

ELECTRO-HARMONIX XO PEDALS £60-£134
EFFECTS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY NEL GODWIN

Electro-Harmonix XO pedals **£60-£134**

A quartet of new digital stompboxes including – shock horror! – a dedicated multi-effects processor of sorts... *by Simon Bradley*

Here we have a quartet of the newer members of Electro-Harmonix's XO Line that shies away from the more out-there stompers such as the Micro Synthesiser and 16 Second Delay in deference to offering a selection of immediately useable units.

Two are straight-ahead affairs, while the remaining pair offer slightly more in the way of onboard features and functions, and the spec of each includes a rectangular steel chassis, sturdy footswitches and cool, chunky controls. What's more, each stompbox also includes the prerequisite 9.6-volt power supply for a battery-free operation.

We asked Rick Stevenson from E-HX to help us navigate through each pedal in turn, as well as offering a few more general tips on how to use the company's effects.

Stereo Memory Man with Hazarai

"Hazarai?" Rick laughs as he explains: "This is all Mike (Matthews, E-HX guru) reaching back and grabbing a Jewish word which means basically, well, since

what it means does not really fit into a magazine, we should say 'with everything'."

In a nutshell the Memory Man is an all-in-one, wholly stereo multi-tap delay, echo and loop station and you can either dial in your own parameters, or use E-HX's presets. The white Hazarai control is actually a push-push infinite rotary encoder that enables you to select each of the multi-tap and echo settings plus the loop functions: push the button once and the unit defaults to the preset of that setting.

"The Hazarai is an awesome pedal," boasts Rick. "While each effect is totally usable and wildly manipulative, everyone seems to have their own favourites. To me the Looper having the ability to incorporate every pure effect and manipulation is a sound designer's or performance musician's dream.

"While we are known as a company with analogue history, the Stereo Memory Man could only be done digitally. The bit processing and recording is 24-bit and 46.88k; the delays and looper are 32-bit. This is one reason that the fidelity of complex loops is

maintained, even when you get crazy with pitch shifting within delays."

The repeats control regulates the number of delays, while the function of the decay control is similar to the feedback pot on other delays. The filter button controls the tone of the repeats, and a flashing green Beat LED lets you know the speed of the delay.

Sounds

You can really hear the increased crispness of the digital processing, but that's not to say you can't rough the pedal up when you need to. For Edge-style delays, mimicking Brian May's three-part canon solo tricks, obtaining a Brian Setzer slapback snap and all points in between, this truly is an awesome unit. It gets very spacey indeed when you set the pedal to the maximum 30 repeats and alter the delay in real time, but it's rarely anything other than entirely valid and musical.

The looper is as useful as anything else out there, and the 300ms echo setting includes a smidge of chorus. The downside is that you need to physically turn the Hazarai pot to access different parameter settings, but many will be able to live with that, especially if the unit is incorporated into a studio's FX trunk.

Micro POG

This version of the now classic polyphonic octave generator forgoes the octet of fiddly sliders of the original in favour of three simple pots.

"The Micro POG, just like the original POG and HOG, is digital; it could not be done any other way," Rick tells us. "The tracking is tighter and quicker than on the original POG although it doesn't have the second octave up, which no one seems to miss, or the detune. On a personal note, I prefer the sound because the tracking is just right there."

It offers an octave below and above a given note, all three can be balanced with the responsive controls. There's a single input and two outs that allow you to split the dry and wet signals.

Sounds

This is a very musical octaver with almost none of that irritating waggle on lower notes and chords. It does take a bit of time to get used to, but the Micro POG can, at different turns, transform your electric into a 12-string, a passable bass or even a church organ.

In fact, adding obscene amounts of drive to the latter setting would make Jon Lord quake in his wellies at the helm of his legendary Hammond, while for a speedy sketch demo when your bass isn't to hand, the sub octave with the dry signal removed is more than capable of stepping in. With an electric bass, the POG is a weapon of aural destruction and is great fun to boot.

Holy Stain

This represents, in effect, the first authentic E-HX multi-effects processor. "The Holy Stain is both digital and analogue," Rick explains. "This is an inexpensive

With an electric bass, the POG is a weapon of aural destruction



Although it is digital, the Stereo Memory Man can sound pretty analogue too

The Rivals

Memory Man

Certainly among the most authentic of recent delay reissues, the **BOSS RE-20 Space Echo** (£152) is simple to use and sounds great. For more off-the-wall presets and settings, the **Damage Control Timeline** (£399) does it all, while **Line 6's** all-conquering **DL-4** (£189) gives a total of three separate effects at the touch of a switch.

