

M-Audio M-Track 2x2 Vocal Studio Pro £170

If you're looking for your first budget home recording setup, M-Audio may have just what you need. **Stuart Bruce** investigates

CONTACT WHO: M-Audio TEL: +44(0)1252 896090 WEB: www.m-audio.com
KEY FEATURES A two-in two-out recording interface with a condenser microphone, headphones and a comprehensive software package including a DAW, a broad selection of effects plugins plus a great synth, a big drum sample library and a piano



Having unpacked your M-Track 2x2 Vocal Studio, the first thing you notice is that you really do have everything you need.

This bus-powered interface is compact and simple. Channel 1 has a dual mic and line input and can provide phantom power; Channel 2 is a dedicated DI/line input, and for a stereo line signal you could use both channels together. There's a headphone output on a 1/4-inch TRS with associated volume knob, and a pair of 1/4-inch TRS jacks for monitors, fed from the big volume knob in the middle.

The Nova Black large-capsule condenser microphone feels solid and well-made, and comes with a good, simple suspension mount and an XLR cable. It has a fixed cardioid pattern, ideal for most vocal and instrument recording. Finally, the HDH 40 headphones come with one of those screw-on 1/4-inch, 3.5mm adapters, making them compatible with anything you may wish to use them for.

In addition to the hardware, you get a lot of software to download, including the excellent Cubase LE, a comprehensive DAW package. In addition, you get the AIR Creative FX collection which, as any Pro Tools user will tell you, contains many useful effects. For drums there is Strike which is a powerful drum programming and sampler tool with a large sample library. Then there's the AIR Mini Grand which has a great selection of piano tones, and finally Xpand!2, a powerful and comprehensive workstation-like plug capable of combining synthesis and sample playback.

On a Mac, the interface is plug-and-play, and on PC, you need to download a driver. With either method, you're up and running very quickly, and once you have all the additional software installed, you have a powerful little music production setup ready to go. The interface is very simple to use and I tested the microphone with various sources including voice, acoustic guitar and percussion. The results are good, and beyond what I would expect at this price point. The DI is also of very good quality, and there was none of the high-frequency loss you often get with cheaper units. Of course, this is not something to replace expensive



You're up and running very quickly with a powerful little music production setup

high-end recording equipment, but with the addition of all that software, it really is the best entry level setup I have seen, and at this price absolutely unbeatable. The interface sounds good, covers all the input sources you need, and provides you with headphones and a monitor controller. The provided headphones sound remarkably good and the microphone, while no Neumann U87, is capable and works on multiple sources. If this doesn't get you started in music production, then nothing will. **FM**

THE PROS & CONS



Everything you need to start making music... except the talent

A comprehensive and fuss-free recording interface



Doesn't include a screw adapter for the shock mount, so won't fit many mic stands out of the box

FM VERDICT

8.7

A brilliant entry-level music production package that, when added to the bundled software proposition, is hard to beat at this price point