



# AXE I/O

**Premium Audio Interface  
with advanced guitar tone shaping**

**USER MANUAL**

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## Power adapter information

Use only the specified AC adaptor and make sure the line voltage at the installation matches the input voltage specified on the AC adaptor's body.

IK Multimedia will not be responsible of any damage caused by usage of any AC adaptor other than the specified one.

The usage of AC adaptors other than the specified one could compromise the user experience in terms of:

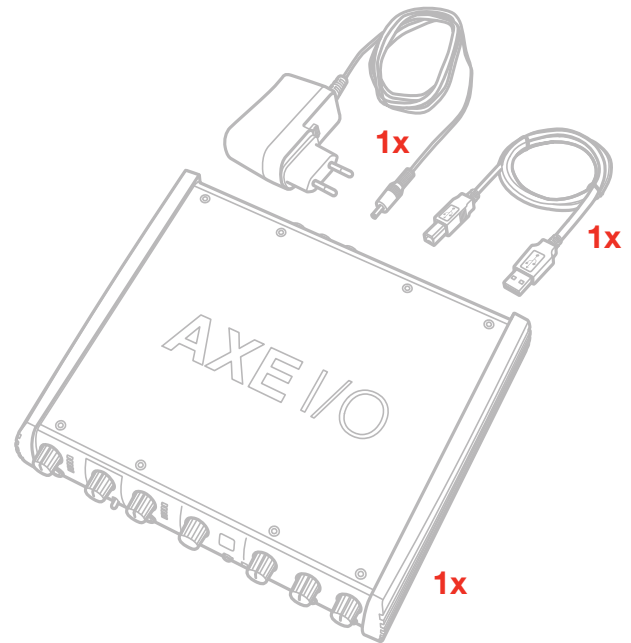
- Safety risk
- Noise performances

## AXE I/O

Thank you for purchasing AXE I/O.

Your package contains:

- AXE I/O
- USB cable
- PSU
- Quick Start Guide
- Registration Card



AXE I/O is a 2in/5out audio/midi interface capable of a resolution up to 24/192kHz.

It has been designed from the ground-up with the goal of providing the best possible interface for guitar players, with dedicated features such as: Re-amplification IN/OUT, JFET/Pure input selector, Pick-up selector, Z-TONE™ control, Preset browser, external control inputs and tuner.

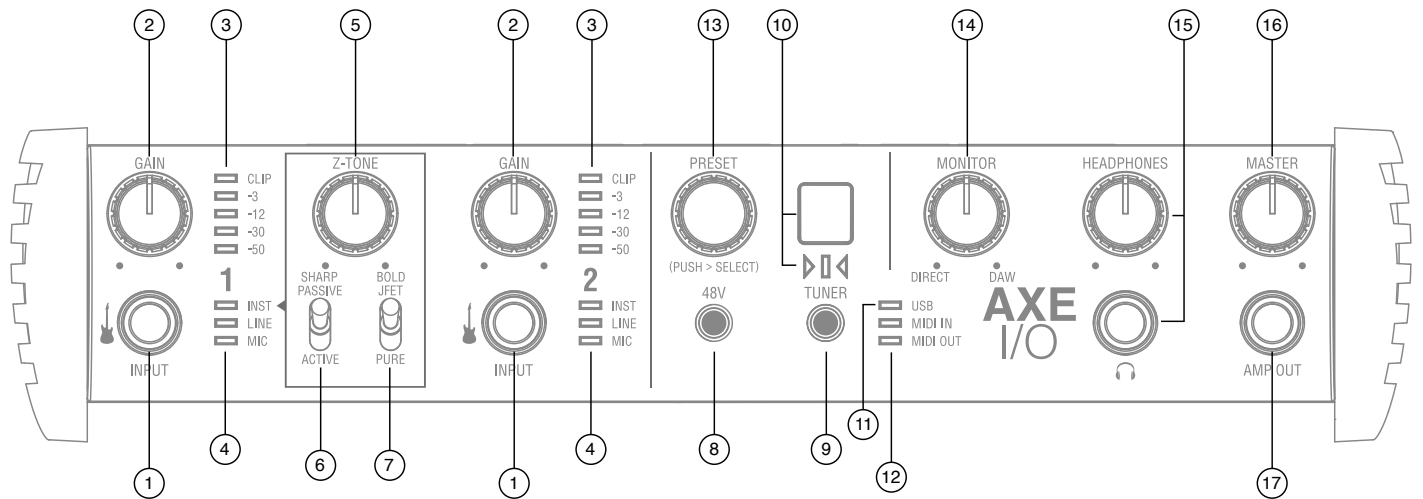
AXE I/O is a superior all-around audio interface too, thanks to the 192kHz sampling resolution at 24bit, the outstanding dynamic range and the asynchronous USB audio, for ultra low conversion jitter for premium audio performance.

## Register your AXE I/O

By registering, you can access technical support, activate your warranty and receive free JamPoints™ which will be added to your account. JamPoints™ allow you to obtain discounts on future IK purchases! Registering also keeps you informed of all the latest software updates and IK products.

Register at: [www.ikmultimedia.com/registration](http://www.ikmultimedia.com/registration)

