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RADIAL ENGINEERING Pro D8

BY STEPHEN FORTNER

WITH SO MANY COMPACT MIXERS OFFERING DEDICATED STEREO channels for keyboards, why use a direct box? If it's the Radial Pro D8, one answer is that its presence tells any sound engineer, "Hah! You can't tell me you don't have enough DIs to run my keys in stereo!" There are better and more practical reasons, though.

First, the ground lift—which direct boxes have and compact mixers usually don't—will confine buzz to your band's Facebook page where it belongs. Second, if a snake (old school or digital) is in use, it'll likely have all XLR inputs at the stage end and be feeding mic inputs on the main P.A. end. Direct boxes put out the balanced mic-level signal the front-of-house mixer expects.

Third, and an area where the Radial Pro family excels, is sound quality. With today's keyboards, there's just something about a nice hunk of iron in the signal path. I mean Radial's Eclipse transformers, of course, which impart a slight but pleasing compression as you drive them harder. It invites you to dig in more confidently and is especially nice on strident sounds like bright rock pianos and resonance-cranked synth leads. Don't get me wrong—it's not like using an actual compressor, and you're not losing dynamic range or frequencies. I put many synths, clone-wheels, and my old passive Rhodes through the D8, with audiophile live and recorded results in all cases.

Each channel has dual 1/4" inputs that merge to its output, and while the obvious use is folding stereo keyboards to mono to conserve P.A.

channels, you can actually squeeze in eight *stereo* signals: Run the left outs of two different synths into channel 1 on the Pro D8. Now, run their right outs into channel 2. Repeat with more keyboards on more channels. Each XLR out will contain one stereo side or the other of a *pair* of keyboards, which makes things a bit Dada on the main mixer, so hopefully you can live with a maximum of four stereo keyboards.

The requisite 1/4" thru for feeding your on-stage amp are present, but an unexpected touch is a TRS insert on each channel for effects loops. Another cool item: phase reverse switches per channel, which can be useful if some stereo sample you're using is thinning out because of room acoustics or mono summing.

Rotating rack ears let you make either side of the D8 the front. In the studio, I faced the XLR side rearward, where each out fed an input of an eight-channel mic preamp, which in turn fed my audio interface via lightpipe. The 1/4" side faced front, letting me patch in the revolving door of review instruments I deal with while leaving my more permanent gear connected to my interface. Though I'm now rethinking *this*, as the Radial has a way of making me want its iron-sweet sound on everything.



If the D8 is beyond your budget, or if you have a keyboard mix setup (like mains to the house and pre-fader aux to your monitor) you'd rather not rethink, consider the Pro D2 as the final link between your mixer and the house. It's stereo, has the same transformers, and streets for about \$150. Carrying your own premium direct box is like sleeping on memory foam: Once you do, you don't go back—and Radial is undeniably the Tempur-Pedic. 🎹

Snap Judgment



PROS Gorgeous, transparent sound. Saturation at high signal levels sounds awesome on keyboards, but never intrusive. Requires no power. Built like a rich paranoid's survival bunker.



CONS None significant.

BOTTOM LINE The most channels combined with the best sound quality of any direct box money can buy.

\$850 list | \$800 street
radialeng.com