

Apogee GiO USB guitar interface & controller £327

Hardware stomping of virtual boxes – Apple's music-making software gets foot control *by Trevor Curwen*

Software amp sims are more practical for real-time use if you use a foot controller, and several of the major names have dedicated units available. Consequently, it hasn't taken long since the release of Apple's Logic Pro 9 and its collection of amp and stompbox plug-ins (Amp Designer and Pedalboard) for a controller to appear. GiO is made by respected digital converter specialist and Apple associate Apogee and combines an audio interface with not only switching for the various virtual effects pedals in Pedalboard, but also transport controls for Logic Pro and GarageBand, enabling hands-free recording plus control over the Loopback and Playback functions in MainStage.

GiO is exceptionally well built and sits solidly on the floor courtesy of a pair of rubber pads. All of the connections are on the rear panel, while the stepped top surface has the illuminated square transport controls on its upper tier. Round stompbox on/off buttons (with associated LEDs) occupy the lower. At each end of the lower tier are triangular rubber 'previous' and 'next' footswitches for stepping through plugin presets in Logic and GarageBand, and the patch lists in MainStage.

A MIDI Expression pedal can also be connected to GiO, enabling control of wah and volume or real-time control of other effects parameters.

The audio interface aspect of the GiO offers a single input for your guitar and a stereo headphone socket. A lead, featuring a stereo jack at one end and two RCA phono plugs at the other is provided to connect the socket to a sound system or powered monitors.

In use

Once the supplied drivers are installed on your Mac and the USB connection made, the GiO is ready for use. The transport controls default naturally to their given function in whatever program you're using. Straight out of the box with Logic Pro 9 or GarageBand 09 you get start/stop, record, fast forward, rewind and return to zero and all work flawlessly, leaving your hands free to concentrate on the guitar.

As an audio interface, there are no sonic problems – all is clean and clear, Apogee being renowned for the quality of its converters. Some might bemoan the lack of a mic input but the GiO isn't a general-purpose audio interface – it's designed for use with guitar, so the single input is sufficient. Apogee, probably seeing the typical GiO user as already having an audio interface, has taken a minimalist approach.

The switching of effects is also carried out flawlessly. In Logic Pro, the five footswitches correspond to the first five stompboxes that you've placed on your Pedalboard. With a cool sense for detail, the LED for

each footswitch glows with a colour that corresponds to the stompbox, changing from a bright to a dull glow if you turn it off. With Mainstage 2, the effects on/off footswitches correspond to the first four effects on your Pedalboard while the fifth is a master mute, muting all audio output.

When playing guitar, the switching of the effects and wah or other parameter control (if you add an expression pedal) gives you plenty of control over changing tone in real time and any changes can easily be recorded into Logic Pro by recording two tracks at once, with the output from the track that the plugins are applied to feeding the input of a second track. That way you'll get the dry guitar audio on the original track and the effected sound with any footswitched changes on the second.

Verdict

If you record in Logic Pro or GarageBand, GiO is a brilliant add-on for facilitating hands-free recording, whether you want to use the Pedalboard plugins or not. If you do use the plugins, it lets you change your sound on the fly – great for recording a guitar part in one take, but also pretty invaluable if you use Mainstage in a live performance setting. For smooth integration of your guitar playing with Apple's music applications, GiO is the way to go. **G**

The Rivals

IK Multimedia's StealthBoard (£TBA) is intended to fully control any MIDI-based hardware or software Amp Modeller – IK say you'll be able to fully control any USB MIDI device. The **X-Tempo POK** (\$319) is a wireless floor unit with eight footswitches that are customisable to control any Mac/PC DAW/plugin/virtual instrument function. The **Presonus FaderPort** (£109) is a tabletop DAW controller that includes a footswitch jack for hands-free punch-in/out recording.

Apogee GiO

PRICE: £327

TYPE: Floorboard software controller and audio interface

ORIGIN: USA

CONNECTIONS: 6.4mm jack instrument input and stereo headphone/line output, expression pedal socket, USB

CONTROLS: Five stompbox buttons, five transport control buttons, two previous/next preset selection buttons

A/D AND D/A CONVERSION: 44.1/48kHz, 24-bit

POWER REQUIREMENTS: USB bus-powered

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS: Mac, with an Intel or PowerPC G5 processor. 1GB minimum of installed RAM, 2GB recommended, OS 10.5.7 or greater. Apple's GarageBand 09, Logic Pro 9, MainStage 2, Logic Express 9, USB

DIMENSIONS: 63.5 (h) x 457 (w) x 178mm (d)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 2.7/6

EXTRAS INCLUDED: 5m USB cable, 3m stereo to Left/Right RCA cable

OPTIONS: Expression pedal

Sonic Distribution

01582 470260

www.sonic-distribution.com

www.apogeedigital.com

www.apple.com



The Bottom Line

We like: Build; ergonomic design; sound quality

We dislike: No built-in expression pedal

Guitarist says: A brilliant tool for Apple music apps

Test results

Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Value for money	★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★