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The magazine for the recording musician

## REC's Holiday Buyer's Guide



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**First Steps:  
10 Great Tricks  
For Any Studio**



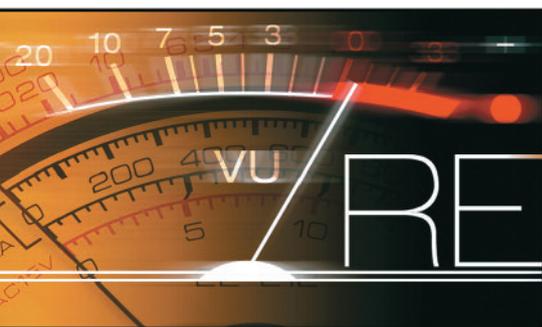
**Hands-On Reviews of 32 New Products!**

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# REVIEW

BY PAUL VNUK JR.



Hi and Tone. Hi is a highcut (lowpass) filter for getting rid of high sizzle, equipment hiss, and upper-register guitar noise. It is set at -3dB at 4kHz. The other button engages the abovementioned Tone filters. It's worth noting that the pad switch and all filtering in the V5 are passive designs.

Last on the right is the input selector switch. This offers a choice of Line, Instrument HI-Z, Mic HI-Z, Mic LO-Z and Mic LO-Z with +48V Phantom Power. There is also a power LED.

## Connections and specs

The rear panel of the V5 features a healthy selection of inputs and outputs. There are separate balanced XLR inputs for both mic and line as well as a balanced XLR line out. On the 1/4"

## Avalon Design V5 Pure Class A DI-RE-Preamplifier

This impeccably designed box does triple duty in the studio

From microphone preamps to mastering grade compressors and equalizers, California-based Avalon Designs has been known since 1985 for high-voltage, high-fidelity audio gear found in studios worldwide. I remember drooling over Avalon gear on early trips to the NAMM show 20 years ago.

Currently Avalon offers two product families, the Vacuum Tube VT-700 series and the Pure Class A AD2000 Series. Avalon Design's newest product, the V5, falls into the Class A/solid-state side and is one of the company's 2U tall/half-rack boxes. Avalon is justifiably famous for the first two members of this little family: the U5 Mono Instrument & DI Preamplifier and the M5 Microphone Preamplifier.

The V5 is equal parts of both and more, and is billed as a DI-RE-Preamplifier. Its compact chassis packs in a versatile microphone preamp, a DI section, and a reamplification output.

### Touring the V5

As mentioned above, the V5 is 2U high. It comes with large rubber feet for desktop use and portability, but it can be rack-mounted singly or in pairs with the U5 or M5 via one of the company's optional rackmount kits.

The unit is available in both brushed silver and matte black finishes. All of the stepped switches, buttons, and meters are top notch, solid, and exude class. Avalon Design, along with companies like Millennia Media and Manley Labs, truly represents the look, feel and sound of high-end boutique gear, with thick faceplates featuring impeccably styled metalwork. It's a look that would make folks in the audiophile market proud, and a sound that's best-in-class for professionals.

The most noticeable feature on the V5's front panel is its centrally-located backlit VU meter. On its left is a stepped switch labeled Boost. This is the input gain control, in 2 dB steps from +26 to +66 dB. Below it are backlit buttons for Phase and Pad (-13dB Line, -10 dB Inst, -15 dB Mic). There is also a signal/peak LED and a 1/4" instrument input.

The right side has a matching stepped switch labeled Tone, which selects between one of ten EQ curves and highpass filter options. Note that six of these are taken from the U5 DI (more on that below). The matching backlit buttons on this side are labeled

side there is a TRS line input, a DI Thru, a +30 dB balanced TRS out, a stereo headphone out, and a -18 dB buffered 1/4" reamplification output. This is finished off with an Earth Lift switch, a power switch, and a 3-Prong IEC power jack.

Internally the V5 uses 100% discrete, high-voltage, Class A circuit topology with a transformer input and a DC coupled Pure Class A output. It has a noise spec of -100 dB with less than 0.5% of THD and IMD and +30 dB of headroom.

### Mic it

Despite using Avalon equalizers and compressors in friends' mastering studios over the years, this is the first time I've had a piece of Avalon gear in my studio. I was very glad to connect with the Avalon team at last June's Sweetwater GearFest... and even more glad once I got to put the V5 to work.

