

# PRODUCT TESTS

## Avalon V5 Silver DI-RE-Preamplifier



By Michael Saracino

I've been fortunate to have had a plethora of excellent recording equipment come through the Winding Path Media studio over the last six years. Throughout this time, I've had the pleasure of using some gear from Avalon. I am an enormous fan of the VT737SP channel strip and was excited to review the V5 DI/preamp/re-amplifier, especially considering its very reasonable price point for this type of Class A equipment.

With a street price of slightly over \$1,000 CDN, the V5 does have some similarly priced competition offering Class A design. A few things, however, immediately set the V5 above and beyond very respectable competitors.

First and foremost, the ability to use the V5 as a transformer-isolated re-amplification box adds tremendous value. In addition to being a microphone and instrument preamplifier, the V5 can convert a line level signal to a -18dB instrument level signal, properly matched for being sent back out to an instrument amplifier.

For those unfamiliar with re-amping, it is a technique often employed by studios in which a previously-recorded performance is sent back out and converted to an instrument-level signal to be re-recorded through other amps or effects. It's a great production tool when building layered guitar tones and, despite a multitude of amp simulation plug-ins and boxes, if one has access to good physical amps, the results are unparalleled. Avalon has built this excellent feature right into the V5, eliminating the need for a dedicated re-amping device and adding more value to an already

impressive piece of gear.

Secondly, the unit features 10 passive tone settings. Whether using the microphone preamp, instrument input, or line level input, the 10-way selectable tone pot is a godsend. It is essentially four filters and six custom equalizations that have been methodically designed for real world use, accessed by a metal rotary pot on the front panel. Its uses range from filtering out buzz to sculpting specific tones. Add to that a pad, phase reversal, 48 V phantom power, selectable hi- and lo-z mic input, dual LED peak indicators, a large illuminated VU meter, and a headphone output and it becomes apparent that this little box will become a go-to workhorse in any recording environment.

Now that you have some knowledge of the V5, let's talk real-world use. We've had this workhorse in the Winding Path Media control room for the past two months with ample opportunity for testing. In that time I've used it as my exclusive DI for electric guitar and bass recording and the results have been phenomenal.

I've used quite a few tube and solid-state DIs over the years and the V5 has made its way towards the front of the line. It let the natural, round tones of some blues lines on a Fender '72 Thinline semi-hollow Telecaster sing through and it handled the subharmonics of an Ernie Ball Music Man bass ideally. The tight, thick and focused tonality of this unit has added to all of our productions in late 2012 and early 2013.

I've also used it as a vocal preamp for a female blues vocalist paired with a Neumann TLM as well as a male rock/

metal vocalist paired with a Shure SM7 with excellent results in both scenarios.

In addition to this, my studio partner and I have made a point of using the V5 for all re-amping we've done in the past month. The tone selector allows us to quickly sculpt radically different tones when re-amping guitar parts and this has been so handy in layering.

We have been working on an album entitled *After The Fire* with London, ON-based artist Samantha Hooley and we weren't happy with some of the lead guitar tones in terms of how they were sitting in the mix. The V5 let us re-sculpt some of these tones and send them out to different amps and re-mic them until we were content.

On a track entitled "Shame," all parts aside from the bass were recorded live off the floor. The bassist came in on a separate session and did his parts DI into an alternate preamp, but it lacked the live flavour. Using the V5, we sent that performance back out to a bass amp on the floor and miked it up. Adding a real world amp tone as well as a little bit of the room ambience of the original performance made the track so much more cohesive.

I would say that this box would not only be a welcome addition to any serious studio, but as a vocalist and guitarist myself, I also think it's a premium choice for any guitarist looking to build a professional home recording set-up. It's essentially a Swiss army knife of solo preamps in terms of versatility, and it's built with quality in mind at every stage. Avalon has once again done it right; call it "the little grey box that could."

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