



## Rupert Neve Designs 5017

It's a standalone unit with a pre, a DI and some other bits that'll be useful in a variety of situations. **JON THORNTON** gets his screwdriver out.

The RND Portico series has become a familiar sight over the years and the range encompasses mic preamps, EQs, dynamics processing and various permutations thereof, as well as more esoteric outboard such as tape simulation. In the beginning, Porticos adopted a standardised half-width rackmount form factor, although over the years this has been added to with full width units and 500 series modules. The 5017 mobile DI/compressor/preamp being looked at here introduces yet another shape to the range. The successor to the similarly specified 5016, it eschews the half width rackmount enclosure in favour of a standalone design with curved sides. In truth, this probably makes more sense given its probable application, as it looks equally at home sitting with a pile of guitar pedals or on the desktop in a control room.

What you get is effectively a single channel mic preamp coupled with a separate high impedance DI channel. What makes it clever is the addition of a simple compressor, a variable phase shift, and some flexibility in the ways in which the two signal paths can be combined or separated.

The microphone input is electronically balanced, and is accessed on the rear panel via an XLR connector. Next to it is a slightly clunky looking slide switch for selecting phantom power — the position here is not necessarily a problem given the non-rackmounting design, but the lack of an obvious front panel +48 indicator light might worry some ribbon mic users. A switched gain control on the front gives a maximum 66dB of gain in 6dB steps, and at unity gain there is sufficient headroom for the channel to work happily with line level sources. Pushbuttons provide a high pass filter (80Hz at 12dB/octave) and polarity reverse, and a single bicoloured LED meters signal present or clipping.

Inputs for the DI channel appear on unbalanced

¼-inch TRS sockets on the front panel — two paralleled inputs are provided to allow a 'thru' connection from instrument to a guitar amplifier if required. Input impedance is fixed at 3MΩ, and up to 30dB of gain is available via a continuously variable pot. The DI path also has a continuously variable phase shift (0 – 180 degrees) that can be switched in and out of circuit, and the same bicoloured LED arrangement for metering as the mic channel.

The outputs of the mic preamp and the DI channel can be mixed together via a front panel blend control, which is clearly useful in applications where a guitar is DIed and the cab miked up simultaneously, allowing the DI and mic signal to be phase aligned (or creatively misaligned!) A transformer balanced output (XLR) on the rear panel carries this blended signal, while a second output (also transformer balanced, but rather curiously on a ¼-inch TRS jack rather than XLR) carries the output of the mic pre channel only. This arrangement does allow, if required, a separate output for each of the two paths to be accessed by setting the blend control to 100% DI.

By default, the blended signal passes through the unit's compressor before being output. The compressor is a new optoelectronic design, and subscribes to the school of 'less is more' as far as front panel control is concerned. All you really get is a threshold control, an in/out button and a single LED to indicate that gain reduction is being applied. Ratio is fixed at 2:1 and the time constants can be set to either fast (Attack 5ms, Release 50ms) or slow (Attack 250ms, Release 500ms). However, altering these requires the lid of the unit to be removed (4 screws) and a jumper set on the PCB. Another jumper also allows the compressor to be applied to the mic preamp path only, rather than the blended output. It's a shame really as, minimum signal path considerations aside, the provision of two additional front panel controls for these options would make

the flexibility they allow much more accessible to the user.

The mic preamp itself is surprisingly characterful in use; not the 'big iron' sound of a 1073 but quite gutsy in its own way in the low and mid frequencies, coupled with a nice open top end. Engaging the Silk switch on the front panel can further enhance this characteristic. Something of a Rupert Neve signature, this function is applied to the blended and mic-only outputs, and effectively reduces the level of negative feedback employed in the output stage. It's a subtle effect but helps to add a little sheen to sounds without sounding unduly harsh.

In many ways, the DI performance is similar to that of the mic pre as there's plenty of detail there at the top end and a nice, full rounded sound to the low end that works nicely with bass guitar. Compared with my current favourite DI, the Radial JDV, it sounds a little softer overall, which suits some instruments/playing styles more than others. And I miss having the 'drag' control (variable load impedance) of the JDV to fine tune bass guitar sounds in particular. The odd thing is that the picture on the front of the manual shows what seems to be an input impedance selector for the DI stage — perhaps a feature that didn't in the end make it into production...

The compressor works nicely in this context though — on the fast setting it does a good job of rounding out a bass sound and the slower setting works well in applying some gentle levelling to vocals. It sounds natural in use, but for anything more than control compression you'll probably have to look elsewhere.

In short, there's much to like about this unit. You get a high quality mic pre and DI, a compressor and some useful phase alignment capability all in one box, with sufficient flexibility in the combination of functions to meet most applications. It's just a shame that some of that flexibility can't be accessed without the use of a screwdriver. ■

**PROS** Four functions in one neat package; nice sounding mic pre; flexibility of routing options; useful and easy to set-up compressor.

**CONS** No +48 indicator; compressor settings altered by internal jumpers only; ¼-inch TRS for mic pre direct out seems a little strange; no fine gain control on mic pre.

**EXTRAS** The 5059 16 x 2 + 2 Satellite summing mixer is built around many of the Class-A topologies and custom transformers in the 5088 mixer and Portico II Series.



It has 16 channels with individual level, pan, inserts, stereo-2 sends, and master texture controls with complete control for two separate stem mixes.

Like the Portico series modules, it has continuously variable Texture controls with Silk and Silk+ modes. Channel inserts are provided and by connecting a second 5059 to the insert outputs of a 5059, the dual stereo outputs can be used as a way to add four auxes to each of the 16 channels.

### Contact

**RND, US:**  
Web: [www.rupertneve.com](http://www.rupertneve.com)  
**UK, Sonic Distribution:** +44 845 500 2500