



It might look like it's escaped from a 1970s science lab, but the 2880 is a cutting edge piece of kit

£299

ELECTRO-HARMONIX 2880 SUPER MULTI-TRACK LOOPER

DON'T FEAR THE LOOPER – IT'S YOUR TICKET TO THE ULTIMATE LIVE SOUND! WORDS: HENRY YATES

WHO'S IT FOR?

Guitar mavericks who are tired of standard pedal effects

INFORMATION

ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Multi-track looper
FEATURES: Multi-track loop recording/overdubbing, stereo mode, mixdown facilities, Compact Flash memory card storage, MIDI capabilities, Punch-in, Octave, Reverse, Quantize and Ext Clock features, Clix metronome, dual inputs/outputs, pan pot/level fader for each track, headphone output, optional foot controller
POWER SUPPLY: 9VDC adaptor (included)
DIMENSIONS: 245 x 160 x 70 [mm]
WEIGHT: 1.22kg
CONTACT: Hot Rox UK 0115 987 3163
WEB:

ALTERNATIVELY

Boss RC-50 Loop Station – £449
Line 6 DL4 – £229
DigiTech JamMan – £279

> THE SIZZLE

The new Electro-Harmonix 2880 Looper makes some guitarists suspicious. This is partly down to its name. Most of us don't know exactly what 'looping' is, but we do know that it sounds uncomfortably like 'sampling' – which is a tactic used by dance muppets like Fatboy Slim to avoid picking up real instruments. Allow us to clear up the confusion. Looping is the technique of creating rhythmic and repetitive musical patterns. In the right hands – like those of David Gilmour and Robert Fripp – it can create textured walls of sound during a recording session or live show, taking your sound to places where the average pub band fears to tread.

But still, when there are many other sexy gadgets on the market, do you really want to spend £299 on something that looks like it's escaped from a '70s science lab?

WHAT'S IT GOT?

You can tell just by looking that the 2880 is a veritable box of tricks. With that in mind, let's start with the basics, and keep going until your head explodes due to a build-up of information. At its most rudimentary level, this unit is a digital multi-track recorder. That is to say, you can plug your guitar into it, lay down riffs and overdubs on any of the four tracks, then transfer the mixed result

to a laptop via the USB port. Which is pretty clever, admittedly, but hardly the reason you'd buy it.

The selling point of the 2880 is that it allows you to take these multi-layered tracks, turn them into the form of circling loops, and manipulate them in real-time to create insane sonic cycles. Nor is this unit the reserve of the bedsit recording artist. Cough up a little extra for the foot controller (approximately £100) and you've got a gig weapon whose loops can be activated and adjusted 'on the hoof'.

The 2880 backs up its concept with some serious hardware. All recording is done at the industry CD standard (44.1kHz) and the quality won't suffer when you start piling

on the tracks. We've mentioned the option of linking up to a laptop, but storage in the short-term is done on Compact Flash memory cards that hold up to two gigabytes of information (meaning that you don't have to fire up the PC when inspiration strikes). There are two separate inputs (so you and a friend can record parts together), along with outputs for an amp, mixer or tape recorder. You've also got detailed panning and mixing controls, plus a metronome (so your loops don't give the drummer a nervous breakdown by coming in at the wrong time).

That's all exciting stuff, but it was the cluster of white buttons on the right-hand side of the 2880 that got TG really hot. This is the section where you really start messing



The 2880 is a four-track digital recorder, allowing you to build up complex multi-layered loops without loss of sound quality

The foot pedal costs extra, but the control it gives you over the looping parameters makes it an invaluable tool for live performance



Using the 2880 as a digital multi-track recorder, you can transfer your mixed tracks to a laptop via the USB port

with the sound you've made, with a variety of cool options like 'Octave' (it drops the pitch and tempo by one octave) and 'Reverse' (it reverses the playback direction) that can also be activated via the foot controller.

BUILT TO LAST?

