

# Universal Audio 2192

It has long been accepted that converters have a big part to play in the search for perfection. The old data processing warning of 'garbage in, garbage out' has been taken to heart. The happy result is the massively wide choice of available converters, but it is also here that bewilderment can set in. **ROB JAMES** investigates UA's take on the subject.



**I**N ATTEMPTING TO DIFFERENTIATE boxes with substantially similar functions, manufacturers are faced with a difficult dilemma. No matter how clever the cosmetics, a 19-inch rack box is still a 19-inch rack box. Convertors themselves are generally of a very high quality. To put this in perspective, many of today's 'budget' convertors perform at least as well, and often better, than the high-end convertors of ten years ago. So manufacturers are obliged to look at other ways of adding value by packaging conversion with other functions for specific purposes. This approach always carries the risk of limiting the market for the product and of over complicating the user interface.

The Universal Audio 2192 'master digital audio interface' is, as the name suggests, aimed squarely at high quality acquisition and mastering. It offers concurrent stereo analogue to digital and digital to analogue conversion together with a Word clock generator, which may not sound especially exciting. However, my ears began to prick up at support for sampling rates up to 192kHz, sub-clocking and over-clocking, and transcoding between digital formats, for example between 192kHz AES-EBU and 192kHz ADAT S-MUX.

Four outputs from the Word clock generator make it simple and convenient to use the 2192 as the master

sync source for DAWs and transfer applications. Universal Audio has, as might be expected given its heritage, used audiophile circuit topology for the analogue signal sections. DC-coupled, fully dual-differential, matched FET, all discrete component Class A with no capacitors in the signal path.

Solidity of construction and a vintage flavour to the knobs and switches all contribute to a real 'feel good factor' before you even fire it up. When you do, don't be fooled by the momentary lack of the On light. A power conditioner circuit self-calibrates for a couple seconds, then the soft blue lamp illuminates. Around ten seconds later, after further calibration routines, the only other front panel lamp begins glowing to indicate Clock status. Green for locked, red for unlocked.

Operation of the 2192 makes a most refreshing change after the tortuous menu driven panels of other units. Rotary selector switches and latching pushbuttons are the order of the day. The comprehensive manual really is redundant in day to day operation. As you might expect from a unit at this price point (around UK£2000 + VAT), the sound is transparent and neutral. Imaging is rock solid and noise conspicuous by its absence. Given ideal conditions, golden ears and a bunch of exotic high-end convertors I am sure differences would emerge but for all practical purposes the 2192 is as good as it gets.

With this box Universal Audio has struck a neat balance between aiming the product at a specific area while maximising its breadth of appeal. It is going to be popular for stereo mastering and acquisition and as an adjunct to DAWs. If you need more channels the four Word clock outputs make it simple to cascade units for eight channels in and out, although I hope UA decides to expand the line with a two in, eight out and eight in/out versions.

Exhibiting highly desirable prime virtues of elegant simplicity and neutrality, the Universal Audio 2192 is a very serious contender. Anyone in the market for a serious stereo convertor should see and hear this box. ■

**PROS** Very well thought out; elegant simplicity; neutrality and imaging.

**CONS** Price will keep it out of the reach of many; nothing to upset me.

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## Back and front

At first glance the classic brushed alloy front panel gives few clues to the sophisticated nature of the unit. The real estate is occupied by 9-segment in and out meters with clip indication,



four retro knobs, a couple of buttons and indicators, and a chunky toggle power switch. The knobs select clock source, sample rate when used as the clock master, the digital source for the D-ACs and the source for the digital outputs. This will normally be set to A-D except when transcoding between digital formats.

Note that the 2192 is not a sample rate convertor. Pushbuttons select whether AES-EBU or SPDIF inputs will be used when the clock source and the analogue or digital output source is set to AES/SPDIF. The other button determines whether single or dual wire AES-EBU mode is selected. The central clock status lamp glows green when a valid clock source is present and locked or red when it isn't.

A glance around the back reveals neat use of panel space. XLRs cater for single and dual-wire AES-EBU and analogue I-O. Factory calibration is such that +4dBu corresponds to -18dBFS giving 18dB of headroom. Fifteen turn trim pots accommodate inputs ranging from +5.5dBu to +30dBu for 0dBFS and outputs from +4dBu to +23dBu for 0dBFS.

Word clock I-Os are BNC with two alternative inputs and four outputs. If an external input is used as the reference, the 2192 can be used as a clock distributor. SPDIF is phono and may be used at sampling rates up to 200kHz. It is worth noting the optical Toslink I-O is in ADAT format, not optical SPDIF — at normal sampling rates only channels 1 and 2 are used. However, S-MUX multiplexing is also supported for higher sampling rates. At 96kHz 4 channels are used and at the 4 X rates, e.g. 192kHz, all 8 ADAT channels are used.