

BOSS VE-20 & TC-Helicon VoiceTone Harmony-G XT £219 & £205

These two units are essentially stompboxes for singers – the guitar's purely optional *by Trevor Curwen*

There was time when it was only guitarists who used stompboxes, but lately vocalists have been getting in on the act with specialised pedals that can generate harmonies, add reverb and even correct their out of tune warblings. We've already taken a look at the various models in the DigiTech Vocalist range that can automatically generate vocal harmonies dependent on an input signal from your guitar. Now up for review are the TC-Helicon VoiceTone Harmony-G XT, which does a similar trick, and the BOSS VE-20, a vocal processor that doesn't rely on a guitar signal.

TC-Helicon VoiceTone Harmony-G XT

The Harmony-G XT is the successor to TC-Helicon's Harmony-G vocal effect and takes some features from the more upmarket VoiceLive 2. It's

designed to provide a variety of effects to enhance any singing performance including, among others, harmony generation, doubling effects, reverb, delay, compression and automatic chromatic pitch correction.

Operation of the Harmony-G XT revolves around 10 programmable presets arranged in five banks as variations A and B. You can step through the banks with the preset button and switch

between the A or B variations with the left footswitch. Each preset can be built up from several elements. You get two harmony voices (Voice 1 and Voice 2), each of which can be chosen from six options or simply be inactive. Voice 1 offers higher, high, low, lower, bass or octave up harmonies, while Voice 2 replaces the octave up option with octave down. You also can have no effects or a choice of hall reverb, room

reverb, echo, slap, combi or SFX. The levels of the effects and the harmony voices are set by separate knobs and each of the effects has selectable variations. On top of this you can engage the double button, which activates a doubling effect (with four different options) on your voice that you can use alone or in tandem with the harmony voices, and there's a tone button that with a single press adds what TC calls 'Adaptive Live Engineer Effects' – a combination of EQ, compression, de-essing and gating – to smooth the vocals. A double press on the tone button engages the automatic pitch correction if you want to add that in as well.

A thru jack takes the guitar signal to your amp, although it can be mixed in with the voice signal if required and share the reverb, the relative levels set by a knob that has an auto setting and an area in its travel when the guitar is muted.

The Rivals

DigiTech's Vocalist units provide the obvious rivals to both pedals, particularly the **Live 3** (£335) and **Live 4** (£555) in the case of the TC-Helicon, which are floor pedals offering vocal harmony from guitar input, while the **Vocal 300** (£230) has more in common with the BOSS. If you like the idea of the TC-Helicon but want more sophistication, the **Vocelive 2** (£665) is its big brother. If you want to tweak vocals in your recording software look no further than the **Antares** company, who's products includes the notorious **Auto-Tune**.



The idea is that you play your guitar to generate vocal harmonies, although there's also manual selection of scale and key for singers without an instrument or horn players. You can also use a guitar to manually set a key by playing a chord and holding both footswitches down.

TC's VoiceSupport software is included and is designed for backing up and restoring user presets and installing any updates to the pedal.

Sounds

Tweaking the Harmony-G XT's 10 presets is pretty straightforward and, once you've programmed in the combinations of harmonies, doubling and effects that you want, onstage use should be easy enough. The right footswitch turns the harmony and doubling effect on and off but keeps any effects that you may have added to your voice (holding it down engages bypass and accesses the onboard guitar tuner).

Quick level tweaking is possible via the knobs. The centre detent positions of both the FX and harmony knobs provide a balance that works well, but it's an instant fix if you want slightly less harmony or the reverb off completely. If you have just two favourite settings, you can switch between them with the left footswitch and not have to worry about touching



the pedal at all.

The effects sound classy with the default sounds, but there's variety available if you want it, with three options for each FX type and four variations on the doubling effect.

TC-Helicon is the branch of the TC group that specialises in vocal effects, so it comes as no

The Harmony-G XT reacts solidly to your guitar chords, with some musically valid harmonies that complement your singing and playing



The Harmony-G XT is built to TC's usual rigorous standards

surprise to find that the harmonies sound really good whether they're being generated from your guitar chords or via a key that you've selected. High and higher centre around a third and a fifth above your voice, while low and lower centre around a fourth and a sixth below and bass sings the root of your guitar chord even if you're singing other notes. Tracking is good and the Harmony-G XT reacts solidly to your guitar chords, with some musically valid harmonies that complement both your singing and playing, as long as you can coordinate the two. The process is probably not something you'd want to undertake on-the-fly at a live show, but with practice you get the hang of it.

BOSS VE-20

The VE-20 takes the familiar

BOSS twin-pedal form as seen in the RE-20 Space Echo and the RC-20XL Loop Station. It's a very practical and easy to use processor – you just plug in a mic, dial up one of 30 presets and start singing. That said, there are a variety of editing tools under the hood if you want to get stuck in and create your own sounds for storage in the 50 user memory locations. An additional feature is a phrase looper with 38 seconds (mono) of recording time.

