

2018 HOLIDAY BUYER'S GUIDE

Great Gear For Your Studio



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 M Ω 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 600 Ω 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.