

Boss SL-20 Slicer | £175

It may look like an old-skool stomp box but **Trevor Curwen** discovers that behind the Slicer's knobular exterior beats a hi-tech digital heart



WHAT IS IT?
Stompbox-based audio pattern processor for slicing up your audio

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HIGHLIGHTS
1 Harmonic Slicer patterns for melodic patterns
2 Choice of stereo or mono output modes
3 MIDI synchronisation keeps timing perfect

Back in the days when we used to record everything onto tape there was an interesting little technique involving feeding the key input of a hardware noise gate with a drum machine or another rhythmic pulse with the aim of triggering the gate and chopping up or slicing an audio signal into a rhythmic pattern. Of course, in these digital days there are plenty of

computer-based ways to achieve similar effects, but the latest product from Boss puts it into a most convenient hardware form. The SL-20 Audio Pattern Processor, aka Slicer, is the latest in the Boss Twin pedal series and is designed to transform any played instrument or recorded track into a percussive chopped groove.

The Slicer has 50 different slice patterns onboard, including a Harmonic

Slicer feature that generates percussive melodies. It's a stereo unit that offers various panning options and plenty of control over the characteristics of the generated pattern. Other features include loop recording, tap tempo and sync to external MIDI Clock.

Slice up your life

An Effect Level knob as well as a Direct Level knob ensure that you can either have a fully-sliced sound or superimpose the sliced sound on top of the dry sound for a more subtle effect. There is also practical control over the shape and size of each slice in a pattern via a pair of knobs. The Attack knob adjusts the pattern's attack while the Duty knob sets the duration from a small percussive segment to letting more of the original sound through.

The patterns themselves are in five banks of ten, selected by a pair of rotary switches. The overall tempo is also under knob control and is indicated by an illuminated ring around the knob that flashes red on every fourth beat and green on the others.





The largest features on the SL-20 are the twin footswitches. Although tempo can be set internally using the Tempo knob, the right footswitch is for tap tempo and can also be used to jump back to the beginning of a sliced pattern. The left switch turns the effect on and off, but it can operate in two modes. In Latch mode, it turns the effect on and off with subsequent pushes. In momentary mode, the effect is active for as long as you keep your foot on the footswitch. The footswitches are also used in loop recording (see the *Loop It!* box below).

the modes produce a 3D effect, one is a swirling panner while the other moves the sound forward and backward as well as left and right.

Slice of the pie

Operation of the Slicer is pretty straightforward – it's a stompbox after all, with all the controls on the surface ready to go. Soundwise, there is plenty of variation within the 50 onboard patterns to keep you interested. These vary from the sort of straightforward tremolo pulse you would find in a Fender guitar amp, through to more

knobs, there is a whole world of creativity at your fingertips and feet as the footswitch allows you to bring the effect in and out. Even more versatility is available by connecting up an expression pedal, which can be used for hands-free control of either the direct level, effects level, output level, attack or duty controls.

As evidenced by their online video demo, Boss probably see the Slicer as a pedal that guitarists can use in a live performance, but its capabilities go way beyond that. It's an extremely convenient and easy to use tool that can

transform sound and create something entirely different from any electronic instrument or any piece of recorded music input.

It's an easy to use tool that can create something entirely different from any electronic instrument

Although it has full stereo in and stereo out if needed, the SL-20 can be used in standard mono in/mono out stompbox mode or can generate a stereo output from a mono source. The full potential is unleashed in stereo, as there are a choice of six stereo output modes with different panning functions. You can have a fixed stereo position, the sound panning between left and right either smoothly or as a bounce, then there's also a random movement between right, left and centre. Two of

sophisticated rhythmic stuff with the emphasis on particular beats. Some are fairly rigid like an old-style sequencer, some syncopated and some filtering that creates a wah effect on some slices. Things get really interesting with the two Harmonic banks that can create melodic patterns from a chordal input. Bank 5 in particular creates patterns with a burbling sample-and-hold vibe.

With the variation in tempo available plus the ability to change the character of the slicing with the Attack and Duty

Conclusion

The SL-20 Slicer is a great rhythmic performance tool. It may be aimed primarily at guitarists and more band-orientated performance but keyboard players and DJ's could definitely find a home for it. This would undoubtedly dial in an extra dimension to anyone's giggering sound but would also be a fine asset for any studio – a practical piece of outboard for adding subtlety and movement to sounds – particularly with all those panning options. **FM**

Loop It!

The SL-20 also features a handy loop function. Up to forty seconds of sounds recorded with the slice patterns can be saved into the SL-20's memory by holding down the left footswitch for a couple of seconds. Latch mode puts it into recording standby and then pressing the

pedal again initiates the recording. Another press stops recording. Looped playback of the sound begins after the recording stops. This process is designed so you can create a backing track to play along with – as soon as the playback starts you can play over it using the

dry sound of your instrument as set via the Direct Level knob. The facility is dead easy to use but, as with all looping pedals, you have to get the timing coordination between your playing and hitting the footswitch to get a glitch-free loop.

SPECS

Connections: 1/4" jack inputs R(mono)/L, 1/4" jack outputs R(mono)/L, MIDI In (Tempo), 1/4" TRS Expression pedal socket

Tempo: Quarter note 30 to 250 bpm

Maximum recording time: 40sec

Options: AC adaptor (PSA series), Expression pedal (Roland EV-5, FV500L)

Dimensions: 173 x 158 x 57mm

Weight: 1.1kg

ALTERNATIVES



Gig-FX Chopper
£179

These multi-function dual oscillator treadle-style pedals offer stereo tremolo and panning.

gig-fx.com



Korg Kaossilator
£99

Not exactly the same as a pedal that slices up your own playing, but if you are interested in rhythmic patterns, Korg have the Kaossilator and the Electribe series.

korg.co.uk

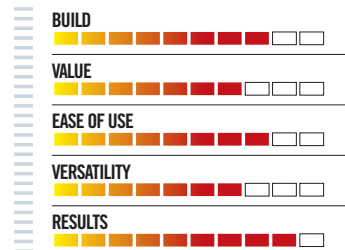


AraldFX StormGate3
\$59

A software multi-band rhythmic gate which lets you draw amplitude patterns and apply them to any sound to produce lots of interesting rhythmic sequences and patterns.

araldfx.com

FutureMusic VERDICT



A creative yet immensely practical tool for chopping up your audio into rhythmic patterns.