

**SIMPLE EFFECT ROUTING** > Dry/wet faders allow external effect units to be inserted on each channel.

**DYNAMIC CONTROL** > New Auto-Gain technology normalizes volume levels between all three channels.

**PRECISION FADERS** > Four Penny and Giles faders allow for smooth, fluid level adjustments and crossfades.

# RANE EMPATH

## AUDIOPHILE PERFORMANCE MIXER

BY DAVE HILL JR.

> During the past 20 years, Rane has been building its reputation one rackspace at a time. DJs such as Paul Oakenfold, Z-Trip and Moby stake their reputation on Rane's sound and swear by the quality of the company's components. In a move to bolster its swelling reputation, Rane recently held court with one of the founding fathers of hip-hop and turntablism, Grandmaster Flash, to optimize the design and feature set of Rane's newest baby, the Empath mixer. Empath, short for empathy (for the performing DJ), is a new direction for Rane and is designed to pick up where Rane's TTM line left off. Empath is geared for both traveling DJs and leading-edge clubs that require a truly scratch-friendly instrument and a versatile performance mixer.

### STEPPIN' OUT

Empath's general layout will remind you of many 3-channel mixers, with some interesting exceptions. For starters, Rane's contour adjustments for channels 1 and 3 and the crossfader, located on Empath's front panel, will pique the interest of the most finicky deck-wreckers. With those magical little knobs, you

### PRODUCT SUMMARY

RANE

EMPATH > \$1,199

**Pros:** Excellent cue, output and internal signal-routing flexibility. Handy Auto-Gain control. True stereo effects loop. Universal power scheme. Signature Rane sound.

**Cons:** No XLR mic input. Effect loops takes some balancing. No mono effects. No individual-frequency high, mid, low EQ kills.

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can adjust the accelerated slope (approximately 1 through 10) of your personal fader grades. This means you can make your crossfader and two main channel faders as gradual or as steep as you like. Incidentally, these knobs—like all of Empath's black rubber grips—feel like butter. Their white indicator stripe is easily visible in a dark club, and I found no sticking or harsh slips. In similar fashion, the four Penny and Giles faders provide zero resistance.

Moving on, each of the three main (phono or line) channels have separate gain, panning and

EQ (low, mid and high) knobs. The gain is  $\pm 12$  dB, and the EQs range from "off" to +6 dB for each band. Two thin metal switches are present for each channel's full EQ kill and phono-versus-line selection. Each channel has the option of being routed to A, B or A+B sum with the flip of a tiny metal switch. This channel surfing makes it a breeze to redesign your routing on the fly. You can flip channels from A to B and back again, combine channels and add a microphone and effects—all during a single performance. Also, Rane has supplied effects-level minifaders (wet to dry) for each channel, including the microphone input.

Empath's rear-panel routing provides gold-plated RCA phono and line inputs, 1/4-inch unbalanced TRS stereo send and return jacks (called FlexFX) and a balanced TRS microphone input. Outputs include stereo XLR, 1/4-inch balanced and standard RCAs. The Empath mixer can be mounted to a rack with provided screw indents, but if you are going with a tabletop or coffin setup, you will need to use the included rubber feet to keep the mixer from sliding around. It should be noted that the Empath is an excellent size and weight for portability, weighing in at about 9 pounds. The unit measures 10 inches wide by 13.5 inches long by 4 inches deep and will easily replace most

## Passing the Bar

Remix asked New York City's Friday night Polar Bear Club DJ crew, which includes Timeblind and his clan of nameless vinyl experimentalists (who can be better uncovered at [www.crucial-systems.com](http://www.crucial-systems.com)), to put Empath through its paces during their weekly gig at Tonic ([www.tonic107.com](http://www.tonic107.com)).

"A lot of mixers work well for only one style of mixing," Timeblind says. "I found that the Empath worked great for scratching and cutting, and then I could change the speed [curve] of the crossfader when I wanted to do slow blends. The A/Off/B switches on each channel let you easily set the middle channel to one side of the crossfader, do the mix, then put the middle channel on the other side of the fader to mix over to the other turntable. This is a good option for me—I always have three sources. [The A/Off/B switches] also worked great for crab scratching when that was on the right-side table. One drawback, however, is that there are not individual kill switches for each frequency. Still, these EQs sound incredible and are very musical. I had a blast."

The opening DJ played a simple blend of dub, roots, rock and break styles with some scratching and effects. He summed up his first Empath gig with the following: "This mixer is made for DJs who want more flexibility in the clubs. After a couple minutes of guesswork, I sorted out the x-fader assigning and other stuff relatively easily, though the [channel] assignment switches were a little too small. I would also point out that the Empath lacks [individual] kill switches for the highs, mids and lows, which was a bit of a drag, though it was nothing that couldn't be handled with some fast hands and a little practice. It appears [that Rane] has opted for more musical EQs that can be killed at once or manipulated gradually. Overall, I'd say this is a powerful and excellent-sounding board that I could take better advantage of the next time around."

