

Tape Op Andy Hong

Portico™ 5033 January 2007

Rupert Neve Designs Portico 5033 parametric EQ

The more I use Pro Tools, the more I use outboard analog. I used to have a single table-high rack of outboard processors (not including all my preamps), but these days, I'm working with two racks full of analog processing. My latest addition is a pair of 5033 EQs from Mr. Neve's Portico range (see Tape Op #51 for reviews of the Portico 5012 and 5042 respectively). Most of my EQ'ing I accomplish using the DMX-R100's onboard EQs. These sound fantastic and extremely clean, while still exhibiting lots of phase-shift, which is characteristic of all analog and IIR digital EQs, that our ears expect to hear as "EQ". And I've been spoiled by having 48 of these EQs, each with four fully-parametric bands, with the two outer bands switchable to shelf, and variable low and high cuts too. But they don't always make everything sound better. On the other hand, I'm not sure what magic is inside the 5033, but everything I send through it immediately sounds good. Maybe the custom-spec'ed input and output transformers are adding a teeny bit of girth (um, distortion) to the sound, but the midrange especially benefits from passing through these EQs. And that's before I start moving the knobs! Speaking of knobs, the 5033 is set up with three parametric midrange bands and shelving controls for low and high. There's also an overall level trim. Despite it having 14 knobs on a half-width 1RU faceplate, it's nicely laid out, so I was immediately comfortable tweaking sounds with this box. (Although I think the knobs feel a little spongy and the LED pushbuttons can be too bright when looking directly at the unit.) Also, it's clear that some thought went into choosing frequency ranges, as there's some overlap in the midrange bands and a good deal of overlap with the two outer midrange bands and the low/high shelves. This makes it possible to shelf the low end down by say 5 dB at 150 Hz while simultaneously boosting 70 Hz by 7 dB with a Q of 2; something like this is a good trick for bringing in some extra oomph into a bass-heavy track without making it muddy, especially for playback on bookshelf speakers. It also allows you to do some extreme medium-Q boosting or cutting with the overlapping midrange bands. But "extreme" might be the wrong word to use here. For one, the Q is limited to a maximum of 5. But disregarding the fact that this is not the most surgical EQ, even when I turned all the level knobs to +12 or -12 dB, things never sounded bad. You can really go crazy with the settings on this EQ and still end up with very useful, if not downright sweet, sounds. I was even quite amazed that I could sweeten up a vocal track by

adding gobs of high shelf above 20 kHz, which I normally wouldn't do to add "sweetness" to a sound, especially a sibilance-prone vocal. The high shelf boost added just enough "air" and almost a phantom presence (upper harmonics maybe?) to the take without it sounding crunchy, even with lots of compression. It really helped to bring the vocal forward in the mix without adding extra level. I've also found that the 5033 is perfect for electric guitar. There's the immediate benefit from the aforementioned midrange magic, and you can subtract or add as much mud and crunch as you need to get the guitar to sit well in the mix without it losing its sense of stage or getting in the way of other instruments. All said, I think the 5033 is a fantastic EQ. It sounds amazing, it's dead-quiet, and it even has the bus connectors on the rear for connecting multiple Portico units... or for building a Portico-based recording console. (www.rupertneve.com) -AH