

Empath Connects;



Rane's Empath features balanced XLR, ¼-inch and RCA outputs.

By Paul Dailey & John Landers

This month's Sounding Off column hits the road with a pair of extremely mobile items – Rane's Empath mixer and the D'Addario-distributed Rock N' Roller Multi-Cart. Boston-based DJ Paul Dailey gives the Empath a drive, while Hollywood, Fla.-based jock John Landers hauls the gear on the Multi-Cart.

Rane Empath

When I attended the 2002 International DJ Expo in Atlantic City, N.J., I couldn't avoid Rane's introduction of the Empath mixer. The Mukilteo, Wash.-based manufacturer had put Empath posters everywhere and even brought Grandmaster Flash – the mixer's co-developer – to the show to do a live demonstration and personal tutorial. The buzz was certainly in full effect and, after having a few months to experience the unit, I am happy to report that the Rane Empath lives up to all the hype, and then some.

After its "Electric Blue" finish, the first thing I noticed about my Empath (\$999 MAP) is how solid it looks. (Ed. Note: It's now available in Rane's basic black and as a "Grandmaster Flash Gold Signature Edition," which includes a road case.) The buttons, knobs and faders are obviously designed with performance in mind and built to withstand a ton of use and abuse. However, it isn't until you actually touch the mixer, that your love affair begins.

Thick rubber coats all of the knobs and faders and it's a remarkable improvement over the plastic/metal knobs and faders found on most mixers. The switches are heavy-duty steel and placed in spots where they are highly operational and minimally intrusive. This is a very well thought-out piece of gear and offers a great number of features, several of which are unique to the Empath.

Standard features include: three full-equipped stereo channels with a three-band EQ section with +6 db to full cut (off), EQ engage switch, left-to-right pan control, +/- 12 db gain control and a dry/wet effects pan that allows the DJ to select the amount of signal sent to any external effectors or sampler.

Each fader is a high-performance, analog Penny & Giles model, built for long life, low maintenance and rated at more than two million cycles. The cueing section has an adjustable "flash cue," which lets you cue any number of assigned sources at a time, allowing you to switch between various sources in a fraction of the time. There is also a variable headphone monitoring section, where you can split cue (program/cue) and adjust the lows and highs of the signal you are cueing (independently of the line EQs).

Additional features include an auto gain switch, which helps to maintain a consistent output level, a fully EQ-able microphone input and an Aux input (for hooking up a separate CD player or other last minute component.)

For outputs, the Empath has: a Main output, which is balanced XLR; Booth output, which is balanced ¼-inch TRS; and an Aux output, which is unbalanced RCA. This assortment of outputs allows the connection of the Empath into any amp or speaker input in almost any situation and with almost any available set of wires or plugs. We all know that, for optimum sound, it is best to use balanced XLR, but since that is not always possible, this is a very well conceived approach.

In The Field

As with anything else, specs on paper are one thing and they're impressive on the surface. It is during actual performance, however, where a piece of gear earns its stripes. I spin at a variety of gigs on the East Coast each week and wanted to give the Empath a good, hard workout. So I decided to try it out at an after-hours party where the DJ is set up on stage and performing for the entire set. I arranged for the Empath to be delivered to the venue ahead of time, and when I walked in at 3 a.m., the sound tech was already singing the praises of the mixer. He loved the variety of outputs and the layout, but most of all he loved the sound quality of the unit.

As I mixed my first few tracks, I realized just how solid and comfortable it was to work with the Empath. The knobs are easy to manipulate. They're sensitive, and I was hitting all my marks, like I had been performing with this mixer for years.