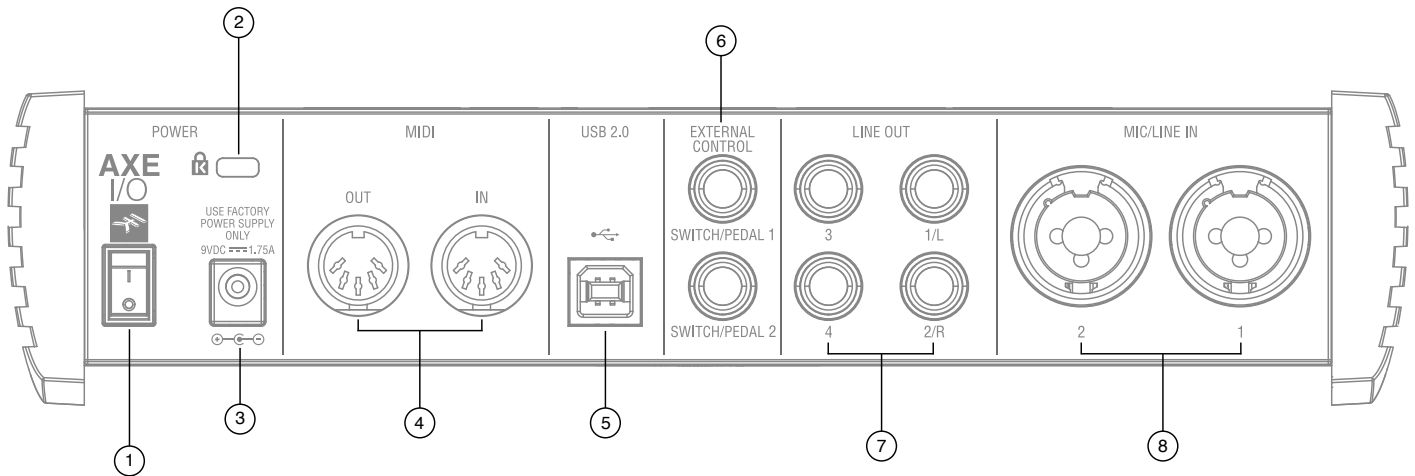
## Front panel



1. Instrument inputs 1 and 2 - 1/4" (6.35mm) jack type - it is possible to connect instruments (e.g., guitar).
2. **GAIN 1** and **GAIN 2** - adjust the input gain for the signals at Inputs 1 and 2 respectively.
3. Peak Meters - each input has a dedicated 5-segments peak meter, with 1-second hold on CLIP, that indicates the level of the input signal.
4. **INST, LINE, MIC** LEDs - active input indication with auto select. If no connection is made, or if an XLR is connected to the back Combo input, the MIC input will be activated, and the corresponding LED will light up; if an 1/4" jack (line level) is connected at the back Combo input, the LINE input will be selected and the corresponding LED will light up; if an instrument is connected to the front input, the INSTRUMENT input will be selected and the corresponding LED will light up. The front Instrument input has always priority over back connected XLR or 1/4" jacks.
5. **Z-TONE™** - Variable impedance control - the front control named Z-TONE™ allows you to change the input impedance on the instrument input 1 allowing for a unique possibility for tone shaping on your instruments.
6. **PASSIVE/ACTIVE** - Pick-Up selector - this selector allows you to match the type of pick-up installed on the connected instrument. This control will act exclusively on the instrument input 1.
7. **JFET/PURE** - Preamp topology selector - this selector allows you to select two different preamp topologies for your connected instrument: JFET preamp type and Pure preamp type. This control will act exclusively on the instrument input 1.
8. **48V** - This switch enables 48V phantom power on both microphone inputs. The switch illuminates when phantom power is selected.
9. **TUNER** - this switch activates the built in tuner. The switch illuminates when tuner is active.
10. Tuner's display and LEDs - 7-segments display shows the note played, plus three segments tuning indication.

11. **USB LED** - this LED illuminates when the unit is recognised by the computer to which it is connected.
12. **MIDI IN/OUT LEDs** - these LEDs illuminate when MIDI data is received from/transmitted to the MIDI port.
13. **PRESET** - this push-encoder allows you to browse between AmpliTube's presets. This control can also be customized to send any MIDI CC to control other functions or other software.
14. **MONITOR** - the Monitor knob allows you to blend your input signals with the playback streams from your computer. This allows you to monitor your input signal with zero latency. If the knob is positioned at 12 o'clock, the input signal and the playback stream will be equally balanced. Turning the knob to the left will increase the level of the direct signal; turning to the right will increase the level of the playback stream from the DAW. This control works both for Outputs 1-2 and Heaphones.
15. **HEADPHONES** - connect one pair of headphones at the 1/4" (6.35 mm) TRS jack sockets below the headphone volume controls. The headphone outputs always carry the signals that are currently routed to outputs 1 & 2.
16. **MASTER** - main output level control – this control adjusts the level at Outputs 1 and 2 on the rear panel.
17. **AMP OUT** - this is a fifth 1/4" physical unbalanced, floating output with selectable ground lift (controlled with software). It's independent from main Outputs 1-2 and 3-4. This output is specifically designed to allow the interface to feed guitar amps or stomps without the typically associated risk or hum or buzz noises caused by ground loops or mismatched levels and impedances.

## Rear panel



1. Power On/Off switch.
2. Kensington security lock - secure your AXE I/O to a suitable structure if desired.
3. External DC power input - 2-pole barrel socket. 9V DC, 1.75A (max), positive on the external pole.
4. **MIDI IN/OUT** - standard 5-pin DIN sockets for connection of external MIDI equipment.
5. **USB 2.0** port - Type B connector - connect the AXE I/O to your computer with the cable supplied.
6. **EXTERNAL CONTROL** - use these 1/4" (6.35mm) jack to connect external controller pedals (single or dual switches, continuous expression pedals). MIDI messages sent are freely assignable from the "Control app".
7. **LINE OUTPUTS** 1 to 4 - Outputs 1/L and 2/R are balanced and floating analogue line outputs on 1/4" (6.35 mm) jack sockets; Outputs 3 and 4 are unbalanced line outputs; use TRS jacks for a balanced connection or TS jacks for unbalanced. Outputs 1/L and 2/R will normally be used to drive the primary monitoring system.
8. **MIC/LINE IN** 1 and 2 - XLR Combo type input sockets - connect microphones or line level signals. Input 1 can also be used as a re-amp input.

## 1 Installation and setup

### 1.1 Software installation

All software required by the AXE I/O are available for download from the IK Multimedia website ([www.ikmultimedia.com/products/axeio](http://www.ikmultimedia.com/products/axeio)). By downloading the “AXE I/O Drivers and Control Software” you’ll find:

**MAC users:** the installer contains the AXE I/O Control App.

**Windows users:** the package includes the AXE I/O Control App and the necessary drivers for the interface.

1. Using your usual browser, go to [www.ikmultimedia.com/products/axeio](http://www.ikmultimedia.com/products/axeio) and go to the Download section.
2. You can now download the “AXE I/O Drivers and Control Software” file (Mac and Windows versions available).
4. Download and install the “AXE I/O Drivers and Control Software” version (Mac or Windows) appropriate for your computer and follow all on-screen instructions.
5. When the installation is complete, restart your computer.
6. After restart, connect the AXE I/O to your computer with the USB cable supplied.

