



New
Products,
P. 10, 40

STUDIO | LIVE | BROADCAST | CONTRACTING | POST



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Apogee ONE USB Audio and Microphone Interface

ONE is both fantastically designed and shockingly good, offers *PAR*'s Senior Contributor, making it a most flexible tool for on-the-go professionals.

by Russ Long

Apogee ONE is a sleek, beautifully designed USB audio interface. Its compact size (slightly larger than an iPhone) and single-knob interface make it visually reminiscent of the classic iPod. ONE is USB-powered and features a mono mic/line input, built-in microphone and stereo output. The device provides 24-bit audio at sample rates of 44.1 kHz or 48 kHz at a quality deserving of the Apogee name. ONE is compatible with any Mac-based Core Audio-compliant application (including Pro Tools 9).

Features

The \$249 ONE measures 2.25 x 4.75 x 1 inches and weighs approximately 1 pound. It includes the ONE interface, breakout cable, USB cable, Apogee Software & Documentation CD and QuickStart Guide. The breakout cable provides audio input via a female XLR or a 1/4-inch jack. The balanced microphone (XLR) input provides 10-63 dB of gain with a maximum input level of +14 dBu and the unbalanced (1/4-inch) instrument input provides 0 to 45 dB of gain with a maximum input level of +11 dBu. Choosing the internal electret condenser microphone also allows gain settings of 0 to 45 dB. Stereo output is provided via an unbalanced 1/8-inch jack with

a maximum output level of +12 dBu, perfectly suited to drive headphones or powered speakers. The ONE mic mount (\$19.95) makes it possible to mount the ONE on any standard mic stand and the ONE Table Top Mic Stand (\$19.95) is a 6.5-inch tall tripod that perfectly complements the mic mount. Apogee's soft neoprene carry case (\$19.95) is the perfect way to make sure ONE stays protected during transport.

Apogee's Maestro software is the link between ONE and the computer. I downloaded the most recent version from the Apogee site (always a good idea just in case an included disc is outdated) and installation was a breeze. Squeezing into only 34MB of hard drive space, the application requires Mac OS 10.5.7 or later to operate. I was already familiar with the software after logging a bunch of time with the Symphony system



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Pictured: Singer/songwriter
Marc Scibilia (marcscibilia.com)

PHOTO BY KONRAD SCHNEIDER

a couple of years ago, and I found the single input/stereo output version that works in tandem with ONE to be simple and intuitive.

Maestro's Mixer and Control pages provide full control of the application's features. The Mixer page displays a fader, mute and solo buttons, and metering for the single input and the "From Software" channels as well as larger metering for the "To Hardware" output level. Metering includes input level and digital "over" display after conversion from analog to digital. The Control page includes gain controls for the input and output levels as well as input selection between Int Mic, Ext Mic, Ext 48V Mic and Instrument. Stereo output should be selected when ONE is connected to headphones, powered speakers, or a mixing console and Amp should be selected when ONE is connected to an instrument amplifier. When Amp is selected, ONE's output level is fixed making it better suited for instrument amplifier inputs.

In Use

Ergonomically, ONE's design is fantastic. Pressing the large silver knob encoder cycles through the input and output options allowing you to make input or output gain adjustments without using the Maestro application. One of four encoder function LED indicators

is always illuminated indicating what the encoder is controlling. A three-segment LED meter reflects the input or output level of the selected function. When making a gain adjustment, a window similar to a Mac's volume display window appears on the screen showing the input or output being adjusted. Holding the button for a second mutes the output — a great feature in the event of a noisy software glitch.

In addition to using ONE as an external soundcard, the device provides the option of low-latency live monitoring that can be set up through Maestro's control panel. The biggest limitation of ONE is that it only supports sample rates of 44.1 and 48 kHz, prohibiting it from recording to high-resolution projects. This will likely be a deterrent to many potential buyers.

The breakout cable is the perfect length, and its locking connector prohibits it from being accidentally detached while in use. While placing the output jack on the bottom of the device makes perfect sense for headphones, it's a bit awkward for speaker connection. I anticipate that more people will use ONE with headphones, but having a parallel output on the top of ONE for speaker output would have been a nice feature.

ONE's headphone amp is surprisingly good. When traveling and

just listening to music for pleasure, I've found that the tradeoff for the extra hassle of using ONE (pulling out an extra device and connecting it to my laptop instead of just plugging my headphones into the computer) is well worth it due to the sound improvement. This sound quality was equally good through a pair of Dynaudio BM 5A powered monitors. In both instances, the imaging is wide and the clarity is superb at both soft and loud volume levels.

I was initially skeptical of the quality of the built-in mic but was pleasantly surprised after



PHOTO BY RONRAD SHYDER

Fast Facts

Applications

Applications: Project Studio, Broadcast, Location Recording, Mobile Recording

Key Features

Features: Built-in mic; balanced XLR mic pre and unbalanced 1/4-inch high-impedance instrument input; software-selectable 48V phantom power; 1/8-inch stereo output; multi-function encoder knob for input gain control and output level control; Core Audio compatible; 24-bit 44.1 kHz or 48 kHz operation; 4 encoder function LED indicators; 3-segment LED input and output metering; Apogee's Maestro software for hardware control and low-latency monitoring

Price

Price: \$249

Contact

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using it to record vocals and guitars. At first, many vocalists may feel awkward singing into something that looks like an iPod but the sound quality is so shockingly good that they may quickly grow accustomed to it. ONE works equally well on acoustic guitar, making it the only device available that will allow you to record full demos or podcasts without needing to purchase an extra mic.

I used ONE's mic pre to record a vocal with the Sony C-800G and the result was stunning. While ONE's pre wouldn't be my first choice while working in the studio, I wouldn't hesitate to use it to capture a critical lead vocal or instrument overdub if I was working in a hotel, apartment or somewhere else on the move; its sound quality is beyond anything I've encountered in the same price range and on par with that of other Apogee products. I recorded electric guitar through ONE along with Line 6's Amp Farm on a Pro Tools 9 session, and it worked great. It worked equally well when recording a bass guitar.

Maestro allows various setups to be stored, making it quick and easy to switch between sound sources and mics with minimal setup time. After recording bass, I saved a setup named Gibson EB-2, so the next time I record that bass through the 1/4-inch input, I'll have a reasonably close starting point.

I also used ONE's built-in mic to record a band's rehearsal. Besides being limited to a mono recording, it works extremely well, making it the perfect tool for capturing rehearsals and performances to create work tapes as arrangements are worked out before going in the studio.

During the review period, I used the ONE along with Pro Tools, Garage Band, Nuendo and Logic, and in every instance, it worked flawlessly.

While the biggest weakness of the ONE is its lack of PC compatibility, it could easily be argued that this is yet another significant reason to switch from PC to Mac.

Summary

Apogee ONE provides a wonderful combination of features, portability and most important, sound quality, at an amazing price point. Any mobile user in need of only a single input should give ONE top consideration.

Product Points



▶ Compact size; low price; great sound quality; phantom power



▶ No support beyond 48 kHz; no PC support

Score ONE is the affordable mono solution for high-quality mobile recording.