ON THE DVD

WHAT IS IT?

A USB mic for driver-free, direct-to-DAW recording

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

1 Latency-free monitoring
2 Through monitoring
3 Great for voice-over work

sE Electronics USB2200a | £222

An SE mic classic gets a 21st-century overhaul. *Jono Buchanan* goes live with the USB2200a

SPECS

Frequency Response: 20Hz-20KHz
Sensitivity: 14.1mV/Pa -37 ± 1.5dB
Polar Pattern: Cardioid
Impedance: < 200 Ohms
Equivalent Noise Level: 12dB(A weighted)
Max SPL for 0.5% THD@1000Hz: 130dB
Power Requirement: Phantom power 48V±4V
Connector: three-pin
Technical Parameters:
USB 2.0 USB1.x compatible
Zero latency headphone jack with gain control
At THD > -90dB, SNR 92dB (A/D conversion)
Adaptive 44.1 to 48KHz sampling frequency

Late last Spring, sE Electronics added the 2200a to a growing, critically acclaimed list of quality microphones. This capacitor mic was almost universally applauded, as it delivered a neutral, warm sound suitable for vocals and instruments at an attractive price. I liked it so much I bought one and it's performed vocal duties on much of my production work since.

Fast forward a year or so, and here's a new 2200a, this time with a 'USB' tag. Sure enough, this revamped model features a USB port instant preamp free plugging into your DAW. So, is this a 2200a for a new generation, or a trick too far for a quality mic?

The USB2200a can operate either in the traditional manner of its predecessor via an XLR lead, or directly via a USB cable to a computer host. If connected the 'old' way, you'll find similar performance to the original 2200a, which is unsurprising when you consider that it uses the same diaphragm. I'm focusing on the new bits, principally the USB connection and the various treats its inclusion permits. For starters, this mic is truly plug-and-play.

Connections are made in a 'cut-away' section on the mic's rear and once you've attached the provided USB cable, the USB2200a appears in your audio driver list. Select this and recording becomes as simple as arming an audio channel and hitting 'record'. But this is only the start of this mic's approach to digital integration. A mini-jack headphone output also nestles at the back, next to a small volume control and through this, you can monitor your mix as you record.

The mic obviously sends its signal directly there too, hence sE's justified claim that the USB2200a offers zero latency monitoring. You can also record the analogue signal at the same time as the USB one, which should appeal to voice-over studios recording master and back-up audio streams simultaneously.

As a direct-to-disk recording approach bypasses the need for a mic pre, you'll notice that this mic can handle an awful lot of signal; indeed, spoken audio registers relatively quietly. But I was impressed by how clean the recorded signal is, and whether you use destructive audio editing tools or plug-ins to affect dynamics, the signal remains pleasantly untroubled by noise. My only gripe is that I'd like a longer USB cable – you have to be very close to your computer to work with the one that's provided.

Easy as USB

Once upon a time, recording could only take place when you hooked your computer up to a dedicated audio interface. Nowadays there are synths, mixers and now microphones requiring no more than a USB cable to get a signal down. This is the first time I've heard a monitor mix playing back through a microphone and I must say I'm thrilled by the possibilities this alone offers.

Anyone looking for a portable recording studio can now strike a dedicated interface from their list of 'essentials' and for studio and location voice-over work, this mic is also a 'must try'. Beyond that, though, the quality offered is sufficient for it to be considered by anyone out there looking for a quality mic for voice and instrument recording.

As the original 2200a is still available, you'll need to decide if you want to spend an additional £70-odd on these extra features. If you do, I don't think you'll be disappointed. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

A quality microphone with instant integration guaranteed – just be sure you buy a longer USB lead.