The microphone preamp on the V5 is impressive. The first words that come to mind with the V5's mic pre are "clean" and "powerful". This is definitely in the "straight wire with gain" camp—the V5's high voltage rails give it an extremely clear and open sound with headroom for days. Its transformerless output keeps the lows full and deep.

I love that it has impedance options for high- and low-impedance mics. What really impressed me was how the V5 handled old standbys like the Shure SM-7B, a favorite of mine but a relatively low-gain dynamic mic. The V5 gave me some of the cleanest and punchiest sounds I have ever heard from the SM-7B on voiceover work (without using a Cloud Microphones Cloudlifter or similar impedance adjustment device). It's equally clean and nice-sounding with even the finickiest passive ribbon mics in my closet.

### Direct it

Similarly, direct signals captured by the V5 are solid and clean; the V5 like its cousin the U5, is an absolute wonder on DI bass and electric guitars. Its instrument input offers +36 dB of headroom before overloading, and its exceptional sound is due in part to the fact that it uses very high input impedance (a whopping 10 MΩ), which places effectively

no load on pickups. Piezo-equipped guitars will love the V5!

### Tone it

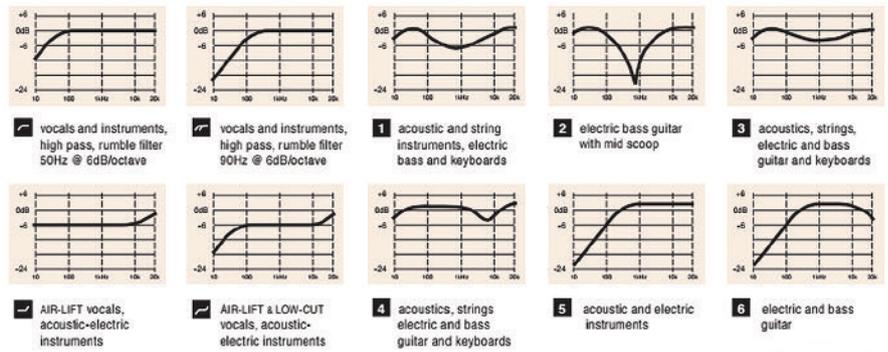
The Tone circuit is best described by checking out the chart at right, taken from the V5 literature. The first six settings—the TONE-BANK™ settings from the U5—are tailored to be source-specific. Both settings 2 and 3 are wonderful for direct tracking of bass, and while setting 4 is suggested for acoustics, strings, electric and bass guitars, I loved it on vocals with the abovementioned SM7B!

The other four settings are made to be more microphone-focused. They include two different highpass filter curves, one of which is also available with something called Air-Lift, a gentle high-end boost that I found especially nice on darker ribbon mics.

### Reamplify it

Reamplification with the V5 is very simple. Start by tracking your guitar, bass, or even your keyboard through the V5 to your DAW. The Thru lets you track clean while letting the talent hear an amp to inspire their playing, and I found the direct input to be clean and powerful enough to do a beautiful job tracking low-output electric pianos like my Fender Rhodes. Then send that signal out of your

TONE selections 1 through 6 are identical to the TONE-BANK™ options in the Avalon U5 "Ultra-Five" Direct Box-preamplifier.



DAW to the V5's line input, and the -18 dB 1/4" out is sent to your amp at the appropriate input impedance level. Mic up your amp and you're good to go!

I recently used the V5 for a bass tracking session where we tracked a Fender Jazz Bass direct through Tone setting 3 and then re-amped that out to a 1959 Fender Bassman miked with a Neumann U 47 fet. The bass player who often works at my studio felt that when the two signals, direct with Tone 3 plus miked with the Neumann, were combined, it was hands down the best bass sound he had ever gotten at my studio.

### Conclusions

It's hard not to be impressed by this box, especially because it does so many things and does them all exceptionally well. The V5 can be equally at home in a high-profile pro studio, or as a great single centerpiece for a home or project studio, tackling your mic and instrument tracking needs with ease.

The Avalon V5 is not inexpensive, but its price is certainly not out of line considering all it does. This is one great sounding, beautiful looking, and impeccably built and designed piece of gear, and a worthy sibling to the U5 and M5 in the Avalon family. ➡

**Price:** \$1345 • **More from:** Avalon Design, [www.avalondesign.com](http://www.avalondesign.com)