

# AMS Neve 4081

The 4081 combines decades of audio experience with a new approach.  
Russ Hepworth-Sawyer has never been so happy



## Price and Availability

**£2,340 inc VAT (€2,800) (Digital Option Card additional - price varies)**  
Distributed by AMS Neve  
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Let's be honest, the digital audio revolution has been and gone. Many of us now use smaller digital consoles, if any, and open-reel tape to some has become a distant memory. In such a climate what does a company like AMS Neve do to keep itself in the audio royalty category? The answer is to blend a little innovation with some coveted audio heritage in the 4081 Quad Mic Preamp.

The 'heritage' comes from the fact that the 4081 features four 'genuine' 1081 preamplifiers (mic and line) in one small half rack-width box. The 1081 module was originally introduced in 1972 to provide both a microphone and line preamplifier with EQ to Neve's modular consoles.

In the 4081, Neve has stripped away the EQ leaving four 1081 microphone preamps – in itself a fantastic proposition. This small but solid box is set up for tracking all sorts of things in one fell swoop. What Neve has done here is to expand the offer tremendously, creating an irresistible package.

So what's the innovation you ask? Well, it's how you engage with the unit. The striking front panel of the 4081 looks a little out of place in the Neve line-up. To start with there are four continuously rotating gain controls for each channel plus large LED readouts. In addition, every button can light up like a beacon once engaged – unlike the traditional Neve small white push buttons – so that you can see the 4081's settings from the other side of the room when using the supplied Neve Remote Control software. Through a USB connection to your Mac or PC, all front panel controls can be managed remotely. In fact, up to 16 units can be daisy-chained from the first unit through the RS-485 protocol. How nifty! For Pro Tools users using

MIDI through USB, some of the controls on the 4081, such as the phase button, can be directly controlled from the channel strip in Pro Tools.

The rear panel illustrates the potential wider functionality of the 4081. There are four mic/line inputs on XLR and four line outputs also on XLR. Power to the unit comes via a separate unit that provides 48V DC through a DIN connector. To be able to connect the 4081 directly to the mains would be preferred by many but the 4081 already creates considerable heat, so keeping the PSU separate is perhaps advantageous here.

A removable panel dominates one-quarter of the rear face of the 4081. This houses the optional Digital I/O Option card, which elevates the unit to another level, providing both FireWire and AES connectivity. Once installed, the 4081 becomes a portable audio interface with Neve preamps. With the digital option, each preamp gains an analogue insert point before the A-D conversion through a 25-way D-type connector. Should you choose not to use FireWire, the 4081 will channel its digital audio out through

AES allowing connection to pretty much everything else digital.

Now what is the 4081 like to use? The 1081 preamps sound fabulous, as you'd expect. That 'coveted audio heritage' kicks in with a vengeance revealing a warmth and envelopment in recordings you rarely hear from the large array of modern preamplifiers these days. If I were to be rather over-critical, they're not the most precise or transient preamps I've used, but given the overall quality and depth, I'd choose this unit over any other mic pre currently in my rack. Recording vocals was the 4081's speciality; in my tests it provided a sheen and presence often only achieved by adding EQ. Additionally the sound translated superbly through the optional digital I/O card to my DAW for a perfect take.

The standard 4081 is a set of classic, timeless and renowned preamplifiers now with complete remote control. Put simply, this is a fantastic offer as it stands, but with Neve's optional digital I/O board, the 4081 becomes a straight-talking audio interface for your computer loaded with remote control over some of the best-sounding, long-coveted preamplifiers on the market. I want one. 🐼

## TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

- Mic XLR input, Z in 1Kohm @ 1kHz Gain +20dB to +70dB in 5dB steps
- Maximum mic input level (with Pad) +24dB
- Outputs – Max +26dB into 600 ohms Z out 50 ohms +/-5% @ 1kHz, balanced
- Distortion <0.07% for 20dBm output from 50Hz to 10kHz @ 60dB gain
- Equivalent input noise >-123dBm 20Hz to 20kHz @60dB gain
- Line input – Z in 50Kohm, unity gain, electronically balanced

## PROS AND CONS

### Pros

- Four 1081 mic pres
- Sound is detailed, warm and sets the standard
- Mac/PC control of all analogue functions via USB
- Additional digital I/O card reveals the 4081 as the ultimate audio interface

### Cons

- The unit gets pretty hot freestanding, racks may need to be well ventilated
- Separate PSU
- Rackmount kit optional, but does permit for two units to be racked together

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