

If you feel the need to skip your audio interface altogether? You'll be needing one of the USB microphones that are arriving on the scene lately. Can the SE Electronics offering cut the mustard? SIMON TILLBROOK thinks so.



We are all getting used to the success SE Electronics has managed to achieve with its range of cost effective microphones, including many major artist endorsements and a number of industry awards. I think we all expect this to continue and, with the latest offerings, this certainly seems to be very much the case.

We have seen the emergence of USB microphones offering portable recording solutions, simple set-ups and integration for the purposes of writing and podcasting, but a real studio quality USB microphone solution has been a while coming. SE Electronics is looking to remedy this with the introduction of the SE Electronics USB2200a, a dual function condenser microphone based on the SE2200a.

The USB2200a uses the same capsule as the SE2200a and the basic specifications look very similar indeed. The USB2200a is slightly shorter than the SE2200a and has an integrated microphone stand mount that screws into either side, giving a reasonable range of swivel movement. The USB2200a has a fixed cardioid polar pattern, and the one-inch gold spluttered capsule is capable of withstanding up to 130dB SPL, with low noise of 12dB (A weighted) and a frequency response curve that shows a very slight lift from about 2kHz. As with its studio bound counterpart the USB2200a has a -10dB pad switch, and a single position high pass filter.

The rear of the USB2200a is where we find what we are

# SE ELECTRONICS USB2200A

## USB CONDENSER MICROPHONE

interested in. As well as the standard XLR input on the base of the microphone, the rear gives us a small USB connector, which you can connect into your system using the supplied USB cable.

SE Electronics have received some feedback with regards to the supplied cable length and have responded by supplying longer cables as standard. The USB and standard analogue output feeds from the USB2200a could be used simultaneously.

This is a class compliant USB2 device compatible with both USB 2.0 and 1.x systems. The USB2200a will integrate into many popular workstations without the need for any additional software, but drivers are available where they are a requirement.

When using the USB connection, there can be slight differences in required signal level for Apple and PC, so a third three-position switch is provided to deal with this issue: 'A' (Apple), 'P' (PC), and a third position indicated by a dot. This final option places the level between the other two settings.

As a true condenser microphone, the USB2200a has a proprietary chip and integrated software to condition the incoming power that is required to supply the capsule for operation. The incoming 5v power feed has the inherent noise and spikes from the current removed before supply to the capsule. This means that the distortion is not be amplified to an unacceptable audible level, and thus the USB2200a is totally useable for professional applications.

A stereo 3.5mm jack and a rotary balance control completes the feature set. When utilising the USB connection into your chosen DAW, the rotary control acts as a balance control between playback from your DAW and microphone output. Not only is this convenient for performer operation but, more importantly, it gives you latency-free monitoring.

### In Use

I have had the USB2200a with me for a short time and it has followed me around in various location scenarios. This is the first USB microphone that I can really call useable for more critical recording purposes.

Firstly, using the USB2200a as a simple condenser via the standard analogue XLR. If you have any experience with the SE2200a then you will already be familiar with the results that I found. The 2200a in both cases exhibits a full-bodied response with a definite brightness to the sound. This is especially pleasant with signals containing some upper mid range content that benefits from a small lift. Vocals are crisp with a little added presence, thanks to the small amount of inherent boost at the top end.

Integration of the USB2200a through the USB was as simple and straightforward as expected. Sample rates of 44.1 and 48kHz are supported, so something to keep in mind with your session set-up. When using the USB connection, gain is automatically set through the USB2200a. This gain setting is aimed at close voice or instrument applications. Some may find this a little on the high side, but with clever positioning or the use of a small acoustic baffle, high levels of ambient noise can be effectively minimised. I used an SE Electronics reflexion filter and this worked perfectly well.

As you can also run the XLR output, fully variable gain can be accessed through your audio interface.

The latency-free monitoring through the USB2200a is a real benefit. In numerous vocal tests this was picked up on by virtually all the performers using it. Having some control over balance at their fingertips was also something that pleased them.

One application that did come out through the sessions with vocalists was for rehearsing.

They stated that being able to hear themselves through a microphone without complex set-ups was particularly useful to them, so using a simple USB connection for power and plug-in headphones they could monitor themselves for practice. The quality of the USB2200a as a true studio-use microphone allowed for this.

### Conclusion

The SE Electronics USB2200a can be used to capture studio quality audio through your DAW, and that is the first USB microphone I can really feel confident in saying that about.

The latency-free monitoring is a real trump card for the USB2200a. There was simple integration into all the systems I tried, and pleasing results throughout.

The USB2200a represents a fantastic portable studio quality recording microphone. **AM**

### INFORMATION

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