Steinberg CI2 | £226

Steinberg continue extending their reach into hardware territory with this USB audio interface and controller. ***Bruce Aisher*** takes it for a spin

WHAT IS IT?

A complete hardware and software recording and production package designed to deliver everything you need to get started

CONTACT

Who: Yamaha/Steinberg
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HIGHLIGHTS

1 Solidly built
2 Simple, yet flexible feature set
3 Inclusion of Cubase AI5 software

SPECS

Requirements
Mac: Mac (OS X 10.5.5 or higher), PowerPC G5 (Intel Core Duo CPU recommended)
PC: Windows XP Home Edition (SP3), XP Professional (SP3) or Vista (32-bit/64-bit), 2GHz CPU (dual core CPU recommended)
General: 1024MB RAM, 1GB of HD space, USB port, Internet access required for license activation

AD/DA: 24-bit
Sample rate: 48kHz (max)
Gain: +60 dB (-60 dB ~ -16 dB)
Freq Resp: 20Hz – 20kHz (-3dB @ 1kHz)
THD+N: 0.05% (@ 1kHz, output level: +4dBu)
Dyn range: 96dB (A-weighted)

Size
190 x 135 x 45mm

Weight
720 g

Just over a year ago Steinberg introduced three new items of hardware – the CC121 Advanced Integration Controller and the MR816CSX Advanced Integration DSP Studio, plus its MR816X variant. Now we take delivery of what is a distillation of both ideas but at an entry-level price point. The CI2 is essentially a two-in/two-out USB audio interface and basic DAW controller bundled with a cut-down version of Cubase 5 (Cubase AI5). Like it's early siblings the CI2 is designed and manufactured by Yamaha, Steinberg's parent company, and therefore brings with it a considerable design heritage.

Heavy metal

Open the box and you'll find a plastic-cased box in grey and off-white, sporting a series of knobs and buttons on the top panel with all sockets round the back. It's quite weighty and there are some signs of some serious metalwork underneath, which bodes well in noise and robustness terms.

On the bottom the unit has threaded holes for mounting the unit on a stand or rack. Starting with the connectivity we get the obligatory USB socket – in this case, it's of the USB 1.1 variety, rather than the higher-bandwidth 2.0 version, but with only four audio streams in this case it isn't an issue.

Next we have a foot switch for remote control, which duplicates operation of the front-panel Action Pad button (more on that later), and a standard 1/4" headphone socket. Output is handled by two balanced (TRS) jack sockets (1/4" again) that will also accept standard unbalanced (TR) plugs. Finally, the inputs are on a pair of XLR / 1/4" combo sockets for handling balanced and unbalanced mic and line level sources. Input 1 also facilitates the Hi-Z (High Impedance) output from guitars via a front panel switch.

On the front panel we find separate controls for the master volume (the main output level, that doesn't alter what is being recorded), phones level, and input/DAW mix control for latency free monitoring. There are two input gain controls, each with a peak LED, and buttons for mono monitoring of input sources and phantom power.

In use, the CI2 can be used as a conventional audio interface, but only lives up to its Advanced Integration moniker when used with Cubase 5 or the enclosed Cubase AI 5. This then allows you to use the AI knob for parameter control and various project and menu selection tasks (albeit only with fully compliant software and plug-ins). The Action Pad is essentially a configurable switch that is designed to make recording as mouse-free as possible. These are nice extras in my book and work well with the enclosed software tools.

Cubasic

The inclusion of Cubase AI5 is not to be sniffed at, as what you are getting is cut-down (and upgradable), but still feature-rich version of Cubase 5. While the CI2 is not the cheapest audio interfacing solution out there and I would like to have seen MIDI included, it is well made, well thought-out and comes bundled with great software, making it well worth a look. FM

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD
VALUE
EASE OF USE
VERSATILITY
RESULTS

This is a great package, and offers the user nearly all they need to get started with DAW production.

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