Micro POG

With the **BOSS OC-3** (£89) you can utilise polyphonic octaves, plus onboard drive, to great effect: it also incorporates the old OC-2. Use the **Dunlop Hendrix Octavio** (£179) to recreate Jimi's classic octave-up tone, while the **MXR Blue Box** (£92) adds fuzz and allows you to add a double-low octave massive enough to move buildings.



pedal with really usable sounds. The fuzz and distortions are totally analogue, while the vibrato, reverbs and pitch shifting are digital. This was meant to be a great introductory pedal to give people more for their money, but people seem to be buying it just because they like its different tone. Who knew?"

Although hardly an Eventide H8000, the Stain includes the aforementioned drive settings alongside room and hall reverbs, pitch shift and tremolo. The four digital effects are selected by the mode switch – you scroll through them one by one until the desired base is reached – while the analogue side is chosen via the three-way dirt knob.

Sounds

With the mix control all the way off, you can use the Stain as a classic E-HX dirt machine, significantly altering the character of the two drive tones – but not the clean setting, strangely – with the three-way Color pot. There's no dedicated gain control, but we didn't find we missed it as much as we'd originally assumed we would.

The pitch shift function operates between a maximum of a 4th above and 5th below a given note and, if you set the amount control just off centre, you have a very useable chorus. We have to report that the tracking isn't especially impressive, but you can obtain some nasty sounds when using the most extreme fuzz setting available and dialling in a suspended 2nd.

Again, the digital precision allows the tremolo to be more au fait with modern equivalents, while the character of the reverbs benefits a great deal from some

time spent with the tone pot.

Of course, each effect is likely to require a different mix of settings of each control, so dedicated tone-tailoring is going to be required to be made on the fly to a certain extent. In short, for every sound you dial in, you'll need to alter something when you change either the effect or dirt pot. We can't criticise too strongly considering what the Holy Stain actually is, but don't assume that it's on a par with any of the more modern processors out there, at least as far as operation goes.

Stereo Electric Mistress

The Mistress is, of course, one of the company's most legendary items and this more compact option is likely to prove the most popular. It mixes a subtle flanger with a lush chorus, while a rate control regulates the speed that's depicted via a flashing LED.

"The Stereo Electric Mistress is the one that performing musicians should go for," Rick agrees. "Simple to set up, nice flanging and the ability to combine it with the chorus makes a lot of sense. It stays pretty true to the original Deluxe Electric Mistress from about 20-30 years ago, even though it's digital. It would have been impossible to create the ability to make a chorus and flanger that can be used together in that size of box or at this price otherwise."

In the interests of discussion, we asked Rick to point out the differences between the Mistress and the infinitely more complex Flanger Hoax. "This is strictly a matter of the guitarist's patience," he says. "The Flanger Hoax is the best single modulation pedal I have ever heard or used: the filter manipulation and the relative



The Holy Stain includes four digital effects: two reverbs, pitch shift and tremolo

With the mix control all the way off, you can use the Holy Stain as a classic E-HX dirt machine.

degrees of modulation and interaction is untouchable. It's kind of a cult classic, I think, but it is a forced classic because you actually have to know what you're doing to create on the Hoax. It is very complex and musicians tend to have their patience tested. Actually, I think the flanger on it is well below its potential: it seriously needed a memory storage."

Sounds

The only niggle we have is that there isn't a mix or FX level pot, although the more subtle settings of both modulations are restrained enough to negate its inclusion. With the rate set to around four and the chorus to around six, the shimmer is inspiring to play around with, and we found that its character altered a great deal with differing amounts of rate and depth. Dialling in a spot of flanger adds more movement beneath the sound that becomes increasingly metallic the more you wind up the flanger depth.

With an increased flanger-to-chorus ratio the tone is richer still, albeit with an intensified swoosh, and if you enjoy those underwater tones as much as we do, there's plenty of wetness available with full chorus, increased rate and subtle use of the flanger.

The secret is to treat the rate pot as your friend and, for modulations both subtle or in your face, this is pretty special.

Verdict

All four of these pedals have something going for them and even the Holy Stain, which is unavoidably limited in its onstage practicality stakes due to the involved nature of the user interface, is available at a staggeringly good price.

