



## AMS Neve 8816 16 X 2 Summing Mixer

by [Barry Rudolph](#)

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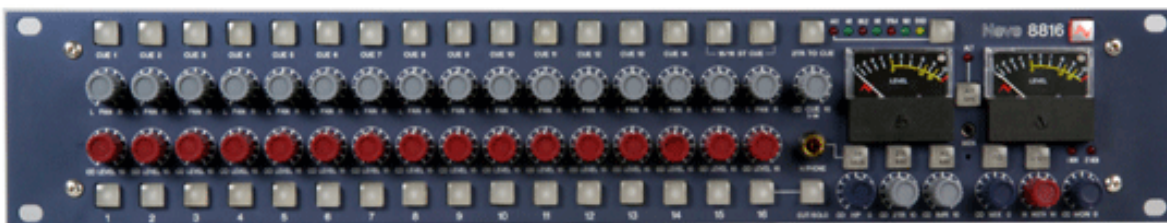
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Newest in AMS Neve's 88 Series outboard line is the long-awaited 8816 16 X 2 summing mixer. But "summing mixer" is a misnomer because in addition to 16 mixer channels, the 8816 has complete control room monitoring facilities, separate cue mix derivation, talkback system with mic, extensive stereo bus control with two insert paths, M/S processing and front panel snapshot recall.

If you add the options (not tested here)--the 8804 Mixer Pack with its 18 100mm faders and onboard 192kHz/DSD A/D converter module--you'd have the 21st-century version of a line-input Neve sidecar console. Multiple 8816s can be cascaded together, and the unit is excellent for live sound recording applications.

### BLUE AND BEAUTIFUL

Built-in a two-rackspace steel box with a smart-looking Neve grayish-blue anodized aluminum front panel, the unit is powered by a line-lump power supply connected by a multipin connector. Although the line inputs are not transformer-coupled, the 8816 uses the same transformer mix topology as the classic 80 Series Neve console with two custom Carnhill transformers on the stereo bus output.

External +4dBu line inputs to the 8816 require two 25-pin D-sub cables that follow Tascam™ protocol. There are three more D-sub for all +4dBu outputs and insert points. There are 1/4-inch jacks for -10dBv levels to the main and alt speaker systems, -10dBv L/R mix output, talkback footswitch and stereo headphone output.

To fit in two rackspaces, the 8816's very full front panel is properly organized and intuitively laid out. The 16 channels are identical with a mute/solo button (globally set with the cut/solo button), a level control with 15 dB of gain over the mid position, a pan pot with a -3dB center and S-law curve, and a cue button above each channel that routes its audio to the headphones. When the 8804 Fader Pack is connected, 100mm faders replace all 16 channel-level controls that now become effect sends to an auxiliary bus.

Just to the right of the mixer is the 2Track to Cue button for routing external stereo audio to the 'phones, cues 1 through 14 level control (more later) and a handy 1/4-inch headphone jack with level control. The HP mon button

routes the mixer's L/R output directly to the 'phones. There is also an alternate speaker button, talkback mic with a level trim pot and a 1/8-inch iMon input jack to connect your iPod.

## BUS AND MIX FEATURES

The stereo mixing bus facilities are, by far, the most comprehensive of any stand-alone summing system I've seen. It starts with the Mix Level output control (aka stereo bus master fader) that is replaced by two 100mm faders when the 8804 Fader Pack is connected. The first stereo insert point is for a pre-fade processor inserted in between the M/S encoder and decoder matrices and switched in/out with the INS button. When the Mix Level control is pushed in, the left-channel pre-fade processor becomes the mid-processor and the right channel becomes the side processor.

The W button connects the M/S circuitry to the main mix output, and the width control adjusts the relationship between the mid- and side components in M/S mode.

The INS Mix button routes the stereo bus mix audio around and parallel to the pre-fade insert and M/S section and directly to the output just in front of the stereo bus master fader. This second stereo insert point has the IMR (Insert Mix Return) control for mixing up to 10 dB of its processor's output back into the unprocessed stereo mix. Finally, with the 2Tr Mix button and control, you can mix audio from an external 2-track source into the stereo bus. Music mixers might use this facility for a main reverb return path or for two more channel inputs.

In addition to the above mixdown mode (where the mix goes to the headphones), the 8816 is capable of other useful mixer configurations, including when you don't have 16 channels of I/O and just feed a stereo mix to channels 15/16. Touch the Cue button for any of the remaining 14 channels you want to add to the 15/16 mix. The cue 1 through 14 control adjusts the overall level.



