

Radial Engineering

KL-8

\$699

radialeng.com



By Gino Robair

The former *EM* editor has written two books on music technology, scored music for film and television, and recorded with Tom Waits and Thurston Moore, among others.

Strengths

- + SB audio/MIDI interface with redundant port
- + Standard MIDI I/O. Aux and Insert I/O

Limitations

- Live/Recording button on rear panel
- Aux Return Assign switch on top panel
- Aux Send is post-input

A feature-packed mixer/interface designed with the working keyboardist in mind

Radial Engineering first caught our attention in 2017 with the Key-Largo, a mixer designed specifically for keyboardists. What made it notable was that it assembled a host of features that gigging musicians need in a portable, yet pro-level device – stereo analog-input channels (three, in this case); balanced Main and Monitor outputs with ground-lifts; a USB audio/MIDI interface with 24-bit, 192kHz resolution for incorporating virtual instruments and tracking into a DAW; standard MIDI I/O; and a switchable Aux bus with individual Send controls on each channel. Best of all, Radial put it all into a rugged case small enough to sit on a desktop, in a pedalboard, or on the corner of a large keyboard. (Read *EM*'s review at bit.ly/keylargorev)

The KL-8 takes the Key-Largo concept further with features that handle a wider range of professional needs while remaining portable as a 1U rack-mountable device. Like other Radial products, the KL-8 is housed in a steel enclosure and feels reassuringly road worthy. For example, the external power supply securely locks into the rack to avoid accidental disconnection.

More in the mix

The KL-8's four-channel mixer accepts stereo and mono analog input and easily integrates digital audio over USB on Channel 4 (more on this in a moment). Each analog-input channel has a pair of unbalanced 1/4" jacks and its own input-level control.

The mixer's Main and Monitor outputs are on XLR jacks, include ground switches, and have front-panel buttons for summing the output pairs to mono. Furthermore, the Main and Monitor outs, as well as the input channels, have individual On buttons so you can use them selectively.

A major difference between the KL-8 and its predecessor is the inclusion of a third output option: dual 1/4" headphone jacks. With a Cue switch on each input channel, it's really easy to audition the individual channels over headphones without sending their signals to either of the speaker outputs.

The KL-8 also includes a stereo Aux channel with individual Send-level controls for each input. (The Aux Send is positioned after the Input Level control in the signal flow.) While external effects are the obvious use of the Aux, the KL-8's Return inputs can, instead, be utilized as a fifth stereo input for line-level sources, with the front-panel Return knob setting the input level. The Aux section can be deactivated remotely using the Radial JRI-L footswitch.

An additional switch, located on the top panel, is used to route the Aux Return to either all analog outputs, or to only the headphones and Monitor outputs. The latter configuration is useful when working with audio that should be kept out of the Mains, such as a click track.

A stereo Insert is included for sending the input channels through an external processor or volume pedal. And for players that need



additional analog inputs, multiple KL-8s can be linked together using 1/4" TRS cables.

USB Audio and MIDI

The KL-8 further expands on the Key-Largo's ability to act as a USB audio/MIDI interface by including two USB ports. This enables you to instantly access a second computer—typically a redundant, backup system—from the front panel or with a JRI-L footswitch.

The KL-8's USB interface can be used in Live or Recording mode. In Live mode, you can play virtual instruments from the selected computer and bring the audio via USB into Channel 4 of the mixer with 24-bit, 192kHz resolution. Channel 4

has separate level controls for USB and analog input, allowing you to submix the two signals: For example, a soft synth and a hardware synth controlled by the same MIDI data. Standard MIDI I/O is on the rear panel and can be used with a keyboard controller for playing soft synths and for playing a hardware synth or drum machine using MIDI data from your DAW.

In Recording mode, the USB interface sends a 2-channel mix over USB to your DAW while simultaneously routing the computer output to the KL-8's Main and Monitor sections.

Although separate On buttons are on the front panel for the analog and USB input of Channel 4, selecting Live or Record mode is done from the

rear panel—it's a bit inconvenient when the KL-8 is in a rack. Similarly, the Aux Return Assign button on the top panel can be difficult to access in a racked setup. Nonetheless, the utility of these features is unmistakable and drives home the fact that the KL-8 is aimed at pro users who work both onstage and in the studio.

A solid choice

Overall, the KL-8 delivers far more than expected from a hybrid rack-mixer. It is easy to set up (especially compared to fully digital units) and the interface is plug-and-play with Mac OS. (Windows users just need to download a driver.) Once you set the levels properly, the switching is silent, the audio quality is excellent, and there are no hassles: The KL-8 simply does its job.

To some, the \$699 price tag will seem high, but once you add up the features—the ability to mix up to five stereo, analog channels; a USB interface with Live and Recording modes; three output choices; Cue and On buttons; Aux and Insert I/O—and then see how sturdy it is, you'll realize that the KL-8 was designed to be at the core of your keyboard rig for a long, long time. ■