### 1.2 Setup

1. Download and install the AXE I/O Drivers and Control Software as described above.

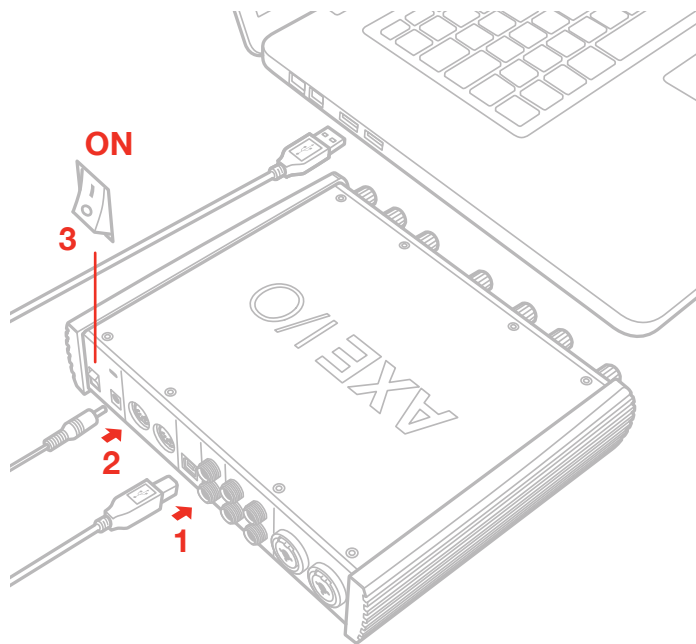


**FREE DOWNLOAD**

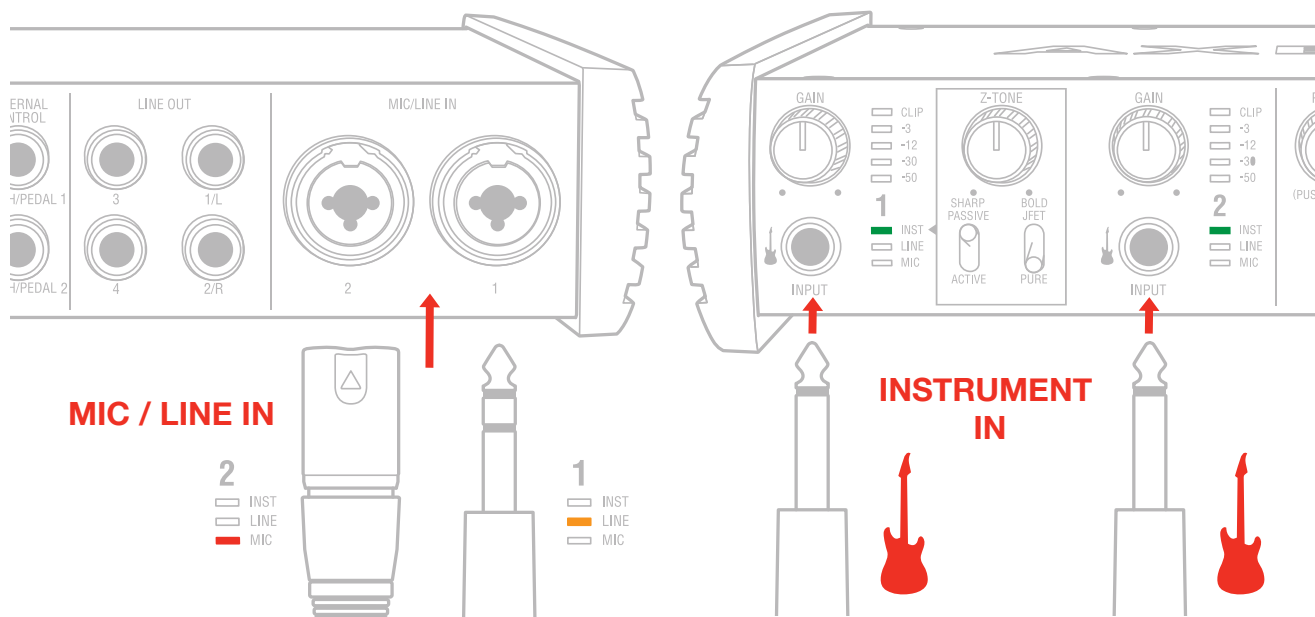
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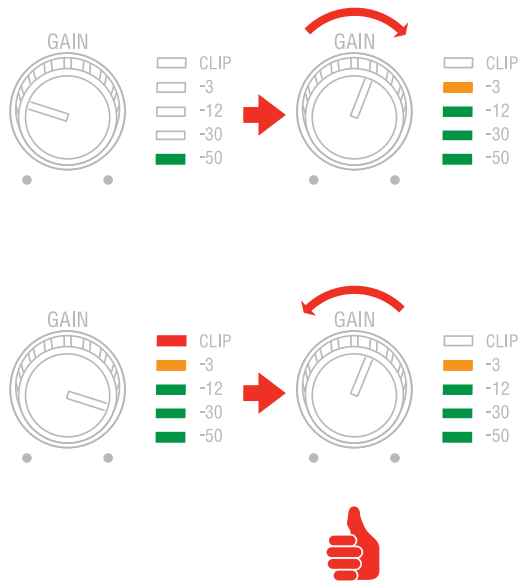
2. Connect the AXE I/O to your computer with the supplied USB cable.
3. Connect the supplied PSU to the AXE I/O and switch on the unit



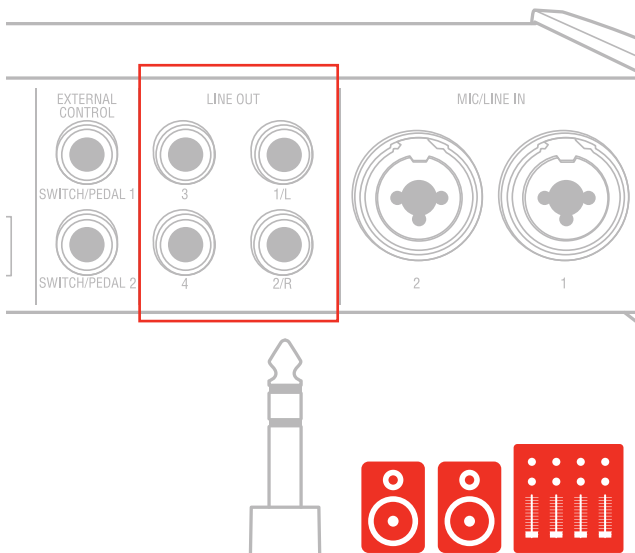
4. You can connect microphones or line level signal to the back combo XLR inputs 1 and 2, or instrument signal to the front Jack 1/4" Instrument inputs 1 and 2.



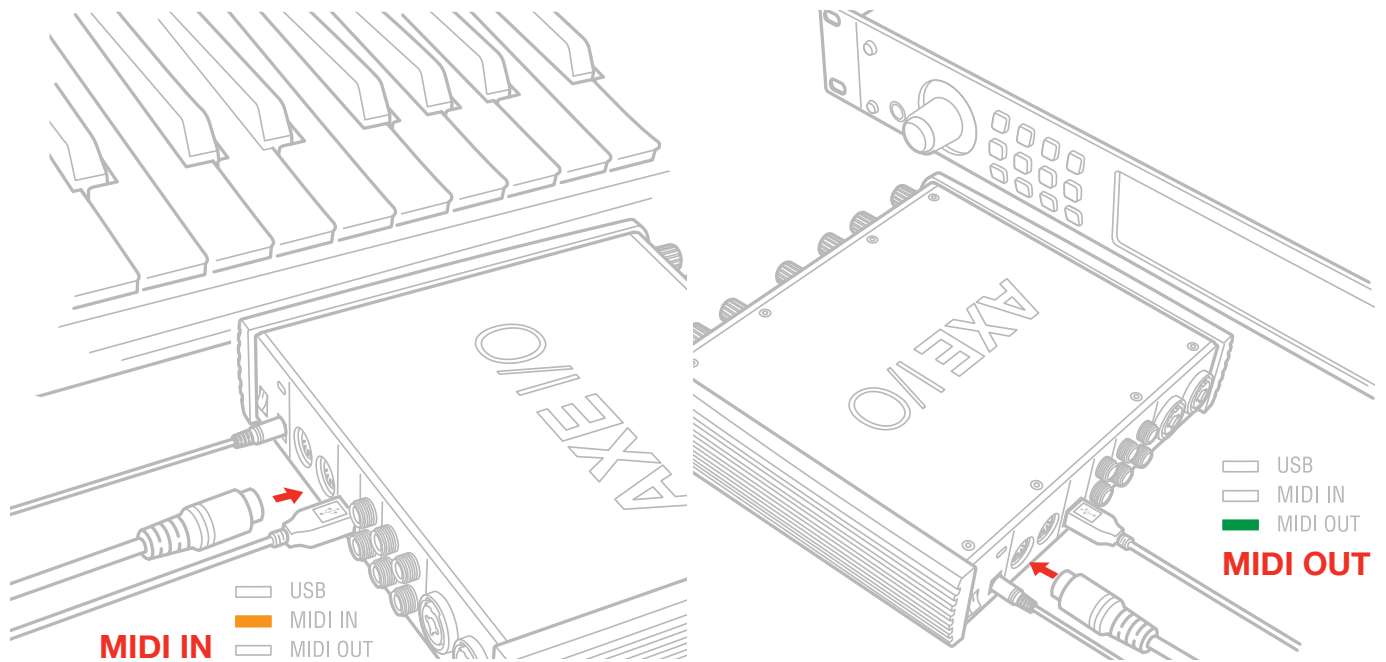




5. Connect speakers, amplifiers or other line devices to the four line output jack 1/4" on the rear panel of AXE I/O. Out 1/L and 2/R are balanced output.

