

# Summit Audio TD-100

Frequently taken for granted and frequently missing the point, a good DI is the surest way to a musician's heart.

TERRY NELSON

**THERE ARE SOME** things that are easily taken for granted and one of these is the humble DI box. Like a lot of things, the principle is simple enough but doing it properly can be a lot more difficult. A DI box aims to interface an electric musical instrument to a mixing console or a recorder but its success can be gauged simply by the width of the smile on the face of the musician playing the instrument. It's all about serving as a good translation of the sound of the instrument to the medium being used.

Summit Audio has introduced the TD-100 instrument preamp/DI box, the first in a new series of half-rack equipment that was introduced last year. In keeping with Summit tradition, the TD-100 uses an ECC83 (12AX7) in the audio path.

The half-rack chassis is solidly built and can be used as a stand-alone or fitted into an optional rack tray. The front panel features the usual Summit brushed satin finish and a mains on/off switch plus indicator, two LEDs for signal presence and overload,



a six-position rotary switch for output gain, a variable input impedance control, in/out parallel jacks for the instrument input, an earth (ground) lift switch and phase (polarity) reverse switch.

For some reason, the input/output jacks go from right to left and while this is no big deal, it could be a pitfall for the unwary first timer working on autopilot.

The rear panel has an IEC mains socket, an XLR connector for the microphone level output, a TRS jack for a separate line output, and a headphone jack. The unit was tested with a Neotek Elite console and a Yamaha AW4416 DAW and in both cases connection was without problems and the preamplifier was silent in operation.

Operation is easy and consists of plugging in the instrument and setting the gain switch so that the amber Signal LED is lighting up satisfactorily. During the test sessions, there were no earth loop problems so the 'lift' switch did not have to be used.

As well as the microphone level output, there is an independent balanced line output and this can be used to feed a secondary audio path, such as an equipment rack, monitor console or recorder.

I have to say that the performance was great. A DI box has to deal with a variety of instruments and signals, so it was obvious that a palette of sources would have to be used. These included a Prophet 5 synthesiser, cello jazz guitar, electric guitar, 6-string baritone bass and an active 5-string bass. These gave a good variety of character as well as an extended frequency range. In terms of frequency response, the TD-100 performed admirably and handled very low notes as well as the high ones with ease, without any fall off

in level. There were also no noticeable peaks or dips when slowly sweeping from one extreme to the other.

The problem most guitarists experience when Dling into a console is that the character of the instrument is rarely maintained unless, of course, the DI sound is an artistic choice. I have frequently used the Mesa Boogie V-Twin valve preamp as a direct box in

order to create a convincing guitar tone and the Summit preamp is definitely in the same league - except that it is much quieter. You can even get a satisfying crunch by turning up the gain.

The TD-100 came to the fore in a PA situation where, for reasons of space, the guitar was fed directly into the system and sounded as near as made (almost) no difference like an amp with a microphone in front of it. That's pretty hard to beat.

Bass guitar was also very impressive, with a lot of depth and solidity. If the icing on the cake is the headphone function, where the unit can be used as a practice amp, then the cherry is the variable input impedance control (no doubt borrowed from the MPA-100 preamplifier). Depending on the instrument plugged in, this control alone can provide a whole palette of different textures and avoid endless tweaking of the console EQ.

The headphone output is dependent on the gain setting and a separate level control would have been a nice touch. Having said this, if you are feeling a bit jaded with your axe, a session on headphones with the TD-100 can be like a voyage of rediscovery and can emphasise to you, once again, how important that first interface can be.

The TD-100 is a must for any studio and/or sound company. I've ordered mine already. □

**PROS** Great sound and flexibility; separate balanced outputs for mic and line levels; variable input impedance (loading)

**CONS** No separate level control for headphone output

**EXTRAS** The TD-100 is a companion product to Summit's TLA-50 tube leveling amplifier as part of a new half-rack width, more affordable series. Based on the company's tried and proven valve circuitry with an input stage that uses a 12AX7A/ECC83, the TLA-50 has three-position attack and release switches, continuously variable gain and gain reduction control, and VU metering of output and gain reduction.

There's also a side chain insert and two units can be linked for stereo operation.



## Contact:

**Summit Audio, US:**  
Tel: +1 831 728 1302  
Email: [www.summitaudio.com](http://www.summitaudio.com)