

iZ ADA II ADC/DAC Modular Multichannel Converter System

The sleek, MADI-equipped iZ ADA II multichannel ADC/DAC offers notably high-quality sound in a completely flexible, truly professional configuration.

Before hearing RADAR (Random Access Digital Audio Recorder) in the mid-1990s, some audio engineers swore they would never leave the analog realm. RADAR was the first device to win many of those engineers over. In a time when tracking to a computer was almost unheard of, the innovative Canadian company iZ Technology developed RADAR, distributed by Otari (the Japanese pro audio brand who sold the RADAR brand through 1999).



The iZ ADA II sits atop of other conversion options at Russ Long's Nashville studio.

RADAR's interface was so intuitive that making the jump from a 24-track analog machine to RADAR took literally only a few minutes of instruction; RADAR could even be operated without using a GUI or monitor.

As the years passed, DAW multi-tracking slowly became the norm and—since RADAR operates solely as a recorder with no mixing features—it became increasingly less prominent in the recording studio scene. However, some engineers and producers never stopped reminiscing about RADAR's “analog character” and the high quality of RADAR's converters; many engineers incorporated their RADAR into their Pro Tools rig as the system's A/D and D/A converters.

Adapting to the current trend of recording directly to a DAW, iZ announced its ADA A/D and D/A multichannel converter systems in 2008. Reviewed here, the second-generation ADA—the ADA II—was unveiled last fall at the AES Convention; ADA II continues in the iZ tradition of exceptional sound and build quality, as well as user-friendly flexibility.

Features

The 4U iZ ADA II is a customizable, made-to-order multichannel ADC/DAC high-resolution converter available in 8-, 16- or 24-channel configurations with customizable I/O ratios [e.g., 8-in/16-out, 24-in/8-out, etc.]. It comes with either iZ's Classic 96 or Ultra Nyquist converter technology, both of which are identical to those offered in iZ's latest generation RADAR 6. The Classic 96 offers sample rates up to 96 kHz; the Ultra Nyquist operates up to 192 kHz. Each converter card provides eight channels of I/O.

The ADA II is controlled via the front-panel's

vibrant 10.1-inch LCD touchscreen (a significant upgrade from the ADA's 7-inch screen); the screen provides single touch commands as well as access to all ADA II functionality via seven user screens—Main, Setup, Route, Meters, System Configuration, About and Debug. A full-screen mode displays high resolution metering for all 48 channels of I/O.

ADA II's rear panel provides comprehensive connectivity in a modular design, allowing expansion of the system as user needs change. To date, MADI digital I/O is standard on every ADA II. Additional digital I/O options include ADAT/Lightpipe, 24 channels of AES3 in and out and dual Pro Tools HD connectivity. The ADA II Motherboard I/O includes onboard Gigabit Ethernet (for software updates and network control), four USB 2.0 connectors, two PS/2 connectors and one Serial remote port. Balanced analog I/O is via six female 25-pin D-Sub connectors.

ADA II interfaces with virtually any native DAW via its low-latency, low-jitter MADI digital I/O and a compatible MADI interface card installed in the host computer. Pro Tools HDX and Pro Tools HD users connect with the iZ Dual Pro Tools HD Option Card that connects up to 2 ADA II units (48 channels) to a Pro Tools HDX or Core Card via DigiLink cable.

In Use

I first used the ADA II review unit provided by iZ with a Pro Tools HDX rig. I found that substituting this rig's Lynx Aurora and Avid I/O with the ADA II was a simple swap; the only thing that caught me off-guard was that the Optical MADI I/O between the ADA MADI card and the iZ Dual Pro Tools HD Interface has to be connected for the iZ Dual Pro Tools HD Interface to operate. Not a big deal, but if I hadn't read it in the manual (after unsuccessfully trying to get it to work on my own), I don't think I would have figured it out. The Pro Tools HD interface apparently operates independently from the ADA II and must be connected to the ADA II's MADI I/O via a pair of optical cables as well as to the HD Core or HDX card using



The ADA II's LCD provides access to seven user screens: Main, Setup, Route, Meters, System Configuration, About and Debug.

a DigiLink cable.

One initial complaint: Opening a Pro Tools session running at a different sample rate than the previous session requires users to manually change the sample rate on the ADA II, apparently because this MADI stage prevents the ADA II from effectively communicating with the Pro Tools software. However, once I was up and running, this Pro Tools 10 HDX/ADA II combo operated flawlessly. After mixing for several days with the ADA II, I was truly ecstatic about its sound quality and routing flexibility.

The touchscreen is beautiful and easy to use; however, as it's built into the chassis, users who keep their computer and converters in a separate location from their control room (myself included) will have to visit the converter each time a setting needs to be changed. The ADA doesn't automatically follow the settings of the Pro Tools session; if you are working in sessions of varying sample rates, you have to physically change the sample rate on the ADA II per each new session, but iZ provides a free Java App that allows full remote control of the key front panel settings—for example, sample rate and sync source, as well as full metering.

During this evaluation, I tracked a full band at Nashville's Brown Owl Studio (thebrownowlstudio.com), simultaneously recording to two Pro Tools rigs (HD Native systems, this time): one through the iZ ADA II and one through a pair of Lynx Aurora converters. After the session and back at my own studio, I combined the two sessions into a single session, allowing me to listen

to any combination of converters.

To my ears, the sonic differences between iZ's and Lynx's converter systems were easily discernible. I found the ADA II to be "warmer" than the Lynx, with more of a difference between the D/A converters than between the A/D converters. The ADA II's DAC was slightly smoother—with more high frequency detail and more low-end clarity—than the Lynx's D/A; this was the case with tracks recorded through both the Lynx's A/D and the ADA's A/D converter stages.

Summary

One of the most important things I remember about the first time I used an iZ RADAR multitrack recorder: the toll-free support number was visible on the unit's main screen at all times. I love working with a company that wants to help its users (rather than hide from them), and I'm happy to report that the iZ tech support toll-free number is *still* found on the main screen of the ADA II.

In conclusion, iZ's ADA II is the converter-based solution for anyone in love with the sound of the RADAR, though relatively deep pockets are required; a fully loaded 24 channel Ultra-Nyquist ADA II with MADI can cost around \$12k (excluding the Dual Pro Tools Interface). However, considering the ADA II's sound quality, plus iZ's proven record of supporting its customers at all times, this price could be considered a bargain.

Prices: \$6,700+ (depending on I/O configuration and choice of Classic 96 or Ultra Nyquist converters)

Contact: iZ Technology | izcorp.com

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