

Check Out The Great New Gear: Winter NAMM 2016

RECORDING

The magazine for the recording musician

SUCCESSFUL STRATEGIES FOR SONGWRITERS!

How To:

- Make More \$\$\$ From Your Music
- Supercharge Your Social Media
- Polish Your Songs The Right Way



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New Products Reviewed:

Acoustica • Aston Microphones • Empirical Labs
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Sonoma Wire Works • Shure • SPL



Songwriter Recording Solutions

Reviews by Mike Metlay

We've come a long way from the early days of plugging microphones into an iPhone's headset jack and hoping for the best. Today's music recording gear for iOS delivers high quality and lots of features for the money, with results comparable to those of gear meant for laptop rigs. In this edition of iOS Music Tools, we're looking at two interfaces and two mics that are ideal for recording songwriters that want to capture their ideas with a good enough sound for professional use.—MM

Sonoma Wire Works StudioJack Mini

\$149; sonomawireworks.com



Sonoma Wire Works has been in the business of creating interface gear with a tight focus on iOS for some time now. We've reviewed Sonoma's portable GuitarJack interfaces more than once, and have always been very pleased with their sound quality and portability. Now we have the new StudioJack Mini to supersede them; like its predecessors, it is designed and built in the USA of primarily American-sourced components, and while it's still tiny and far lighter than its predecessors (under 3 ounces!), it packs a pretty big punch for such a small box.

Packaged in an injection-molded casing that feels quite tough, the StudioJack Mini has the familiar "tapered on one side, thicker on the other" shape of other Sonoma products, but unlike the original GuitarJacks, its jacks aren't on the sides. There's a row of three 1/4" jacks along front face of the unit—a Hi-Z instrument input (mono), a headphone/line level output (stereo), and a line-level or mic input (mono/stereo autoswitching). The two knobs are for setting gain on the guitar and mic/line inputs; headphone playback level is adjusted from your computer.

The left and right LEDs are multicolored, and change from green to orange to red depending on input level. (The center LED lights green for an active computer connection.) Note that the StudioJack Mini is a stereo I/O interface, but it's smart about its connections—if you plug in a guitar and a mono mic, it will record both, but if you plug in a guitar and a stereo source, only the left channel of the stereo source will record.

There are two USB Micro-B ports on the unit, one on the back for your DAW and one on the side for a power

passthrough if you want to charge your iGizmo while you record. The StudioJack Mini comes with heavy-duty Lightning and USB-A cables, plus an OTG cable if you want to use it with an Android device (Sonoma recommends Lollipop or newer Android OS).

The StudioJack Mini can record at 16 or 24 bits, 44.1 or 48 kHz. It's class-compliant and doesn't need any drivers, but if you'd like a low-latency ASIO driver for Windows, Sonoma is happy to provide one upon request.

By the way, Sonoma Wire Works has finally solved the problem of unreliable cable connections that hindered its earliest designs. The rear-edge USB port is surrounded by a set of triangular holes, and the Lightning and USB-A cables end in a right-angle plug surrounded by corresponding triangular plastic pegs. When the plug is inserted firmly, the resulting connection is rock-solid, and you basically never have to worry about unplugging the cable unless you want to move the interface from your iPad to your laptop. Well done!

The StudioJack Mini doesn't provide 48V phantom power, but it does provide 3.3V power for electret condenser mics. Of course it works fine with dynamics and should work with passive ribbons as well, although I didn't get a chance to test this. Sonoma Wire Works claims that both inputs can provide up to 60 dB of gain, and I had no trouble getting good clean signals into my iPad with even my most finicky dynamic mics. On stereo line-level signals, the interface works seamlessly.

The spec sheet doesn't list the input impedance of the Hi-Z jack. Sonoma claims it offers a "warm, mojo-infused tone" that's optimized for guitars; in my recording tests, I found it to be quite pleasant on my Schecter solid-body, adding a touch of midrange heft that isn't there on a totally clean guitar input. If you're very picky about guitar inputs messing with your tone, you'll want to try before you buy, but I found the sound to be very pleasing and inspiringly non-sterile, taking well to compression and other effects.

The sound of the StudioJack Mini's mic/line input, by contrast, is impeccably clean. There's no coloration or weirdness; it just lays down audio into your recording apps with clarity and effectively zero noise unless you really crank the gain to the outer limits. If you want coloration, it's easy enough to add it yourself.

Because it's class-compliant, the StudioJack Mini doesn't favor any one app over another. Sonoma Wire Works makes some great options for the beginning recordist, like FourTrack and StudioTrack, and naturally it sounds great through Sonoma's GuitarTone effects app. But it also sounds great feeding recording apps like Auria and guitar effects apps like BIAS FX and AmpliTube.

I found the StudioJack Mini to be incredibly easy to set up and use, portable, reliable, and great-sounding. If you like the idea of a solid stereo audio interface that plays well with computers and iOS devices alike and weighs practically nothing, you'll find the StudioJack Mini suits the bill perfectly.