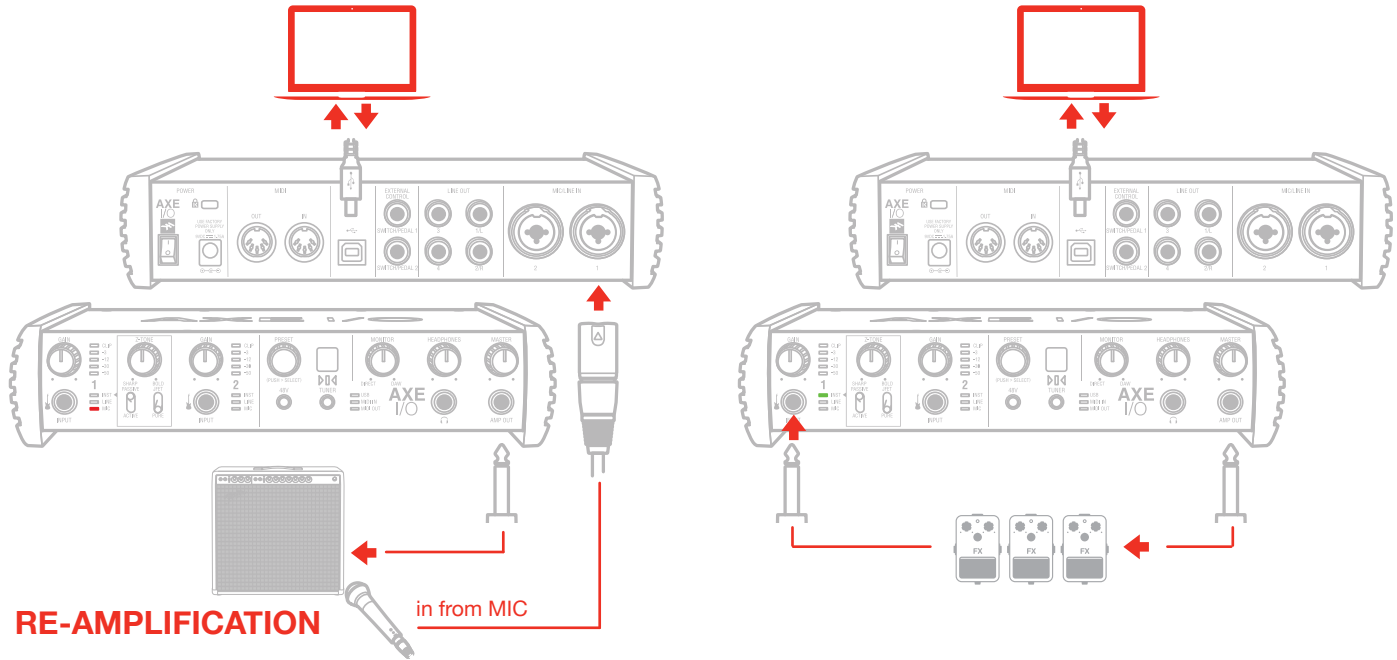


6. If needed, you can connect external MIDI devices to the physical MIDI ports (Input/Output).



## 2 Dedicated guitar features

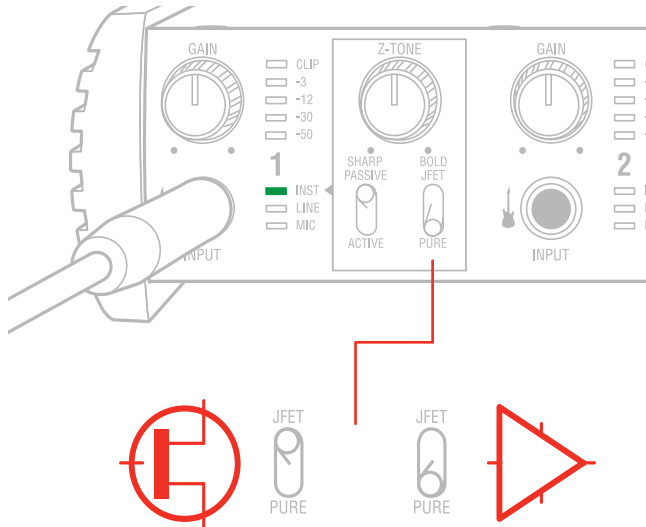
### 2.1 Direct amplifier output & Re-Amplification



Among the features that make of AXE I/O the definitive guitarist interface is the Re-Amplification feature: The “AMP OUT” is a fifth physical output, and it’s independent from main Output 1-2 and 3-4. With this output, you can feed a DI recorded guitar to external analogue stumps or a real amplifier, still being able to monitor the session from main Output (1-2). The external stumps (or the miked amplifier) will be connected to Input to return into the DAW in a recording track.

The AMP OUT is a floating balanced output topology specifically designed for proper interface with guitar or bass amplifiers of any kind for maximum signal fidelity and integrity. This ensures the immunity from noises caused by ground loops with the Amps, so actually allowing reamping without the typical associated noise/hum issues.

## 2.2 JFET / PURE input (only for Instrument Input 1)



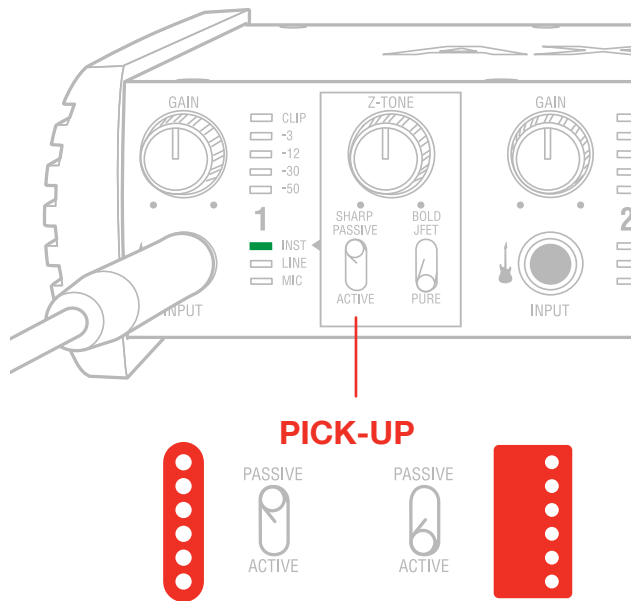
Thanks to the front panel selector it is possible to select two different preamp topologies for your connected instrument: JFET preamp type and Pure preamp type.

The discrete JFET (field-effect transistor) circuitry adds a tiny bit of color and harmonics to the signal, giving your instruments a bit of added warmth.

Pure circuitry results in a more linear response featuring the absolutely cleaner signal path possible, for best transparency and clarity.

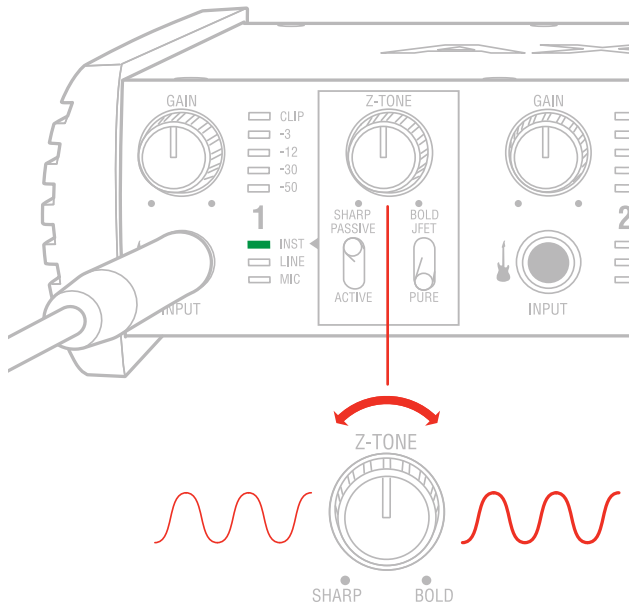
Each amplifier topology offers complimentary sonic performance to the other, and both are widely used in professional recording and stage work. Note: this control only works when the Pickup selector is on the Passive position.

