



Black Lion Audio Revolution 2x2

A rugged and portable interface with high-end components

REVIEW BY ALEX HAWLEY

Chicago-based Black Lion Audio (BLA) is a boutique company known for high-end converter and preamp mods, in addition to an ever-growing lineup of original products. For a company with so much experience looking under the hood of countless other interfaces and figuring out ways to improve them, BLA designing an original box with all those enhancements as standard is an exciting idea. As BLA puts it, the Revolution 2x2 is “modded out of the box,” meaning this two-channel interface is built from the ground up with top-end components.

Overview

Revolution 2x2 is a compact two-channel interface. The build quality is impressive; every aspect of the chassis is well-built and rugged. The metal enclosure weighs a bit more than similarly sized interfaces. Still, if you plan to do any remote recording or travel with this interface, the all-metal build is a huge confidence booster in durability.

Connections include two combo XLR jacks on the front panel to accommodate mic, line or instrument inputs. It is entirely bus-powered via USB-C, with 24-bit 192 kHz capability. A single 48V phantom power button engages phantom power for both channels. Each channel has a

dedicated gain knob paired with an LED indicator for clipping. An input select button to toggle between the analog inputs is on the front panel and the S/PDIF I/O is on the back panel. Note that you cannot use both the analog and digital inputs simultaneously, nor can you mix and match. It's an either-or scenario — XLR combo jacks or S/PDIF via RCA.

Take Control

On the front panel you will find a large monitor control knob, a direct monitor mix knob that blends computer playback with direct input monitoring, and a dedicated headphone volume knob with a 1/4" headphone output on

the front panel for easy access. A mono button is also included, which affects input monitoring only, not playback — still a handy feature if you're using the two XLR inputs as a blend of two microphones on a guitar amp instead of a stereo source, for example.

The centerpiece of the front panel is a large color-coded LED main output meter. It would be nice if it were possible to toggle between input or output levels, but even having the output level displayed at a glance is atypical for interfaces in this class.

The Mods Come Stock

BLA has spent years refining various aspects of interfaces while famously modding 3rd party models. This experience bodes well for the company's first-ever interface. Revolution 2x2 utilizes studio-grade ICs (integrated circuits) and top-end capacitors (Vishay, Nichicon and Wima), combined with the latest BLA Macro MMC clocking technology to ensure a tight and clear signal. The analog signal path is entirely decoupled and balanced, minimizing noise every step of the way.



The preamps have a gain range of 55dB with a frequency response of 20 Hz to 20 kHz (+/- 0.25dB).

Welcome to the Revolution

Revolution 2x2 couldn't be easier to get up and running. It's class-compliant on Mac systems (which I use), but it requires a driver for Windows users. The workflow is simple, but everything is well-thought-out and executed. No frills or gimmicks, just high-quality sound with a streamlined user experience. This is similar to my experience with BLA Auteur mkIII preamp reviewed in May 2022.

Whether recording guitar amps, acoustic guitar or vocals with the Revolution 2x2, I was met with a crystal clear and full-bodied tone on each source. It's not uncommon for smaller bus-powered interfaces to introduce noise when pushing the preamps, but I didn't run into that issue unless pushed to the maximum. While there are higher gain preamps on the market, 55dB of preamp gain should be plenty for most applications. I'd keep your favorite in-line booster handy for less-sensitive microphones (a passive ribbon or dynamic like a Shure SM7B) when recording quiet sources. That said, I didn't run into any issues, even with a variety of ribbon microphones used during my tests. The quality of the preamp is clearly a cut above those found in most interfaces of this class. The Revolution 2x2 offers a clean tone and musical character that's far from being sterile or overly colored.

Back to Mono

The mono input monitoring came in handy when blending mics on the guitar amp. I used a Royer R-121 blended with a trusty Shure SM57. By engaging

the mono button on the front panel, I could hear and perfect the blend of the two mics with near-zero latency through direct monitoring. The ability to tweak the balance between input monitoring and computer playback is also helpful in cases where latency is a concern [See this month's Inside The Box on page 40 for a deep dive into this topic -Ed], and when you need to punch into a pre-existing mix. This is often a pressure point for smaller interfaces, but BLA found an elegant solution that gives you plenty of control.

Software

Revolution 2x2 comes with a generous bundle of software, including PreSonus Studio One Artist, iZotope Elements Suite (with Nectar, Neutron, Ozone and RX), Brainworx BX Digital (one of my go-to EQs!), and Lindell 6X-500. If you're new to recording, not only will Revolution 2x2 get you started on the right foot with studio-grade analog recording, the included software comes with everything you need to start making music out of the box.

Final Thoughts

Revolution 2x2 lives up to the hype and Black Lion Audio focused its attention to detail in all the right places. If you're in the market for a bullet-proof bus-powered interface that can go toe-to-toe with pro-studio sound quality, the Revolution 2x2 might be your huckleberry. Whether it's your primary studio interface or a mobile rig traveling companion, it's hard to match its sound quality in a compact unit for this price point. ➡

Price: \$399
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