



BOSS

U42
MONSTER BASS

GUITAR
SYNTHESIZER
SY-300

ON/OFF

CTL 1

/CTL 2

TUNER

/CTL 3

MENU
EXIT
PAGE
SELECT/ENTER

L/MONO
R/MONO
MAIN OUTPUT
RETURN



BOSS SY-300 £549

A guitar synth that you can play from any guitar without using MIDI? Boss's no-compromises unit seamlessly integrates into your setup...

Words Trevor Curwen Photograph Olly Curtis

What You Need To Know

1 Guitar synths? Why don't I just buy a keyboard-based synth?

Ah, but can you play keys as well as you play guitar? A keyboard will give you synth sounds but it won't give you the magical blends of guitar, synth and effects that the SY-300 offers.

2 Do I need a special pickup?

To trigger sounds via MIDI, you need a guitar equipped with a hexaphonic pickup that tracks each string separately. The SY-300 doesn't use pitch-to-MIDI conversion and is designed to take a signal direct from your guitar or bass: it's more of a sophisticated effects processor that can output synthesiser sounds.

3 So, sort of a pedal-based synth?

Yes, and between parent company Roland's long history of both keyboard and guitar synths and Boss's pedal legacy, there's the perfect expertise necessary to pull it off.

There are a variety of reasons why the vast majority of us guitarists don't own a guitar synth, but we reckon many players are simply put off by the hassle of the thing: the need for a hexaphonic pickup and the idea that you may have to alter your playing technique to get the best out of one without false note triggering. Well, those reasons don't hold water with the new Boss SY-300 Guitar Synthesiser because it lets you plug a guitar or bass straight in and play exactly as you normally do.

The SY-300 is a Boss product, somewhat distancing it from parent company Roland's GR-series guitar synths and suggesting that it may have more in common with the company's effects processors. It is, in fact, a different kind of guitar synth: it doesn't work via the pitch detection and conversion method of the GR-series and it doesn't have MIDI output to access an infinite range of sounds, beyond those onboard the floor unit. Instead, it works on your guitar's audio signal and provides all of its own sounds using three onboard oscillators combined with a range of onboard effects. The signal passes through up to three oscillators in parallel, each of which has a choice of eight

waveforms (including the input sound) and a shedload of adjustable parameters to shape the sound, including a 16-note sequencer for creating arpeggios from one note. On top of that, there are four COSM effects blocks that can be placed at various points in the signal chain. The sounds created are collected in 70 onboard preset patches while another 99 memory slots let you store your own.

The SY-300 has a footprint that, while a little larger than most four-footswitch pedals, could fit fairly naturally onto a pretty standard pedalboard. There's a bypass footswitch, a control footswitch that can bring in different functions within a patch, and two footswitches that scroll up and down through the presets or can alternatively be configured as control switches. If you want more capability, you can add an expression pedal or up to two extra control footswitches. There's audio signal routing flexibility with Main mono or stereo outputs, plus Sub outputs that can pass the same signal or audio tapped off from a different point, while Thru and Return sockets can be used to bring external effects into the SY-300's signal chain. Alternatively, the Thru output could be



used to pass the dry guitar signal to an amp. MIDI connectivity is provided for program and control change messages, while a USB connection allows audio-interface duties for computer recording but also lets you connect to Tone Central editor and librarian software, which offers the possibility of downloading new patches from the web.

Sounds

The SY-300 plays superbly, both on single notes and chords – there are no doubts about tracking, like you'd get with a pitch-to-MIDI guitar synth, as it is simply synthesising the guitar's audio signal. Consequently, there's no need to alter your technique. All the nuances of your playing – string bending, vibrato, muting, and so on – are translated perfectly into synthesised sound... even playing slide is possible!

Sound-wise, there's an awful lot of creative sonic possibilities and not all of them are adequately represented by the factory presets, which mainly showcase 1980s synth sounds and arpeggiated dance music rhythms. Some of the presets are

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cool: there are organs, funky basses and the sort of synth sounds that will have you trying to play the intros to *Jump* or *Born In The USA*, or a bit of Pat Metheny soloing.

But what isn't instantly apparent is how much of a creative tone machine the SY-300 can be, in adding more textures to your guitar sound rather than totally transforming it. It can also work as a pure effects processor with its wide range of effects and parallel guitar paths. It's tantalising to image the possibility of synth sounds and ambient textures lurking behind the natural guitar tone – plenty to fill the sound out on stage, particularly if you're working as a duo or a small combo. Of course, to unlock those possibilities, you have to get into editing, which might seem daunting to anyone unfamiliar with oscillators, LFOs and the like.

Thankfully, though, it's really not that difficult, especially with the help of the computer-based editor, which lays out the complete signal routing clearly and lets you swiftly turn effects blocks and oscillators on and off to let you hear their sonic



1. The SY-300's menus and controls are both intuitive and clear

2. The Blender control enables you to mix up synth patches to create new sounds

3. Sub outputs send the same signal at a lower frequency, and Thru and Return enable you to add external effects

4. The SY-300 comes complete with 70 onboard presets – mainly covering 80s synth sounds and arpeggiated sequences – plus there's space for 99 more user-defined patches. The SY-300's potential can be unlocked through Tone Central editor and Librarian software

contribution. For live work, patch switching is instant and the Control footswitches can be set up for a variety of tasks from performance-enhancing momentary effects like a quick filter sweep to switching effects in a patch.

Verdict

This is not the guitar synth for those who need access to realistic instrument sounds; we recommend a hexaphonic pickup and all the associated gubbins if that's the route you want to explore. While that sort of setup is like a different instrument that exists in parallel to a guitar, the SY-300 feels like a totally natural extension of the guitar that can take it off into new directions with no compromises in expressiveness or playing technique. This is a bit of a game-changer, if that's not an over-used term, and if you feel that the out-and-out synth sounds and new blended guitar textures that the SY-300 delivers can play a part in the music you make, you'll be buying into a creative and extremely versatile sonic toolbox that just begs to be explored. **G**



BOSS SY-300

PRICE: £549

ORIGIN: Taiwan

TYPE: Guitar synthesiser pedal

EFFECTS TYPES: Touch Wah, Compressor, Limiter, OD/DS, EQ, Slow Gear, Delay, Chorus, Reverb, Phaser, Flanger, Tremolo, Rotary, Uni-V, Pan, Slicer, Isolator, Lo-Fi, Delay+Reverb, Chorus+Delay, Chorus+Reverb

PRESETS: 99 user, 70 preset

OTHER FEATURES: Tuner, 3x oscillators each with 8 waveforms: Sine, Sawtooth, Triangle, Square, PWM, Detune Sawtooth, Noise, Input

CONTROLS: Output Level, Patch select, 4x soft knobs, 7x buttons, On/Off footswitch, 3x CTL footswitches, Ground Lift

CONNECTIONS: Standard guitar input, standard Thru, standard Return, standard Main output L (phones) and R (mono), standard Sub output R (mono) and L, standard TRS CTL/EXP jack, USB, MIDI In, MIDI Out/Thru

POWER: AC adaptor (supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 255 (w) x 191 (d) x 70mm (h)

OPTIONS: Footswitch (FS-5U, FS-5L, FS-6, FS-7), Expression Pedal (Boss FV-500L/500H, Roland EV-5)

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9/10

PROS Opens up a whole new world of sounds using all the expressiveness of your technique

CONS If you're looking for MIDI control and triggering sampled sounds, you need to look elsewhere