## 2.3 Pick-Up selector (only for Instrument Input 1)



AXE I/O works perfectly with both Passive and Active guitar or bass pickups, having independent circuitry that suits perfectly both topologies. Passive electric guitar pickups exhibit significantly higher output impedance than the passive counterpart, among other significant tone differences, but neither of the two is “better” or “worse” than the other: indeed they have different behaviors. To properly couple this diversity of guitar pickups in the most musically pleasing manner, AXE I/O offers a pickup selector that allows the artist to select between Active (when using an active pickup) and Passive (when using a passive pickup).

## 2.4 Variable impedance (Z-TONE™) control (only for Instrument Input 1)



All passive pickups (being them single coil, humbucker, split, etc..) has a certain sound character that is also determined by the loading impedance. The Z-TONE™ front control allows you to change the input impedance on the instrument input 1 therefore allowing for a very creative way of shaping the tone of your instruments.

The beauty of this system is that it allows you to discover tonal shades from your instruments that you never heard before, by shaping the tone right at the source, within the pickups, instead of what is normally done with post-processing tools of any kind.

Feel free to experiment without rules with this knob! You will find your tone becomes generally more thick and bold by reducing the impedance (control is moved clockwise) and, on the other hand, more crisp and sharp when rotated counter-clockwise.

For example if you find your high gain tones to be too harsh, try setting this control at mid position, and you'll experience what the Z-TONE can magically do.

If you're recording a bass (with passive pickups) and find it sounds a bit thin, try the same. The sound will immediately feel more bold, solid and bigger.

The key here is experimentation! Feel free to check it out on your instruments, on various configurations, the possibilities are really endless.

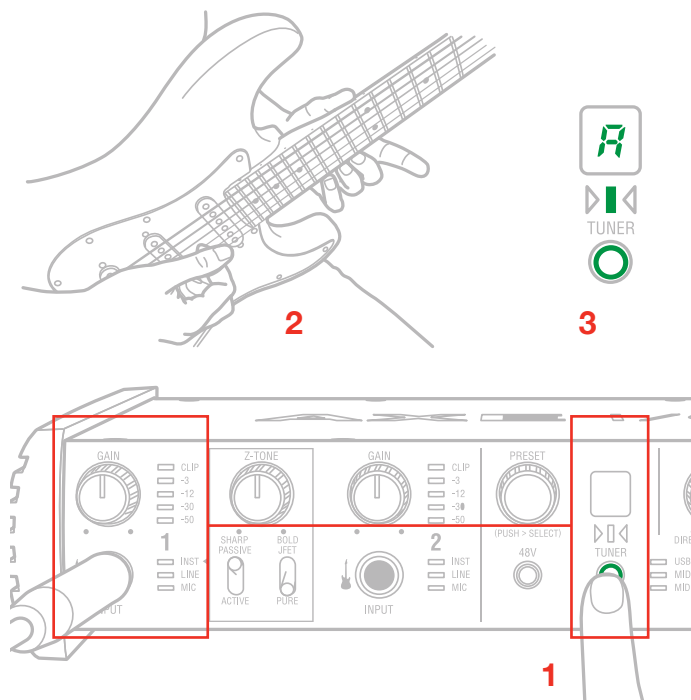
Settings start from the highest impedance value (named "Sharp") to the lowest impedance value (named "Bold") The Z-TONE circuit only works with passive pickups of any kind.

Using it on active pickups will not provide any significant useful change to the sonics of the instrument.

Note: AXE IO is very useful to feed analogue stomp boxes from DAW tracks using the AMP output.

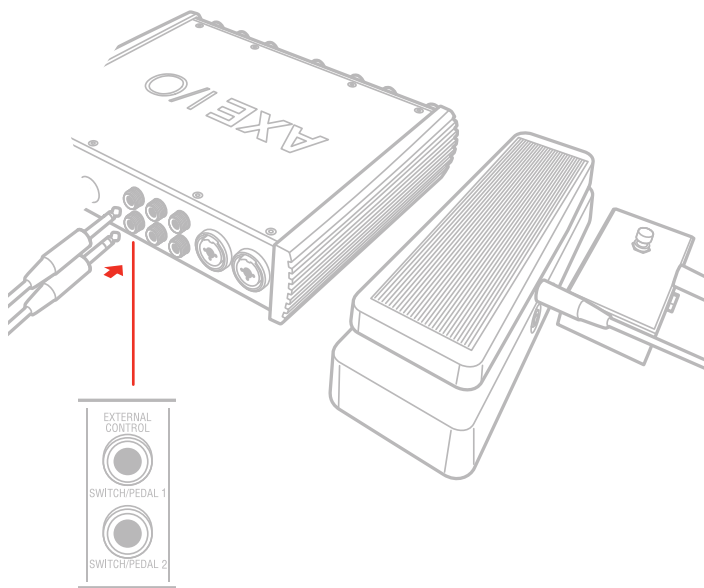
The perfect way to get the Stomp signal back into the DAW is using Instrument input 1. This way the Z-TONE circuit will also be very useful because most vintage stomps can actually change the way they sound depending on the load impedance, so experimentation in this usage is very welcome as well.

## 2.5 Tuner (only for Instrument Input 1)



A built-in tuner with bright LED indicators clearly shows any tuning discrepancy. To access to the tuner just press the tuner button on the front panel. This is another feature not so common on audio interfaces and allows the artist to access seamlessly to tune their instruments on the fly without having to use external tuners or dedicated plug-ins.

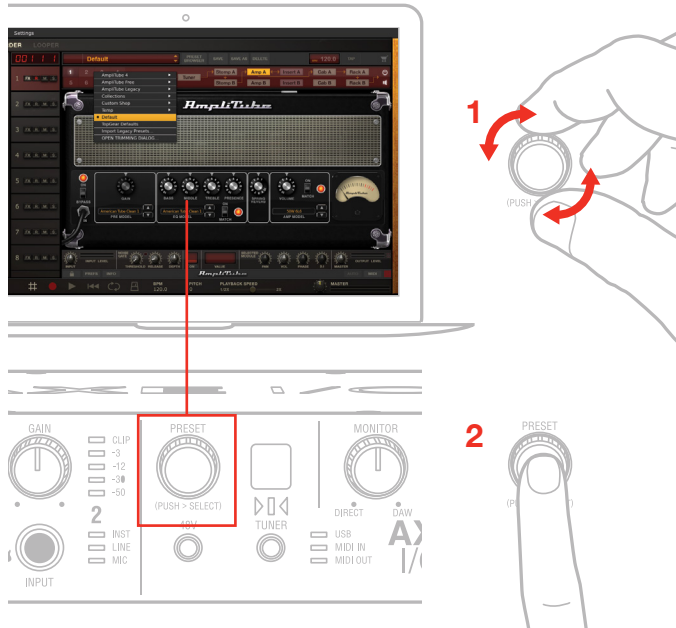
## 2.6 External control



Connect up to two external controller here to send MIDI control messages. You can use any available

“momentary” or “sustain pedal” type foot switch that includes a 1/4 inch connector. Both normally open and normally closed switches are supported. AXE IO also support continuous expression pedals for controlling realtime parameters like Wah, Volume, FX depth etc. Any 1/4” TRS connector expression pedal will work with AXE IO. MIDI messages associated with these controllers are freely assignable from the “Control app”.

## 2.7 Preset browsing



By default this control is setup to directly control presets browsing on AmpliTube, however the MIDI CC that are assigned to this control can be freely assigned to make it useful for other type of controls by using the “Control App”.

Of course, by doing so, you will no longer be able to browse AmpliTube presets.