Each of the preset and user patches is created from a chain of up to six effects (dynamics, pitch correct, tone/SFX, double/harmony, delay and reverb), each with its own editable parameters. Knobbage is quite minimal on the VE-20, with just a central knob to scroll through and select the patches. Reverb level is the only parameter that can be accessed

The BOSS is a lot of fun, sounds pretty good and will be easy to use onstage

by a dedicated front panel button but there are four more buttons, including two cursors, for getting into the menus and editing. The left footswitch is the on/off switch for the overall sound, while the right footswitch is set by default to turn the harmonies on and off, although you can opt to set it to switch other effects within a patch if so desired.

Sounds

The VE-20's factory presets are a varied cross-section of what the unit can do and are based on various musical styles, special effects and different harmony intervals. While you might find something here that you can use straight out of the box, you'll probably head for the user patches where you can store your own particular sounds. To this end, editing is dead easy, with perhaps the two most crucial parameters instantly available – one being the previously mentioned reverb level and the other being the key for the harmonies, which is accessed by a single press of the right cursor – the rotary knob choosing a key other than the default C major setting. All edits are automatically saved.

Other parameters are easily accessed from the menu, including setting the level, pitch interval, pan and gender of the two available harmonies – unison and up or down thirds, fourths, fifths, sixths and octaves are all available. Doubling is also available as a harmony choice. While the harmonies are an important part of the VE-20, BOSS has also put in plenty of vocal effects should you want to sound like a robot, Cher, or even a tinny radio. The pitch correction FX block has an 'electric' setting for that abused Auto-Tune sound, while the available tone/SFX types include chorus, flanger, strobe (a tremolo effect), radio, preamp (for EQ and the like) and distortion, which possibly combined with an octave down harmony should tickle the fancy of death metal vocalists.

The BOSS is a lot of fun, sounds pretty good and will be easy to use onstage once you've set up all your patches, if you don't mind bending down and selecting them between songs.

Verdict

Both of these pedals offer creative possibilities for vocalists and may be particularly suited to solo acts that want to add a little interest to their music or just present a bigger sound to their audience. Bear in mind, though, that this type of pedal demands to be used with caution, vocal pitch-shifting technology isn't without odd-sounding artefacts and a shift of just a few semitones can sound unnatural if mixed too high in relation to the main vocal. Keep the levels reasonable though (and sing in tune!) and you'll be rewarded with generated harmonies that will enhance your performance. **G**

The Bottom Line

TC-Helicon
VoiceTone
Harmony-G XT

We like: Harmonies generated from guitar; dedicated footswitch for harmony switching; two different patches instantly footswitchable

We dislike: Setting the key manually requires a lot of footswitching activity

Guitarist says: A cost-effective way to enhance your voice and add harmonies that can be pitched to follow your guitar

BOSS VE-20

We like: Selection of voice-changing effects; harmonies with dedicated footswitch; onboard looper

We dislike: No guitar input
Guitarist says: Why should guitarists have all the fun? This is a no-brainer onstage pedal for vocalists



BOSS VE-20

PRICE: £219
ORIGIN: Taiwan
TYPE: Vocal processor
MEMORY: 30 Preset and 50 User patches
CONNECTIONS: 6.4mm jack/XLR combi input, XLR outputs L (mono) and R, 6.4mm stereo headphone/line output
EFFECTS: Electric, Robot, Strobe (rotary), Distortion, Chorus, Reverb
OTHER FEATURES: Phrase Loop (Mono 38 sec)
DIMENSIONS: 173 (w) x 158 (d) x 57mm (h)
POWER REQUIREMENTS: DC 9V: 6 x LR6/R6 (AA) Batteries (included) or DC 9V AC adaptor (PSA series)
PHANTOM POWER: Yes
BATTERY LIFE: Expected battery life under continuous use: 2 hours (Carbon), 8 hours (Alkaline)
INCLUDED ACCESSORIES: Six AAA batteries
OPTIONS: Power Adapter
Roland UK
01792 702701
www.roland.co.uk

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



TC-Helicon VoiceTone Harmony-G XT

PRICE: £205
ORIGIN: Thailand
TYPE: Vocal processor
MEMORY: 10 editable patches
CONNECTIONS: XLR mic input, XLR outputs L (mono) and R, 1/4-inch jack Thru, 6.4mm jack In, USB
EFFECTS: Hall, room, echo, slap, combi, SFX
DIMENSIONS: 130 (w) x 132 (d) x 41mm (h)
POWER REQUIREMENTS: AC adaptor (12 VDC 300 mA, tip negative)
PHANTOM POWER: Yes
INCLUDED ACCESSORIES: Power Adapter, USB cable, CD with VoiceSupport software
RANGE OPTIONS: VoiceLive 2 (£665) plus there are five other VoiceTone pedals for various applications: VoiceTone Create XT, Correct and Double (£205), VoiceTone Synth and Harmony-M (£249)
TC-Helicon
0800 917 8926
www.tc-helicon.com

Test results

Build quality ★★★★★
Features ★★★★★
Sound ★★★★★
Value for money ★★★★★

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



The VE-20's presets offer a varied cross-section of the unit's capabilities