

True Systems P-Solo

True Systems has a product range that already includes a highly acclaimed 8-channel mic preamp and a rather clever stereo mic preamp, and the P-Solo is an almost inevitable next step in reductionism to a single channel preamp in a compact, flexible form factor. **JON THORNTON**

WHILE THE CHANNEL

Wcount may have been cut down, the same is fortunately not true of the design and manufacturing philosophies. Indeed, the electronic design of the P-Solo (UK£579.95 inc VAT) is near identical to that of its larger siblings. That means it pays homage to solid-state design principles — not a transformer in sight in the signal path, and not much in the way of capacitors or extraneous switches and relays. What you do get is a combination of discrete components and high-end integrated circuits arranged in a dual-servo, DC coupled design.

The published specs are impressive in terms of noise (-132db EIN), distortion (THD 0.0008 @ +26dBu) and slew rate (>40V/uS) — testament to minimal compromise in the design and component choice.

The P-Solo's anodised aluminium box is designed to sit free-standing on a desktop rather than in a rack. Build quality appears very good although it looks like it should be a little weightier than it actually is particularly given the welcome inclusion of an internal power supply.

The rear panel is straightforward enough: microphone input on XLR and two electronically balanced outputs on XLR and TRS jack. Both outputs are simultaneously available if necessary but with the caveat to be cautious of inducing earth loops by doing so as the outputs are not isolated from each other.

The front panel is dominated by the large gain control, which though big and tactile looks and feels ever so slightly low-rent compared to the rest of the unit. A click stop on the gain control allows it to be set in a fixed, low-gain mode for high-level signals, giving about 6dB of gain. Clicking past this gives a normal gain range of 15.5dB to 64dB. Two push buttons with associated LED tallies select phantom power and a high-pass filter (80Hz), and four LEDs look after level indication. Sensible choices for the thresholds of these LEDs mean that it's not quite such a crude indication as it might be — signal present illuminating green at -24dBu, with additional orange indicators for +4dBu and +12dBu. The red overload indicator kicks in at a relatively cautious +26dBu, giving around 5dB of headroom from the P-Solo's internal clip point. A high-impedance, unbalanced input is also provided on the front panel for DI purposes.

Patching the P-Solo into the console for the first time, and first impressions of cranking the gain both loaded and un-loaded are that the specs aren't lying — this is a very quiet piece of kit. With the ubiquitous C414-BULS as an initial reference source, first impressions are of a very transparent, open sound that captures the nuances of a vocal performance well. Switching to a more taxing source with the same microphone as a close overhead on



a pair of timbales showed plenty of transient resolution, with the attack of the instrument captured well without any trace of smearing. An A/B comparison with a Focusrite ISA220, chosen as having similar design principles, revealed similar amounts of detail and resolution to transients and the same sense of transparency. Curiously for a totally solid-state design, the P-Solo didn't sound quite as clinical as the ISA220 sometimes can, seeming to impart a little more in the way of low-mid guts to an acoustic guitar.

It's hard to unsettle the P-Solo. Experimenting with the upper ranges of the gain control results in a completely unflustered sound with little in the way of additional noise, and plenty of headroom

means that its terrific transient response remains intact. Granted, this means that there's little in the way of change in its sonic character to be had by driving it hard but sometimes this predictability and uniformity is an advantage. It does seem happiest, though, when mated with relatively high output microphones. Every capacitor microphone I auditioned (AKG 414, Audix SCX-25 and DPA4006) performed beautifully, with plenty of gain on tap. Switching to dynamic microphones, for the most part it remained very predictable and wrung a very accomplished performance out of an SM58 on a rock vocal track, managing to capture some HF detail and low-mid warmth that surprised everybody in the room. With a Beyer 201 though (not renowned for its high output), I was left wanting a touch more gain on quieter sources.

As for shortcomings, they centre on the physical packaging of the unit. Putting it on the desktop is something you either will or won't want to do. While you could argue that a phase reverse on a single channel unit isn't absolutely necessary, it might have been handy. Despite these minor niggles, the P-Solo is a very nice sounding unit indeed. If a single channel is all you need, and you want a unit that is very natural and open sounding that you can almost set and forget, it's an attractive proposition. ■

PROS

Clean, quiet and accurate preamp; pretty much set and forget in most applications; nice DI with plenty of low-end punch; not as clinical sounding as you might expect; compact with internal PSU.

CONS

Form factor might not suit some applications; could run out of gain with very low output microphones; no phase reverse switch.

Contact

TRUE SYSTEMS, US:
Website: www.truesystems.com
UK, Audio-Technica: +44 113 277 1441