Default MIDI CC# are:

Rotation -> CC#22 Relative mode

Push -> CC#23

To load a preset in AmpliTube:







PRESET  
(PUSH > SELECT)  
**PUSH**



PRESET  
(PUSH > SELECT)  
**ROTATE**



PRESET  
(PUSH > SELECT)  
**PUSH**



To go back on the previous level of the preset menu, push and hold the control:



PRESET  
(PUSH > SELECT)  
**PUSH and HOLD**



## 3 Setup your DAW

The AXE I/O is compatible with any Windows-based DAW that supports ASIO or any Mac-based DAW that uses Core Audio. After installing AXE I/O Control Software and connecting the hardware, you can start using your AXE I/O with your DAW.

It is possible that your DAW may not automatically select the AXE I/O as its default I/O device. In this case, you must manually select the AXE I/O as the audio hardware on your DAW's Audio Setup page. Please refer to your DAW's documentation (or Help files) if you are unsure where to select the ASIO/Core Audio driver.

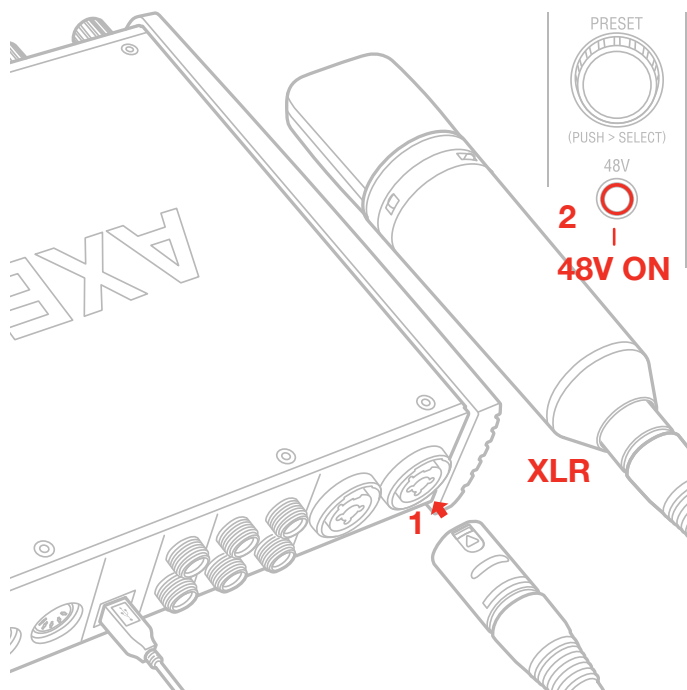
Once the AXE I/O is set as the preferred Audio Device in your DAW, all 2 inputs and 5 outputs will appear in your DAW's Audio I/O preferences.

## 4 Connecting microphones

Always connect microphones to AXE I/O with XLR-to-XLR balanced cables. This will ensure a pristine and clean performance from your microphone with AXE I/O.

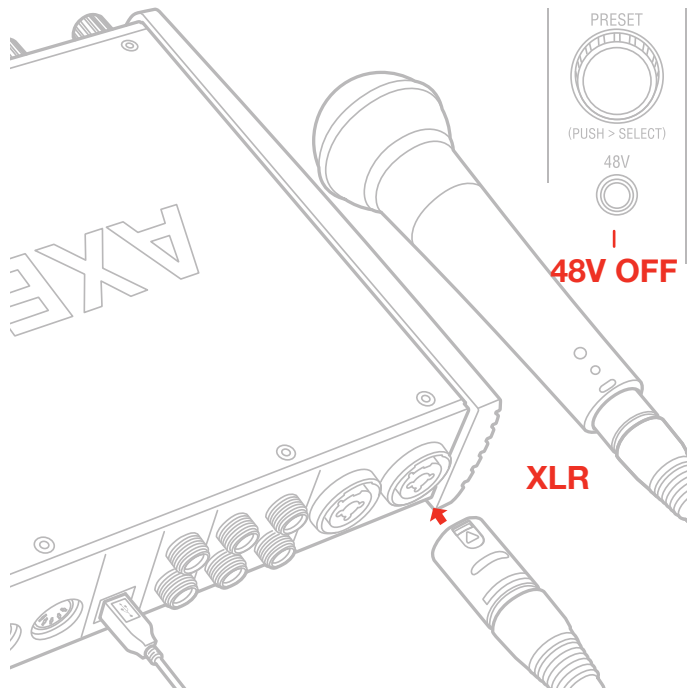
NOTE: In your audio software, select the appropriate AXE I/O input (1 or 2) as the source of the track you will be recording to. Adjust the channel gain knob until you have a sufficient audio signal without clipping.

### 4.1 Condenser microphones



Most condenser microphones require external phantom power. If phantom power is ON, switch it OFF, and then connect your microphone. Turn phantom power ON only after the microphone is connected. Once it's turned ON, check that the phantom power LED has become red.

## 4.2 Dynamic microphones

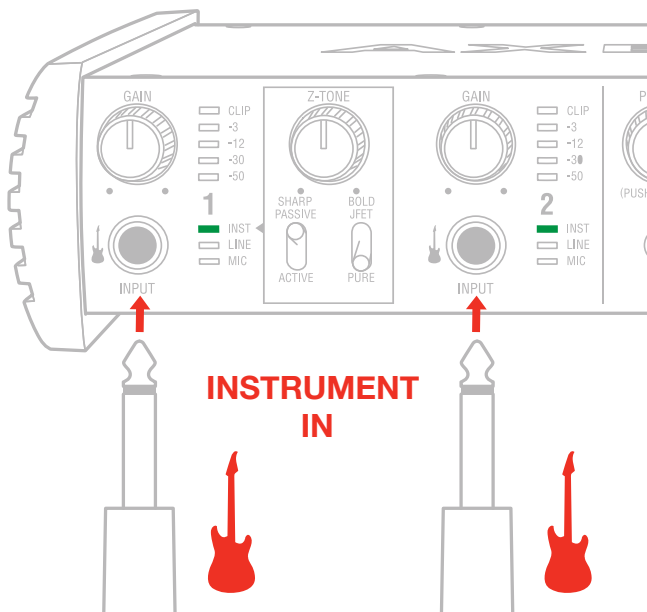


Before connecting dynamic microphones make sure phantom power is turned OFF. Check that the Phantom LED is turned off.

## 4.3 Ribbon microphones

Before connecting a ribbon microphone, turn OFF phantom power and check the microphone's operating instruction manual to see if it requires it. Most ribbon microphones don't require phantom power, and some can even be damaged by it. If you're in doubt just leave it OFF. If the microphone won't work, check its user manual, it may need phantom power. Please note that when 48V phantom power is turned on, it works on both channels simultaneously.

