smaller knobs have a tactile rubbery feel to them and the weight of the device combined with its rubber feet keeps it stable on the desktop, even with two XLR cables plugged in.

Fluid Audio SRI-2 £179

PROS
• Clean audio quality.
• Great desktop ergonomics.
• Dual monitor speaker connectivity.

CONS
• I found nothing to dislike at the price.

SUMMARY
A basic interface but very stylishly executed.

Unlike the Audient iD14, which follows a similar desktop format and occupies the same price range, there's no option to add more inputs via ADAT lightpipe, but on the plus side there's the dual speaker switching option and that gloriously smooth control knob. I know some potential users have complained that there's only one headphone output, which can make life difficult when recording two performers at the same time, but that's a restriction shared by most small interfaces in this price bracket. And there's plenty of undistorted level available from the headphone output.

A speech recording test using a capacitor microphone produced clean results, and the gain controls behaved fairly progressively rather than having too much gain bunched up at one end of the pot's travel. Despite the lack of a spec sheet, nothing shows up in operation that the manufacturers might wish to hide.

At its heart this is a fairly basic interface, offering nothing out of the ordinary other than the dual speaker switching, but I think Fluid Audio have managed to deliver 'basic' with considerable style. I found the form factor of the unit to be perfect for the job in hand and in my view, given its pricing, this is one of the most professional-looking desktop interfaces of its kind that I've reviewed so far. ▮▮▮

£ £179 including VAT.
W www.fluidaudio.com

FLUID AUDIO SRI-2

A Small Interface With a Big Sound

By Mike Levine

Fluid Audio has made a name mainly through its studio monitors, but the company recently ventured for the first time into the busy and competitive audio interface market with the SRI-2, a compact 2-in and 2-out USB interface that's compatible with Mac/PC and iOS. The unit records at up to 24-bit, 192 kHz quality.

Getting the SRI-2 up and running on my Mac was easy. It's class-compliant and is therefore immediately recognized by the Mac OS without the need for drivers. It's also class-compliant on Windows, but, according to the manual, you won't get full functionality unless you download and install a driver from the Fluid Audio website.

TWOS ARE WILD

The angled, tabletop unit is compact and sleekly designed, housed in an impressively solid-feeling aluminum casing. It's completely bus-powered when you use it with a Mac or PC, which is a plus for portability. It's not bus-powered with an iOS device, however; for that application you'll need a micro-USB power supply, which is not included. Fortunately, they are easy to find, and many models are priced in the $10 neighborhood so it won't cost you much to add one. You'll also need an Apple Lightning-to-USB Camera adapter to connect an iOS device to the SRI-2.

The SRI-2 has two convenient front-panel combo XLR/TRS mic/line/instrument inputs, with globally switched phantom power. A single TRS stereo headphone output is also on the front.

The top panel of the unit is dominated by a large—and I mean large—Master Volume knob, which controls the TRS outputs only. The headphone output has its own, much smaller, volume knob. Each channel has an Input Gain knob for setting levels, a Line/Inst switch and a six-step LED ladder meter. Many small interfaces only provide signal-present and clip LEDs, which leave you guessing about levels, to some extent. The SRI-2's meters have enough resolution to make level setting easy.

The SRI-2 offers solid build quality, simple operation and excellent sound for its price point.

LISTEN UP

The DAW/Input knob on the top panel controls the level of direct input to DAW playback that you hear either from the headphone or speaker outputs, providing zero-latency monitoring. You use the DAW/Input knob to find the right balance between your input signal and the signal coming back from the DAW.

This type of arrangement is pretty common on budget-priced interfaces with one or two inputs and is certainly workable, but it's limited compared to interfaces with built-in DSP-based mixers. What's more, without DSP you have no built-in effects to monitor with. Of course, adding DSP would have likely pushed the cost up significantly.

In the speaker and headphone outputs of the SRI-2, audio coming into input 1 is routed hard left and audio coming into input

The inputs are conveniently placed on the front panel (top) with the speaker outputs on the rear panel (bottom)

2 hard right. While this is a bit unusual, you can press the Sum switch to sum Inputs 1 and 2 to mono in the headphone and speaker outputs, bringing both input signals to the center. The Sum switch doesn't affect the audio coming back from the DAW, which remains in stereo.

The SRI-2 features built-in speaker switching, which is a useful extra that is not typically found on small interfaces in this price range. Although the unit can only output two channels of audio at a time, it has four ¼-inch TRS outputs on the back in two stereo pairs dubbed Speaker A and Speaker B. You use the Speaker AB button on the top panel to switch between them. This arrangement allows you to connect two different sets of monitors and easily swap between them. It also obviates the need for a separate speaker switcher.

FREEBIES
You do get some software with when you buy the unit. In the box are two cards with serial numbers for Steinberg Cubase LE (Mac/Windows) and the Cubasis LE app. Both are feature-limited versions.

If you've never used Cubase before, the LE version for Mac/PC will give you a good sense of the Cubase work-style. The Cubasis LE app, although limited to four audio and four MIDI channels, is a good way to find out if you want to spring for the full Cubasis app, which is definitely one of the best iOS DAWs around.

CHECKING IT OUT
I used the SRI-2 exclusively on several projects in my studio and was quite pleased with the sound quality on both the input and output sides.

During these projects, I recorded a number of different instruments, including acoustic guitar, Dobro and shaker through the mic inputs—using either an Oktava MK-012 pencil condenser or a Mojave Audio MA-300 tube mic. I also recorded vocals with the MA-300.

I was definitely impressed with the sound of the Class-A mic preamps and the converters. The results were clean, present and on par with the sound quality of other, more expensive interfaces I've used.

In addition, I used the instrument inputs for electric guitar and electric bass, and I got plenty of level and very clean sonics.

FLUIDITY
I must admit that when I first received the SRI-2 for review, but before I tried it, I wasn't anticipating anything special. I figured it would just be another low-cost, utilitarian interface with okay sound. But its sonics and performance belie its price point. If you can get by with the unit's 2x2 channel count, it represents an excellent value.

Not only does it offer surprisingly good sound, but also built-in speaker switching, solid build quality and portability. This unit would be great for musicians who just record one or two sources at a time in their studios and who need an inexpensive, high-quality interface. It would also work well as a secondary interface for someone with a larger unit in their studio, but who needs a portable model for remote work.

Now that Fluid Audio has broken into the interface market, perhaps the company will consider making an 8-input version in the future. If it had the same mic pres and converters as the SRI-2, added built-in DSP with effects, and was able to keep the cost per channel relatively similar, it could be a desirable product for those needing more ins and outs.

Not to take anything away from the SRI-2. It's an awesome interface for the money. ∎

"Not only does it offer surprisingly good sound, but also built-in speaker switching, solid build quality and portability. This unit would be great for musicians who just record one or two sources at a time in their studios and who need an inexpensive, high-quality interface."