## LARGE-CONSOLE MONITORING

There is a small monitor level control knob with four monitor source choices indicated by LEDs. Push on this knob to toggle between main mix output (no LED and the default position on power up); 2TR to Mon for a 2-track tape deck; channels 1/2 pre-fade sources for monitoring the input to the optional ADC, which could be yet another stereo audio source (if set by an internal jumper); or iMon for listening to the audio coming in on the 1/8-inch iMon jack.

When you push the width control knob, the main mix audio output is summed with whatever source is selected in the monitor section. A yellow LED indicates that you are monitoring two audio sources simultaneously. If you are mixing music to picture, then this is a great tool to quickly check your mix against production sound and/or dialog tracks.

## SNAPSHOT RECALL

The 8816, like the rest of the AMS Neve 88 line, employs a recall system whereby a snapshot of all knob and button positions is captured and written to a small (32kb) Microsoft Office text file. Driver and application software for both PCs and Mac OS X are included.

After you load the software in your computer and interconnect a USB cable to the 8816, boot up the application and select which 88 Series unit in your session you want to store/recall settings. If you have more than one, you have to designate the master and slaves.

The software interface has buttons for creating, loading and saving snapshots of settings. When loading (recalling) a snapshot, a picture of the 8816's front panel appears with all knobs that need changing highlighted; the buttons reset automatically. A bigger view of each knob needing adjustment is provided with a purple hash mark indicating where you must turn that knob to match its store setting. Once all knobs are reset, you get a confirmation that the "Unit is Reset!"---so simple!

## IN THE STUDIO

I calibrated 16 channels on both the 8816 and the studio's large '70s API console (normaled to the DAW) with a test tone coming from the signal generator in the DAW. I set the controls on the 8816 to about the 2:30 position and used the unit's stereo pseudo PPM meters at the 0dB position to match the level for all 16 channels. I also set all 16 API faders to identical positions as indicated by each channel's equal level contribution on the console's stereo bus meter.

Both the API's and the 8816 mixer's stereo outputs were patched to the API's monitor section so I could A/B switch between them while listening to several different music style mixes derived inside the DAW.

For my unscientific comparison, I liked the sound of the DAW mix through the 8816 over this old API. It was more open with good punch — a clearer sound with better transient representation. Both mixes sounded great, and I was surprised, considering the cost difference between them.

The stereo bus in the Neve will overload nicely because there is so much channel gain available to accommodate -10dBV levels from semi-pro gear. The noticeable result is tremendous headroom, and, with 16 channel level pots, you can crank them, do manual gain rides or fades right on the 8816. There is plenty of latitude of adjustment without awful-sounding overload or noise---you cannot really make a mistake here. Sweet!

The recall feature worked flawlessly and is great for trying many balances outside of the DAW. I stored different mix versions such as vocal up/down, drums up/down, etc.

I used the stereo bus inserts with good results when mixing a heavily squashed track back into the original mix using the IMR control---an old mixing console trick made easy. The M/S width control was very interesting for particular moments in the mix where I went from rock-steady mono to superwide stereo with a twist on the width control.

Compressing the mid-signal and not the side signal produces a stereo mix with a dense middle (lead vocals, kick, snare, bass tracks, etc.) wrapped with the airy and transparent ambience from the L/R side components. I used this on a pop/rock song with a lot of different reverbs and delays programmed. The mix was dense and punchy with a wide ambient feeling.

## CLASSIC SUMMATION

The AMS Neve 8816 is a great tool for interfacing any DAW and instantly raising it to a professional level with its classically great Neve mixer sound. I like the 8816's small, compact size, although the monitor section's knobs are a little small. I also found that when you push on the engineer's headphone level control knob on the talkback, it



produced a very loud click in the 'phones. Also, the stereo bus metering is excellent, although small and not lighted.

Summing, mixing, monitoring, cue mixing and talkback functions are brilliantly accomplished in efficient ways within this compact unit without compromise in utility or sound. The unit comes with an excellent 41-page CD-ROM manual.

Prices: 8816, \$3,250; 8804 Mixer Pack, \$1,750; and 192kHz ADC unit with DSD output, \$800.

AMS Neve, 212-965-1400, [www.ams-neve.com](http://www.ams-neve.com).

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