The looping concept might sound like something you'd do in your bedroom, but E-H are keen to stress the 2880's prowess as a live tool. To lend weight to their claims, they've built the chassis entirely out of metal, and complemented it with chunky dials and smooth-running faders. Frankly, the only way you could knacker this unit is by dropping the (equally rugged) foot controller onto it.

HANDS ON

In TG's experience, the complexity of a product is directly proportionate to how confusing the manual is. So it was a nice change to find ourselves guided through the 2880's operation by one of the most straightforward booklets we've ever seen. It's genuinely easy to get your first loop laid down. First you insert the memory card. Next you fire up the 9VDC adaptor. Then you decide whether you want to hear the result through an amp or headphones.

Before you start recording, it's worth tweaking the 'Clip' level of your instrument

to make sure what you lay down isn't too loud or quiet. Like we mentioned earlier, it's also a good idea to set the 'Clix' metronome at a tempo that suits you. Having done that, TG stabbed 'New Loop', hit 'Record' and laid down a first position E major chord at the start of every bar. Our next move

"If you're prepared to put in the time, you'll find that what initially seems like a curiosity could transform your entire sound"

was to overdub a variety of extensions and inversions of that first chord, in the hope of building up an orchestral-sounding flourish. Before long, and with minimal effort, we had put together a cycling pattern in the key of E

The white buttons on the 2880 enable you to reverse or adjust the pitch of your loops



REPEAT PERFORMANCE
TG LOOKS BACK AT LOOPING THROUGH THE AGES...

Not content with designing the most revered axe in rock 'n' roll, it's also reputed that Les Paul may have been the first guitarist to experiment with the concept of looping. This being the fag-end of the 1940s, Paul didn't have access to software or digital pedals, forcing the loveable old buzzard to settle instead on a customised multi-track tape unit that was used to repeat pre-recorded overdubs. The device – cunningly named the Les Paulverizer – reportedly made appearances on the radio and at Paul's concerts, but has never emerged into the cold light of day for us to have a proper poke under its bonnet.

The looping phenomenon started gathering speed in the 1960s, with behemoths like The Beatles and Pink Floyd using the technique to lend spacey atmospherics to their music, and by the following decade, it had been adopted by arguably its most famous practitioner – Robert Fripp. Having been introduced to looping by egghead producer Brian Eno, the King Crimson virtuoso was so taken by his technique of recirculating riffs that he christened it 'Frippertronics'. "I needed a name for it, so I came up with Frippertronics, because it was silly," Fripp explained in 1986. "I would run the tape back and improvise on top of it. The original was with two Revox tape recorders, but now I'm working with the Electro-Harmonix 16 Second Delay. It was advertised as the Fripp In The Box."

With the rise and development of digital technology, looping today is a whole different ball game, with the recent Winter NAMM show throwing enough new looping devices (by everyone from Boss to DigiTech) to suggest that this technique is now firmly part of the mainstream. Check out a looper and see what it could do for your sound...

that would lend real atmosphere to a chorus.

But that still didn't quite do it. The loop was a little turgid, and we felt it could do with more spice. No problem. First we cranked up the tempo via the slider. Then, with a stomp on the 'Reverse' and 'Octave' buttons on the footswitch, we turned our loop into something that sounded suspiciously like *Don't Stop* by the Stone Roses. Finally, we turned the loop off with the 'Play' button and carried on strumming.

Even the 2880's more involved features like 'Punch In' (it lets you fix bum notes in an otherwise perfect loop) and 'Quantize' (it extends the loop length to the nearest full bar) are easy enough to grasp.

THE BOTTOM LINE

Unlike, say, a Marshall amp, the 2880 is only as good as the person using it. If you haven't got much imagination or patience, you might struggle to lay down anything memorable – and decide your money's better spent elsewhere. But if you're prepared to put in the time, you'll find that what initially seems like a curiosity, could transform your sound. Us? We're bloody loopy about it.

FOR: Great potential for innovative sounds
AGAINST: Results are dictated by your ability

TG RATING