We're torn between the Stereo Memory Man and Electric Mistress as to our favourite, and the choice would probably depend on how patient we were feeling. The Mistress is close to the perfect flanger/chorus pedal and only the lack of an FX level pot stops it from being awarded a higher mark.

The MM, complete with Hazarai lest we forget, is a fantastic-sounding delay and echo that's simple to use and, although it certainly would have its uses on stage, we'd suggest that it would be equally impressive as a recording tool.

No less stirring yet probably more exclusive in its appeal is the Micro POG, easily the most musical of any octave pedal we've played in many a year. Yes, it may seem that it's a little expensive considering what it does, but if you have any use for a stable polyphonic octave generator in your arsenal, this is the one.

More than just mere pedals, Electro-Harmonix has long provided musical tools and these four boxes are yet more to try, buy and use to your creativity's content. **G**

The Rivals continued...

Holy Stain

DigiTech's RP50 (£59) offers a drum machine, cabinet and pickup modelling in a seriously good and affordable package, while the **Zoom G1** (£54) impressively mimics the nuances of a genuine tube amp: it provides excellent effects too. Fancy something crazy? The **Z-Vex Seek Tremorama** (£149) mimics the sound of your amp cutting out, all with added modulation...

Electric Mistress

The **BOSS CE-20** (£149) offers a sextet of lush and warm choruses that can be used for bass and acoustic should you be so inclined. If jetting is your bag, the **DigiTech Turbo Flange** (£89) gives no less than seven flanging options via a dedicated rotary selector, while the **Dunlop Uni-Vibe** (£169), in effect, combines both modulations effectively in a bomb-proof chassis.

The Bottom Line

Stereo Memory Man

We like: The quality of the effects plus the efficient looper

We dislike: Using the Hazarai rotary encoder gets a little long-winded

Guitarist says: Maybe more suited to a recording studio than a stage in the long run, the SMM is nonetheless rather special...

Micro POG

We like: It's compact and, most important of all, tonally stable – even at ultra-low pitches

We dislike: The price may be off-putting

Guitarist says: It's the best octave pedal we've used in ages: from organ to 12-string and beyond, the Micro POG has it all

Holy Stain

We like: The price of this versatile pedal is very competitive

We dislike: There's almost too much going on here

Guitarist says: E-HX's first foray into the murky world of multi-effects processors is a muted success, but the Stain does what it does well enough

Electric Mistress

We like: Subtle and gregarious in equal amounts

We dislike: The flanger doesn't 'jet' quite as severely as you may expect or require

Guitarist says: Among the most enjoyable flanger/chorus stompboxes available. Would benefit from a level pot.



Stereo Memory Man with Hazarai

PRICE: £134
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Echo and delay pedal
FEATURES: Eight modes
CONTROLS: Blend, decay, filter, repeats and delay pots, Hazarai continual rotary and push/push selector, tap/record and bypass switches, status and beat LEDs
CONNECTIONS: Left and right inputs, left and right outputs
MIDI: No
POWER: 9.6V DC 200mA PSU only (included)
OPTIONS: Deluxe Memory Man (£169) or Stereo Memory Man (£109)
Numerous UK dealers (inc Sounds Great 0161 436 4799 & GAK 01273 665 400)
www.electro-harmonix.com

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Micro POG

PRICE: £130
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Polyphonic octave pedal
FEATURES: Two octaves, one below and one above
CONTROLS: Dry, sub octave, octave up
CONNECTIONS: Input, dry output, effect output
MIDI: No
POWER: 9.6V DC 200mA PSU only (included)
OPTIONS: The POG Polyphonic Octave Generator (£299)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Holy Stain

PRICE: £60
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Multi-effects pedal
FEATURES: Two reverbs, pitch shifting and tremolo, fuzz and drive settings each with three colour types, plus clean
CONTROLS: Mix, amount, volume and tone knobs plus three-way rotary colour and dirt pots, mode and bypass switches
CONNECTIONS: Input, expression pedal input, output
MIDI: No
POWER: 9.6V DC 200mA PSU only (included)
OPTIONS: None

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Stereo Electric Mistress

PRICE: £75
ORIGIN: USA
TYPE: Stereo flanger and chorus pedal
FEATURES: Independent or mixable stereo modulations
CONTROLS: Rate, flanger depth, chorus depth
CONNECTIONS: Input, main output, stereo output
MIDI: No
POWER: 9.6V DC 200mA PSU only (included)
OPTIONS: Deluxe Electric Mistress (£89)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★