



Neve 8801 Channel Strip | £2,227

Most pros need no introduction to Neve's top-flight, top-money mixing desks. **Bruce Aisher** asks if some of that magic can be passed on to us mere mortals

+20dB to a healthy +70dB. When using the DI input the pad switch changes the input impedance from over 750kOhm (for most electric guitars) to a lower 100kOhm. Lastly, in the input section we have the simple phase reverse button.

Next we have the low- and high-pass filter section. Both are 12dB/octave varieties and range from 30Hz to 300Hz, and 1.5kHz to 18kHz. They're switched in and out of circuit by a simple press of each knob. The Filters To Sidechain button moves the filters from the audio path to the sidechain of the dynamics section but more on that later.

Things get a little more exciting with the arrival of the dynamics. Let's start with the compressor/limiter. Here we find the Threshold (-30dBu to +20dBu), Ratio (1:1 to hard limiting) and Release (30ms to 3s) knobs. Pressing the Ratio and Release

between line, mic, DI and digital inputs. The line input on the rear panel (a combo jack/XLR) and the front panel high impedance DI input both have -24dB to +24dB of gain via the I/P gain control, while the mic input (also duplicated on the rear panel) runs from

The world of pro audio is awash with channel strips, and AMS Neve have now joined the fray with a 1U distillation of a channel from their famed 88R desk. These can be found at such illustrious studios as Abbey Road, Ocean Way and George Lucas' Skywalker Sound among many others.

Essentially, the 8801 is a mono mic/line preamplifier with dynamics (limiter/compressor and gate/expander), 4-band EQ, insert and key send/returns and controller recall via USB. The unit is of the classic Neve dark blue/grey variety with white writing. The back panel features balanced mic and line inputs, and individual insert sends and returns alongside a DI input and headphone output. There's also space for the optional digital output board.

The grand tour

Starting on the left of the front panel you'll find a combined XLR/jack for the mic and DI inputs. Next, two buttons for the -20dB pad and +48v phantom power, and the rotary input gain control that also doubles as an input source selector. Pressing the knob switches



WHAT IS IT?

A rack-mountable channel strip based on the famed Neve 88R desk with mic, line and instrument preamps, dynamics processing and EQ

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Sound quality
- 2 Flexible routing
- 3 Recall software

Recall software

One unusual and welcome addition to the 8801 is the presence of a USB socket. This doesn't offer the usual audio in/out capability, but enables storage and recall of all buttons and knobs alongside their associated

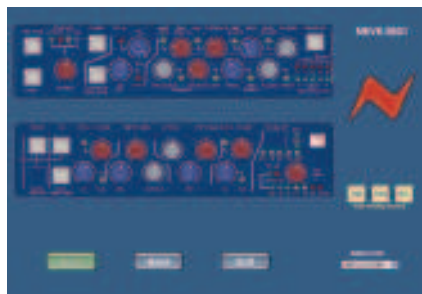
routing. First you'll need to install the Recall software, available for both PC and Mac. This also allows you to update the unit's firmware if that's required.

Once in place the software allows viewing

and reconfiguration of the audio routing system. Additionally any unit in the 88 rack range can be scanned for knob and button positions.

Reloading the settings brings up a graphical representation of the unit in question and an indication of the stored values. Recalling a setting is simply a matter of turning the control until it's 'graphic' disappears from the display.

This isn't a fully automated system, but it works and is a great asset when working quickly with a repeat performances.





controls switches to Fast Attack and Auto Release modes respectively.

Multiple units can be linked (for stereo compression duties) by pressing the Threshold knob and using the D-Sub connector on the rear of the unit to bridge the control signals. Finally there's a Gain Make-Up control (which

120Hz to 2kHz, and 800Hz to 9kHz. The low and high bands are switchable between Shelving and Peaking modes (with an additional High Q button).

The EQ To Sidechain button moves the EQ from the audio path to the dynamics sidechain and there's also a full EQ bypass. The audio ends up at

But the 8801 doesn't disappoint. The quality of the input stages is second to none and vocals sounded great from any number of the tested mic sources. While the dynamics don't offer the sonic quirkiness of some other units, they offer flexibility and ease of operation. The EQ is easy to

use, and delivers great results. One of my favourite tricks, when presented with high-end outboard kit, is configuring it as an external Insert effect from

Overall, the 8801 doesn't disappoint. I found it a joy to use, bringing a sparkle to whatever I threw at it

also enables a hard knee compression curve when pressed), and simple gain reduction metering.

Ducker and run

The Expander/Gate section features the usual array of Threshold, Range and Release controls that also double as switches for the external Key input, Fast Attack and Invert modes. The later turns the Gate into a Ducker for use with the Key input.

The Hysteresis knob sets the difference in threshold the width in level between the gate opening and closing signals. One push of this and the Gate functions as a 2:1 Expander. There's a Dynamics Bypass switch and another visual Gain Reduction meter. The EQ section is a 4-band affair with two fully parametric mid bands, both offering +/- 20dB of gain and covering

the Output section with a level meter that can display both input and output levels, and an Output Gain control.

One useful feature of this unit is the ability to reconfigure the audio routing (by default the Dynamics section is followed by the EQ and Insert loop). I didn't have the opportunity to try the optional digital output card, but needless to say it's very well specified. It caters for S/PDIF, AES/EBU (up to 192kHz, and even Direct Stream Digital).

My main criticism of the Neve 8801 Channel Strip is of the controls themselves. The knobs feel a little too light to the touch considering the rest of the unit's high build quality, and the external PSU was a bit of a disappointment (although it does allow for cooler racking and removes a potential noise source).

within Cubase. Of course the signal does undergo digital to analogue and then analogue to digital (D-A-D) conversion, but in the case of the Neve it was well worth the effort. I found the 8801 a joy to use, bringing a sparkle to whatever I threw at it. **FM**

FutureMusic VERDICT

BUILD [Progress bar: 10/10]

VALUE [Progress bar: 10/10]

EASE OF USE [Progress bar: 10/10]

VERSATILITY [Progress bar: 10/10]

RESULTS [Progress bar: 10/10]

A perfect front end to any recording set-up and should provide sterling service for years.

SPECS

Performance:
 THD+N: <0.005% (20Hz-20kHz)
 Noise: <-89dBu (20Hz-20kHz all audio blocks in circuit)
 Frequency Response: +/- 0.5dB 10Hz to 40kHz

Mono channel strip:
 Transformer coupled mic preamp with 0dB to 70dB gain

Line and DI inputs with -24dB to +24dB gain

Overload indication at each gain stage

Compression/limiting with auto release

Gate/Expander/Ducker Dynamics sidechain + key input

Balanced switchable insert

4-band switchable EQ

User definable signal path using 'Audio Router'

Headphone output

Optional Digital Output Card (AES/EBU/DSD)

User recall/store via USB and Mac or PC software

Dimensions
 482 x 44 x 240mm

Weight
 3kg

ALTERNATIVES

UAD Neve RS plug-in \$299

A very good plug-in version of the 88 series processing, but you don't get the extremely high-quality inputs, true analogue sonics and hands-on control of the real thing.

uaudio.com

SSL XLogic Super Analogue Channel £2,400

Another channel strip based on a legendary mixing desk, with similar features to the 880, including top-notch EQ and compression.

solid-state-logic.com

