

Soundcraft Spirit M8 Mixer

Pros: Lovely "British" EQ. Plenty of headroom. Super-sexy fader feel.

Cons: Digital implementation not complete; lacks input and word clock interface.

Bottom Line: A killer, inexpensive audiophile choice for a small P.A. or keyboard mixer, but not the mixer for all-digital applications.

Soundcraft, www.harmaninternational.com

\$849

For years, Soundcraft has been known for making great-sounding mixers. Now they've stirred a digital output into the same great recipe they've always used.

The M8 is well-suited for use in a P.A. system, a small recording rig, or as a keyboardist's onstage mixer. Each of the eight mono channels offers swept-mid "British" EQ (12kHz high, 240Hz–6kHz mid, 60Hz low), two pre- and two post-fader sends, and direct outs. The direct outs on the mono channels (and pre-fader aux outs on the stereo channels) make live recording easy. Just route the pre-fader direct signals to a multitrack recorder and mix your live recording later in your home studio. Another nice little touch: All channels feature signal and peak LEDs. Satiny, seductive 100mm faders tempt your caress; try to be like the best engineers and avoid needless fader-fiddling.

The last four channels are stereo; equally useful for keyboards and modules or as effects returns. (A lot of folks like to use channels as returns because it allows the effects to be EQ'ed and panned.) Input gain knobs on the stereo channels come with a peak LED of their own, in addition to the signal and peak LEDs down near the faders. The EQ on the stereo channels is limited to high (12kHz) and low (60Hz) shelving, but for most synth sounds that's really all you need, and a little better even, owing to the sweeter voicing of the EQ. Highs sound more spacious, and not at all harsh. The low band's voicing brings out more subharmonics as opposed to poking the fundamental. Just like on the mono channels, two pre- and two post-fader sends make an appearance here, as do a L/R balance control, a mute switch, and a PFL button.

The master section offers all the expected goodies, including globally switchable 48V phantom power, left and right XLR main outs, balanced TRS monitor outs, a headphone jack with its own volume knob, aux masters, mix inserts, etc.

There's plenty of headroom in the M8. Plenty of channel headroom and plenty overall. I've always liked the British sound, and the M8 didn't let me down in that regard either. The differences are subtle but unmistakable.



Connected to an AKG C414, the mixer preserved (and the EQ enhanced) the air in vocals. Sampled snare drums sounded nice and open. An extra measure of subsonic wonderfulness could be added to synth basses. Many mixers just don't let it all through. This one does.

The S/PDIF out is a cool feature, but it's not the celebrate-in-the-streets-it's-finally-here feature it might be made out to be. A *bona fide* 24-bit/44.1kHz undithered stream issues from it, though. It's perfect for connecting to an audio card with a S/PDIF input, but without a digital input (and word clock interface) it'd be hard to *fully* integrate the M8 into a digital studio; you can get your signals into your computer digitally, but you can't mix them that way on the M8. You still have to use your audio sequencer's onscreen mixer.

No, choose this mixer as your stage mixer, small P.A. mixer, or converted-closet studio mixer because it sounds lovely, and enjoy the added convenience of having a digital output. KEN HUGHES