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REVIEW

BY BETO HALE

Apogee MiC and Jam

Pocket-sized interfaces with Apogee power



Apogee Electronics is known for producing high-quality audio interfaces intended for home-studio use, as well as very high-end cards geared for state-of-the-art facilities. *Recording* has reviewed quite a few of Apogee's products, most recently the Duet 2 (February 2012), and today we will add two more to that list—the MiC and JAM interfaces.

MiC and JAM: Overview

MiC was designed to record acoustic instruments or voice on an iPad, iPhone or a Mac, while JAM is for recording guitar directly into those same devices. In addition to music creation, MiC was also designed for recording interviews, podcasts, voice-overs and audio for DSLR video.

Included with MiC and JAM are two cables: one for connection to a Mac (1m in length), and the other for iPhone/iPad (0.5m). Both products feature locking output jacks which connect directly to the iPad and iPhone's 30-pin docking ports or to the USB port on a Mac, using the corresponding cables. MiC also includes a carrying case and a mic-stand adaptor.

The documentation explains that sound is converted inside of MiC and JAM instead of inside of the recording device, since according to Apogee, audio converted inside the iPad may be affected by the noise of the iPad's circuitry. Both interfaces are bus-powered by the recording device.

MiC and JAM are "Made For iOS" certified devices, which according to Apogee means they are held to a higher standard by the Apple MFi program and subjected to tests other products are not. The documentation says that both products feature Apogee's PureDIGITAL technology, providing 44.1 or 48 kHz/24-bit analog-to-digital conversion, and that both devices allow for 40 dB of gain. The polar pattern for MiC, a condenser, is cardioid.

MiC

MiC is quite attractive and sturdy. It has a metal body but is very light, and it features a rotary-style wheel on the side for input-gain control. The front has a level-indication LED which changes color depending on the status of MiC: blue means MiC is connected, but not ready; green tells you that MiC is connected, ready, and working with your software; and red indicates that the gain is set too high. (JAM features the same LED indicator.)

I connected MiC to a MacBook Pro running OS 10.6.8 and used Apple Logic Pro 9. It started working with the software without a hitch, and I was recording in no time. I tracked acoustic guitar, vocals, cabasa, and bongos.



riff around the middle of the neck, and the other was an ostinato pattern of gently articulated notes. In all three cases, the guitar's sound was faithfully reproduced. I was especially impressed with the third track; it seems like MiC really liked the sweet sound of a softly fingerpicked figure.

The cabasa has a penetrating sound, which MiC handled well, and I really liked how it recorded the bongos. Every stroke was registered faithfully, from the louder accents to the very subtle "ghost notes" I played with my fingertips.

I also recorded two vocal tracks, one low, and one high. Both parts sounded nice and smooth on playback; I know my voice well, and the interface was very true to my sound. Apogee recommends using a pop filter with MiC, to avoid nasty plosives; I agree.

For the takes, I placed MiC at a distance of 8 to 12 inches from the source, tipping it on its side when tracking the guitar. (Apogee includes a small tripod which is ideal for table-top recording—a stand adaptor for standard mic stands, a carrycase, and longer USB or iOS cables are available as options.)

I also used MiC with my iPad 2 running Apple GarageBand; for these tests I decided to record my old, full-size upright piano. I placed

the iPad on the open lid with MiC right next to it and directed the mic towards the middle of the opening. The sound obtained was full, "organic," and simply beautiful. I also recorded some vocals and the results were just as good as on the Mac.

JAM



This is a small interface which fits easily in your pocket. It has a 1/4" instrument jack on one end, and the connector for Mac or iPad/iPhone cables on the other. It also features the rotary gain control on the side. The look is elegant and simple, just like MiC.

I recorded electric guitar, acoustic guitar and bass with JAM. I tracked into my Mac first, then into the iPhone, and finally the iPad.

Electric and acoustic guitars were faithfully reproduced. My Fender Strat sounded full yet bright when playing funky rhythm parts. Another Martin, a DC-16GTE with a pickup, sounded considerably better when I played strummed open chords than it normally does when recorded directly. Again, the clarity of the sound, played at different neck positions and intensities, was evident.

The basses I recorded were a reissue Höfner "violin" bass and a Rickenbacker 4003. The Höfner sounded the way it's supposed to: round, bouncy, and present. The Ricky, with its high output and more aggressive tone, was also faithfully reproduced after dialing down the gain on JAM a bit. All these instruments sounded equally good when tracking on the Mac and on the other two devices.

Conclusions

Apogee Electronics has produced two excellent interfaces for musicians who are leaping into the world of tracking on iPads and iPhones. For those of us who still like using computers in addition to the newer units, MiC and JAM offer the option of recording via USB.

I am glad to know that Apogee has now released 3m cables, since I struggled to find a way to place the iPad and the MiC in comfortable positions when using the shorter cables included, especially when recording the piano.

The sound quality and fidelity, low latency and ease of use that we've come to expect from this company are again present in these new products. I expect more and more recordings to be produced using these types of interfaces. I, for one, am hooked. ➡

Prices: MiC, \$199; JAM, \$99

More from: Apogee, www.apogee.com
digital.com

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