

Centrance MicPort Pro

Simple and portable recording devices have been generating a lot of interest and there are two main approaches — USB with a computer or small portable recorders. These obviously address different applications but the MicPort Pro neatly slots into the USB category. **ROB JAMES**

I've been tempted by the convenience and utility of USB microphones, but the currently available models are just too much of a compromise to make me reach for the plastic. In any case, I have a number of mics I know well and am comfortable with so why buy another one if I don't have to? MicPort Pro to the rescue. For a mere UK£93 (+ VAT) MicPort Pro squeezes a mic preamp with A-DC and D-AC for monitoring through the built-in headphone amp into a compact anodised alloy tube with a chopped-off ellipsoid cross-section.

That's the first bit of clever design. With an XLR at one end it can be plugged straight into a mic or connected via a cable. If the casing was cylindrical it would be prone to rolling off surfaces and the two rotary controls, mic gain and headphone level, would perpetually be out of reach. The flat on the case means it sits nicely on the desktop when connected via a cable to the mic. A transparent plastic shroud surrounds the XLR. Thanks to an LED this gives enough light to make it very obvious when the device is active.

At the other end of the case a standard mini USB connects to the computer and a 3.5mm jack socket provides the headphone connection. The tiny momentary pushbutton switches 48V phantom power on or off with a small red indicator LED. This defaults to 'off' to preserve mics that might not take kindly to phantom. The whole thing is powered via



USB and the 48V is generated internally from the 5V USB supply.

Centrance claims plug-and-play operation and this was my experience on a Vista box but it doesn't support legacy Windows 2k (I tried it). Output is mono and Centrance offers a free download of its Universal Driver which allows the use of multiple MicPorts. You'll also need this to provide an ASIO2 interface for Cubase/Nuendo etc and a GSIF2 interface for GigaStudio.

In operation the MicPort becomes surprisingly warm but this does not appear to have any adverse effect. Operation is simplicity itself. I used it to record a video tutorial with complete success. There is plenty of mic gain and the headphone output is prodigious. Since the analogue mic output is mixed with the D-A converted return from the computer there is no mic latency on the monitor output.

MicPort offers 24-bit 96kHz and it is the 24 bits that make the difference. Although still more bits are desirable in some circumstances, the analogue gain adjustment is relatively uncritical — i.e. getting the balance right between not clipping and low noise is very easy. That said, I would be more comfortable if there was at least a clip LED on the device. A tri-colour metering LED would be even better.

For many applications this is the perfect solution. It even has 'green' credentials. If I hadn't used the MicPort I would have had to turn on the mixer, the monitors and all the rest of the studio paraphernalia to achieve the same result. This device is perfect for those quick recordings you might otherwise never make because it's just too much hassle to set everything up. As you may have gathered by now, I like it. ■

PROS Price; simplicity and convenience; 24-bit means decent dynamic range without over critical set-up.

CONS No clip indication or metering; not much else at this price.

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