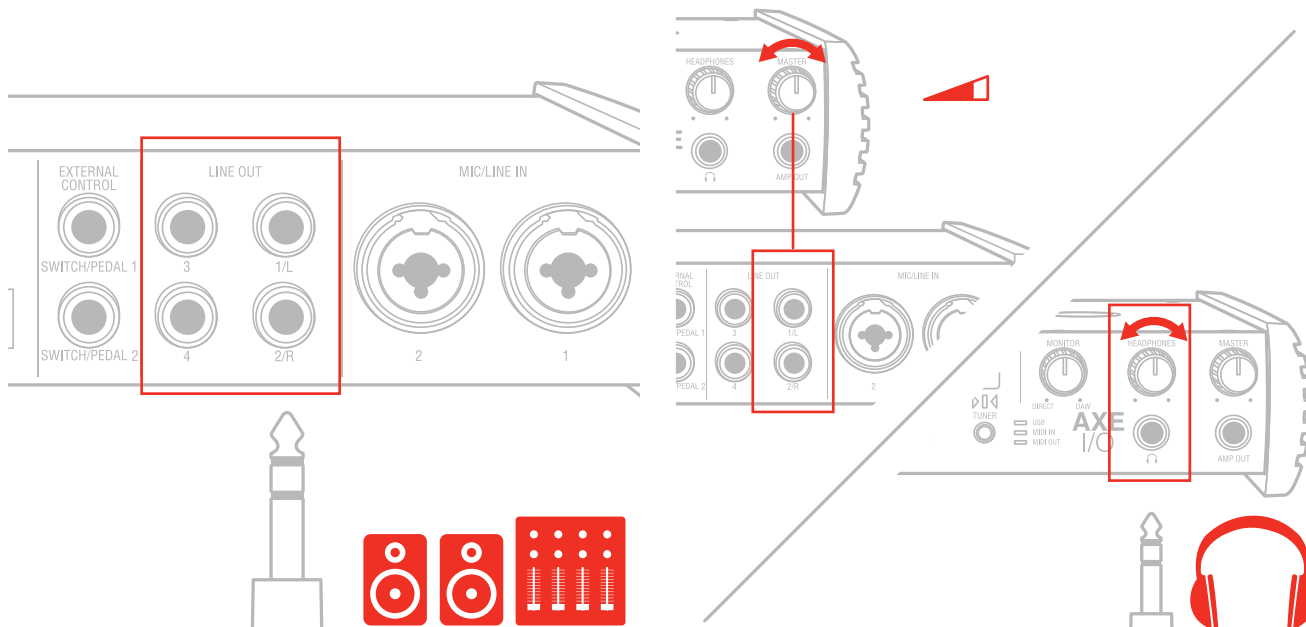
## 5 Connecting instruments



Connect your guitars, basses or any other mono instruments to the instrument inputs on AXE I/O using an 1/4" plug unbalanced (TS or "mono") guitar cable.

Please refer to Section 2 of this manual for the complete description of features dedicated to the instrument input.

## 6 Connecting loudspeakers and headphones



The 1/4" jack outputs 1/L and 2/R on the rear panel will normally be used to drive monitoring speakers. Self-powered (active) monitors incorporate internal amplifiers, and may be connected directly. Passive loudspeakers

will require a separate stereo amplifier; in this case, the rear panel outputs should be connected to the amplifier's inputs.

Line outputs 1/L and 2R are electronically balanced and floating, automatically compensates level when connection is balanced or unbalanced. For this reason these outputs are also ideal for use onstage, when directly feeding the FOH without any need for isolators or DI boxes. The AXE IO has a solid strong signal free from ground loops that will work perfectly in these situations. Line outputs 3 and 4 are unbalanced.

On the front panel of AXE I/O is present one 1/4" (6.35mm) jack sockets where to connect a pair of headphones whose level can be controlled with the headphones knob.

## 7 Direct monitoring

When recording an audio signal into your audio software, there is often a slight delay before it reaches the outputs. This delay, called latency, is caused by the computer processing required to process the audio. Since this delay can be distracting, AXE I/O provides a direct monitoring path from the inputs to the outputs, and this is controlled by the Monitor knob. The Monitor knob allows you to blend your input signals with the playback streams from your computer. This allows you to monitor your input signal with zero latency. If the knob is positioned at 12 o'clock, the input signal and the playback stream will be equally balanced. Turning the knob to the left will increase the level of the direct signal; turning to the right will increase the level of the playback stream from the DAW.

When Monitor is set to DIRECT, make sure any software monitoring option for direct (or "low latency") monitoring is disabled. Disabling low latency monitoring prevents "double-monitoring" of input audio signals when using the Direct Monitoring feature. When "double-monitoring" occurs, there will be an increase in volume and an undesirable "phasing" sound. For more details about its monitoring function, refer to the documentation for your audio software.

**IMPORTANT:** Always make sure MONITOR knob is set fully clockwise (DAW) when connecting microphones. This is because even if your DAW is not running or does not have an active recording track loud feedback could occur if your monitoring level is high and the MONITOR knob is set on DIRECT.

## 8 Control software

This is a macOS and Windows applet that controls all the functionalities for the AXE I/O, also presenting additional information from the status of AXE I/O. From this applet you will have extended and comprehensive metering, have control over output levels, sample rate, MIDI setup, and other important AXE IO options.

To open the Control software:

After installing the Control software on your computer (refer to section 1.1 of this manual for more information) click the icon on your desktop to launch it.

Assuming that your AXE I/O interface is connected to your computer with the USB cable, the Control app GUI (Graphical User Interface) will appear as shown on the sections below. The green State 'LED' at the screen top left should be illuminated; this confirms that the AXE I/O interface is connected and properly working.

## 8.1 Interface view



INTERFACE view:

Configuration section:

State:

This LED shows when an AXE I/O unit is connected and active.

MIDI IN, OUT: these LEDs shows when there is MIDI activity on the AXE I/O physical MIDI ports.

Sample Rate:

Here you can set the working samplerate for the AXE IO unit, from 44.1 to 192 kHz.

Remember than in most cases DAWs and host applications will most likely control this value by their end, not allowing it to be forced differently. For this reason you might see this value to go back to its previous state when you attempt changing it.

Direct Monitoring:

Here you can determine how the two input channels are mixed on the Direct monitoring path.

“Mono” means that both channels are mixed to mono. This is the most useful setting when you want to monitor one channel per time as this way the input channel will be monitored on both channels of your monitors or headphones.

“Stereo” mean that channel 1 will be routed to the left side of your monitors or headphones, and channel 2 on the right side. This is the most useful setting when you need to monitor stereo sources, like stereo microphones, keyboards, sound modules etc.



“Channel 1” makes only input 1 channel to reach the direct monitoring path on both L and R sides.

“Channel 2” makes only input 2 channel to reach the direct monitoring path on both L and R sides.

These are useful when only one input is normally used and you don't want even the slightest amount of noise coming from the other channel to be mixed into the monitoring path.

Audio Input section:

Here you can see the input channels active source (Instruments, Mic or Line) and monitor the level on high precision peak meters.

You can also switch phantom power on and off. Remember that phantom power is activated on both channels at the same time. It is NOT possible to enable phantom power on one input channel only.

However, phantom power will only be applied to the XLR input.

Audio Output section:

