



Rupert Neve Designs PORTICO 5016



Sporting an unusual and interesting Phase Adjust control, the 5016 simply demands closer inspection. **Huw Price** lines up.

KEY FEATURES

- DI input +20dB—+40dB
- Line input -10dB—+10dB
- Phase alignment control
- Mic preamp +72dB gain
- Silk switch for emulation of vintage units
- Mute switches
- High-pass filter variable between 20 and 250Hz
- Output level meter 30dBu—+22dBu
- Phantom Power
- Ground lift on DI channel

MEASURING UP

We're not aware of any other product with the 5016's phase-alignment feature, but there are preamps with variable tonal characteristics. The SPL GainStation (£645) has bypassable valve circuitry and a DI input, but it can't do both simultaneously. Universal Audio's Solo 610 and 110 (both £703) also have DI inputs and sculptable gain structure, but once again, you'll need to buy two units if you want mic'ed and direct signals.

PORTICO 5016

Manufacturer **Rupert Neve Designs**

Price **£939**

Contact **Sonic Distribution**

01582 470260

Web **www.rupertneve.com**

The Portico 5016's Phase Adjust control is our first port of call in this review. Many engineers prefer to take a direct as well as a microphone signal when they record instruments such as electric bass, because sometimes the best sound is achieved by combining the two signals. But if your DI box is connected inside the control room and the amp is 20 metres or so away in the live room, there'll be a slight delay between the direct and the mic'ed signals.

Even a few milliseconds can have a destructive effect on the phase relationship between the two signals. Preamp polarity switches can sometimes help, but the only genuine solutions include delaying the DI signal to put it back into phase, putting the DI box next to the amp in the live room and using a long, treble-sucking instrument cable, or aligning the signals in your audio editor after the recording. Apparently, though, the 5016's Phase Adjust knob makes these solutions redundant by enabling you to adjust the phase relationship using your ears and a simple hardware control. We'll put that to the test later.

Other DI features include a DI/Line switch to suit high-impedance instruments such as electric bass and

guitar as well as low-impedance keyboards and drum machines. A jack input socket is located on the front panel and there's a gain control plus a ground lift switch. The Thru output links the input signal to an amp. This can send both balanced and unbalanced signals and it's buffered, so the load impedance isn't compromised and a long cable is effectively driven.

Once you have the signal reaching the amp, you'll want to mic it up. The left side of the 5016 takes care of that with up to 66dB of gain available via the vintage-style stepped Mic Gain control and -6dB—+6dB on the variable Trim pot. There's a switchable high-pass filter, too, with a control that goes from 20Hz—250Hz, plus switches for mute and phantom power.

The mic amp also has a rather neat feature. Sometimes you need a clinical modern sound, at other times you need a more 'vintage' tone. The Silk switch is designed to give you both by reducing negative feedback in the circuit and adjusting the frequency spectrum. Each side has a To Buss switch that routes the signals to other modules in the Portico range, or you can use this as a monitor out. The inputs are balanced by a 'transformer-like amplifier' followed by an actual input transformer, with transformers also present at the outputs.

Loud and proud

We started assessing the 5016 by routing the snare drum through the line input of the DI side during a drum mix, listening to how the snare moved into phase with the overheads as we tweaked the Phase Adjust knob. Our

treated snare cut through the mix better and we could hear far more tone and low/mid weight. In this respect the 5016 provided what most engineers try to achieve using EQ and compression, but without corrupting the playing dynamics or tone.

A touch of Silk

Next we split the mic signal and made simultaneous recordings with various preamps. The 5016 made the perfectly decent preamps in our MOTU 828mkII sound a touch hard. The Neve also sounded more detailed and 'realistic' and the Silk switch gave the 5016 another dimension. The bass and low mids gain roundness and weight without sounding boomy, while the top end is noticeably sweeter and softer.

The difference isn't dramatic – the 5016 is too refined for drama – but engaging the Silk switch brings it closer to the sound of valve mic pres such as our Telefunken V72s. The 5016 also has more than enough clean gain for ribbon mics, and for this application we preferred the extra high-end detail of the Neve without the Silk switch engaged. However, the Silk setting might temper the top end of some modern condensers, and it sounds lush with vintage microphones. **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- High gain and low noise
- Sonically refined
- Silk offers tonal variety
- Economic use of rack space
- Modular design
- Super-clean DI sound
- Properly considered functions
- Zero-latency monitor output

WALK ON BY

- Only a single mic preamp
- DI-oriented features
- No EQ or compression

VERDICT

A classy and versatile mic pre/DI box with a super-convenient time-alignment tool for recording and mixing.



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