

Black Lion Audio Revolution 2x2 USB Interface

By Andrew Leyenhorst

While Black Lion Audio rose to prominence through their acclaimed mods to existing hardware, they have recently begun making a name for themselves with their own line of products ranging from mic preamps to compressors to clocking equipment. Now, they've taken yet another step towards establishing themselves as a mainstay in audio rigs the world over.

Black Lion released the Revolution 2x2 USB interface in February, breaking into the portable interface market with quite a thunderous roar. A small, bus-powered box, this new contender offers exceptional portability and staggering sonics that find it immediately competing with, and I daresay outclassing, established products that do the same job.

The Revolution 2x2's design is immediately impactful, with a bold, black stainless-steel chassis and a hefty, robust build. I was quite frankly surprised by the weight of the unit, but very pleased; it looks and feels like a premium product.

The sleek unit boasts two XLR/TS combo inputs and a single 1/4-in. headphone jack on the front panel, and two balanced 1/4-in. TRS outputs as well as S/PDIF I/O with embedded clock signal on the back. +48V phantom power is shared across the two inputs, and there is also an input select button present. Five analog encoders grace the unit, one for each preamp; one for the headphone output; one for the main outs; and lastly, an Input/Playback balance for zero-latency input monitoring. Consistent with the overall feel of the build, the encoders have a nice weight to them and deliver a satisfying tactile feel. Accompanying the Input/Playback encoder is also a mono input summing button. Additionally, an eight-segment LED VU meter adorns the front face for real-time visual feedback.

As for as the interface's audio architecture, the Revolution 2x2 supports up to 24-bit/192kHz recording and playback via USB-C, and Black Lion has employed Vishay, Nichicon, and Wima capacitors throughout the entire circuit. They've also adapted the PG-I power filtering technology from their highly-regarded power conditioning units for this effort, delivering a ludicrously low signal-to-noise ratio, as well as incorporating what they call "Macro-MMC" technology

from their clocking products. This interface also sets itself apart in the sense that power is filtered and decoupled in every stage of the circuit from the preamps to the clock, which is a rather uncommon practice.

In the box you'll find the interface itself and an accompanying USB-C cable, as well as a handful of software goodies; downloads for PreSonus Studio One Artist, iZotope Elements, the Brainworx_bx mastering EQ plug-in, and the Lindell 6X500 preamp/passive EQ plug-in are available to Revolution 2x2 owners.

When put into action, the Revolution 2x2 more than vindicates the lengths Black Lion have gone to design the ideal small-format interface. Of course, the aforementioned sleek look, small profile, and the quality of the build contribute to the unit's standing, but all of those factors ultimately ride on the back of the titan that is this interface's sound.

The first thing I noticed when switching to the Revolution 2x2 from my Audient iD44, was that there was no noticeable drop-off in digital-to-analog conversion when playing back audio or printing mixes. The Revolution 2x2 delivered the same depth, width, and openness as the iD44, and ultimately proved to do the same with its analog-to-digital conversion as well; a strong statement by Black Lion given Audient's phenomenal reputation for their interfaces and conversion.

The preamps on the Revolution 2x2 also proved to be impressive, easily handling a variety of sources and delivering excellent recordings at all dynamics; I put it through its paces with vocals ranging from gentle croons to aggressive screams and growls, and was satisfied with the results. With 55 dB of gain, there's plenty of headroom on tap and it's very, very clean. When pushed to the brink, however, these preamps do offer some satisfying saturation; I was especially impressed with the way they captured alto sax. I intentionally recorded hot in some instances, and even when pushed to saturation with high-SPL input, the horn's nuances were not muddled or distorted, and



sounded full and open. The microphone I used for these tests was an Aston Origin condenser.

The Revolution 2x2's preamps also served direct electric guitar and bass recordings well, making full use of their 20Hz – 20kHz frequency response. These preamps are very accurate, and will capture every bit of crisp high end or warmth you throw at them. I also really liked how they handled a direct injection of synth, as switching from fat bass tones to shrill leads to deep, ambient pads emphasized different areas of the preamps' range and demonstrated their versatility.

The Input/Playback balance encoder is a very convenient means of input monitoring without latency, as it circumvents the need for software and makes it easy to intuitively blend your live performance with your DAW's output. The headphone amp also sounds killer, as it should, considering that this is an extremely well-rounded package.

With the Revolution 2x2, Black Lion Audio's first foray into the audio interface conversation has yielded a triumphant return. While it sits at a slightly higher price point than its 2-in, 2-out competitors, it also punches at a much higher weight than the tag it carries. This is a small-format interface that sets a new standard, and I'd be hard-pressed not to suggest it to those looking for a killer tool for home recording or to take on the road.

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