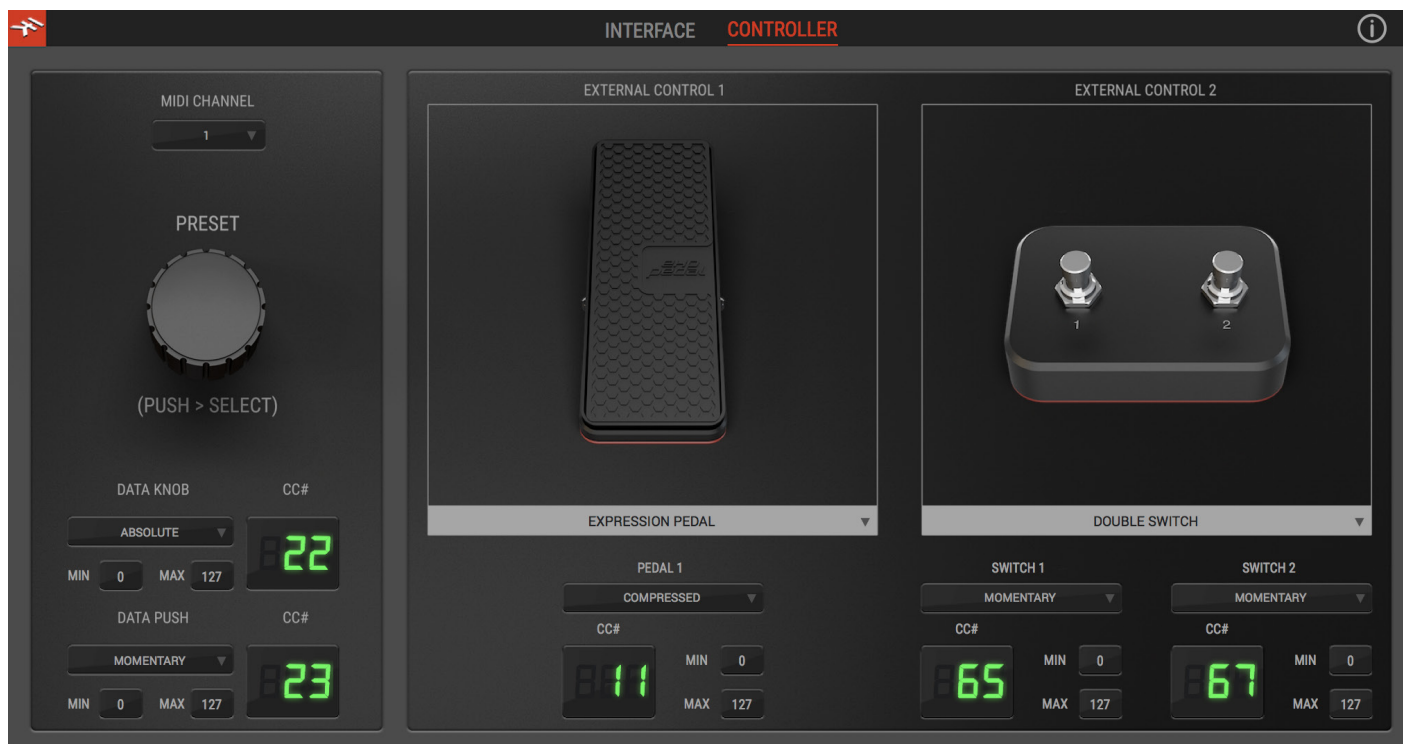
Here you can see the output channels levels on precision peak meters, you can adjust the output levels of all outputs with the large sliders, or you can quickly mute each output individually.

Amp Output GND LIFT:

The Amp Output is a specially designed floating output made to drive amplifiers and sensitive vintage stumps without the typically associated ground loop noises, hum and buzzes. Depending on what else is connected to the AXE I/O and what grounding scheme is implemented in the setup the amp connection can be cleaner with GND LIFT active or not active.

The default position is GND LIFT, with lift active, in case you hear some buzz or noise when connecting an high gain guitar amp, try switching off the GND LIFT.

## 8.2 Controller tab



The CONTROLLER tab gives you control over the preset knob and 2 controller inputs. Set behavior, MIDI channel, MIDI CC #, minimum and maximum values, and more, to dial in the best settings for whatever application you want to control.



## 9 Specifications

### Common

AD and DA Resolution: 24-bit

Sampling Rate: 44.1 kHz, 48 kHz, 88.2 kHz, 96 kHz, 176.4 kHz and 192 kHz

Host Connection: USB Type-B receptacle. USB 2.0 (High Speed).

### Line Outputs 1-2 (Monitor)

Configuration: Electronically balanced and floating, automatically compensates level when connection is balanced or unbalanced, tip hot.

Output impedance: 150 Ohms balanced, 75 Ohms unbalanced

Output Level: 0 dBFS corresponds to +21 dBu

Frequency response: From 3 Hz to 32 kHz within 0.5 dB (96 kHz sample rate)

Dynamic Range: 116 dB(A)

THD+N: -106 dB(A) at -1 dBFS

Channels 1-2 crosstalk: 115 dB(A)

### Line Outputs 3-4

Configuration: Unbalanced

Output impedance: 75 Ohms

Output Level: 0 dBFS corresponds to +16 dBu

Frequency response: From 3 Hz to 32 kHz within 0.5 dB (96 kHz sample rate)

Dynamic Range: 115 dB(A)

THD+N: -102 dB(A)

Channels 3-4 crosstalk: 112 dB(A)

### Output 5 (Amp output)

Configuration: Unbalanced, floating, with selectable ground lift

Output impedance: 100 Ohms

Output Level: 0 dBFS corresponds to -6 dBu

Frequency response: From 10 Hz to 32 kHz within 0.5 dB (96 kHz sample rate)

Dynamic Range: 110 dB(A)

THD+N: -104 dB(A)

### Headphones Out

Output impedance: Virtually ideal source (zero Ohms) until clipping

Maximum Output level: +12 dBu into 50 Ohms load (approx 180 mW)

Frequency response: From 3 Hz to 32 kHz within 0.5 dB (96 kHz sample rate)

Dynamic Range: 112 dB(A)

THD+N: -100 dB(A)

## **Mic Inputs 1-2**

Configuration: Class-A discrete differential microphone preamp, pin 2 hot

Input impedance: 4 kOhms differential

Input level, min gain: 0 dBFS is obtained with a +12 dBu signal at the XLR input

Input level, max gain: 0 dBFS is obtained with a -37 dBu signal at the XLR input

Frequency response: From 5 Hz to 32 kHz within 0.5 dB (96 kHz sample rate)

Dynamic Range: 116 dB(A)

THD+N: -106 dB(A) at -10 dBFS

## **Line Inputs 1-2**

Configuration: Class-A discrete differential line receiver, tip hot

Input impedance: 20 kOhms differential

Input level, min gain: 0 dBFS is obtained with a +26 dBu signal at the TRS input

Input level, max gain: 0 dBFS is obtained with a -24 dBu signal at the TRS input

Frequency response: From 5 Hz to 32 kHz within 0.5 dB (96 kHz sample rate)

Dynamic Range: 116 dB(A)

THD+N: -106 dB(A) at -10 dBFS

## **Instrument Inputs 1**

Configuration: Multiple topology instrument preamp

Input impedance, PASSIVE mode: Variable from 1 MOhms down to 2.2 kOhms

Input impedance, ACTIVE mode: 10 kOhms

Input level, min gain: 0 dBFS is obtained with a +14 dBu signal at the TS input

Input level, max gain: 0 dBFS is obtained with a -17 dBu signal at the TS input

Frequency response: From 3 Hz to 32 kHz within 0.5 dB (96 kHz sample rate)

Dynamic Range: 117 dB(A)

THD, PURE mode: 0.0015 %

THD, JFET mode: 0.5 %

## **Instrument Inputs 2**

Configuration: Hi-Z instrument preamp

Input impedance: 1 MOhms

Input level, min gain: 0 dBFS is obtained with a +14 dBu signal at the TS input

Input level, max gain: 0 dBFS is obtained with a -17 dBu signal at the TS input

Frequency response: From 3 Hz to 32 kHz within 0.5 dB (96 kHz sample rate)

Dynamic Range: 117 dB(A)

THD: 0.006%

## Warranty

Please visit:

[www.ikmultimedia.com/warranty](http://www.ikmultimedia.com/warranty)

for the complete warranty policy.

## Support and more info

[www.ikmultimedia.com/support](http://www.ikmultimedia.com/support)

[www.axeio.com](http://www.axeio.com)



## FCC statement

This device complies with Part 15.107 and 15.109 Class B of the FCC Rules CFR47: October 2010.

Operation is subject to the following two conditions:

1. This device may not cause harmful interference.
2. This device must accept any interference received, including interference that may cause undesired operation.

Changes or modifications not expressly approved by the party responsible for compliance could void the user's authority to operate the equipment.

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