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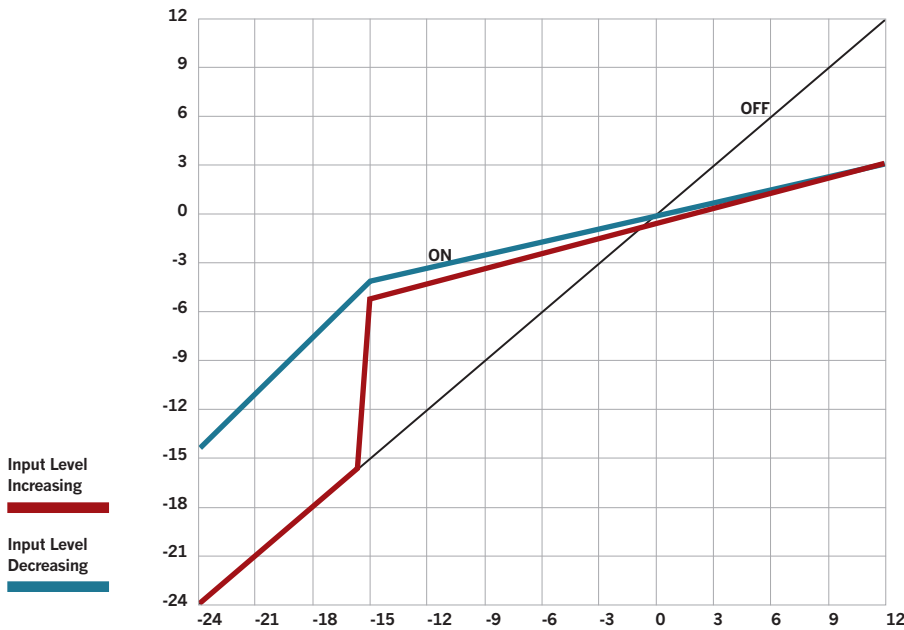
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## AUTO-GAIN CONTROL



**AUTO-GAIN >** The Auto-Gain works with no noticeable influence on the sonic shape of the music. This graph shows the signal leveled proportionately, or normalized, by the amount of increased (red line) or decreased (blue line) gain in the true signal.

house mixers. Other advantages include the use of a typical three-prong 100 to 240 VAC standard power cord, as opposed to a wall-wart plug or hard-to-find adapter. If you are a CD DJ, Empath's two assignable CD triggers can commence playback on any CD player with fader-start ability by simply bringing up the channel volume. Most modern Pioneer, Gemini, American DJ and Numark CD players can do this.

Cueing your mix with Empath is as flexible as it gets. Each channel sports a Cue (in or out) button next to the previously described channel selector. You can individually monitor channels 1, 2 or 3; aux inputs; and returns. In the middle of the mixer, a prominent cue selector switch provides the option for A, B or Cue-button-selectable monitoring that can come in handy in the heat of a delicately balanced mix set. For instance, you may be playing channels 1 and 2 simultaneously with the crossfader dead center (between sides A and B). To monitor the third channel (with the fader down), simply depress the Cue button with the master cue selector in the middle position, and you can cue up the mix. Other thoughtful cue features include a Split (cue and main output) button and another mini-crossfader for fading cue mix to master mix. These allow for better mix blending and even

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**BACK PANEL >** In addition to standard I/O connectors, the Empath also includes two CD trigger jacks.


more discretionary cue monitoring. Both ¼- and ⅜-inch headphone outputs are provided and can be used simultaneously. Rane has also included a useful headphone EQ with sunken low- and high-frequency sliders for tuning up your cans. After all, shouldn't you enjoy your own mix set?

**AUTO-GAIN IN THE MEMBRANE**

Ever fade-in the monster cut only to discover that your headphone cue level is too hot, thus creating a false sense of audio security? The dancefloor ceases to gyrate. Heads fail to nod. Oh, boy, is it gonna be a long night! Rane's new smart Auto-Gain technology attempts to correct all of that by normalizing each of Empath's input sources. In testing, I determined that when Auto-Gain is turned on via the upper-left toggle button, all three channels sound at approximately the same volume. This can be a lifesaver when working with several different kinds of sources or low-level recordings. For example, an MP3 player may have a limited output level when compared to a pre-amplified turntable. Other tracks may just be mastered hotter (that is, louder) than others and therefore jump out of a mix without the Auto-Gain activated. Note: Empath's Auto-Gain takes action at the cue point after the phono/line source selection, after the gain/trim and EQ but before the channel fader.

**EFFECTS ON THE DECKS**

Although effects and DJ mixers seem like natural counterparts, manufacturers have struggled with the logistics of how to integrate aux sends and returns and not crowd the controls. With Empath's FlexFX sends and returns, I patched in several different effects, including a Line 6 DL4 Delay Modeler with both stereo sends and returns. Via Empath's dry/wet faders, it was relatively easy to apply the effects. The two comments I have are that Empath's FlexFX send and return do affect the gain more than typical effects chains I have worked with. Also, there is no ¼-inch jack for mono effects, like for a single-plug guitar effects pedal. (You know, the kind easiest to tote to a gig.) The logical thing for Rane would have been to include a left (mono) selectable plug like most guitar pedals have.

Wrapping up, the Empath mixer is indeed sympathetic to the needs of DJs without getting too style-specific. This unit sounds incredibly full and natural, due in no small part to the four Penny and Giles faders and gold-plated patch plugs. The standard power supply and rock-solid chassis prove beyond doubt that Rane has built this rig to last with exceptional workmanship. Add to that the FlexFX (external effects) loop, robust cue options and customizable fader assignments (and envelopes), and it is guaranteed that no two Empath DJs could ever set up the unit the same way. Rane's Empath senses a DJ's needs (Auto-Gain), provides powerful solutions (routing, contour controls) and contains as ergonomic a group of knobs and faders that you may ever find. 

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