

ELECTRO-HARMONIX V256 VOCODER & CATHEDRAL STEREO REVERB £179 & £140
EFFECTS



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Electro-Harmonix V256 Vocoder & Cathedral Stereo Reverb £179 & £140

A stompbox that combines voice and guitar and a 'verb to expand your sound... *by Trevor Curwen & Dave Durban*

Electro-Harmonix has always been one of the most prolific stompbox companies, and also one that likes to push the envelope when it comes to guitar effects. Both of those strands are reflected in two of its newest pedals. The Cathedral Stereo Reverb takes E-H's count of current pedals in the reverb category to five. Meanwhile, the V256 Vocoder pedal has a lineage that can be traced back to E-H's seventies rack-mounted Vocoder and Golden Throat voice box, but offers a modern take on voice-driven sounds by offering the likes of robot voices and harmony generation alongside that ubiquitous vocal effect.

V256 Vocoder

The V256 Vocoder isn't your typical guitar pedal – with just a mic plugged in it can create vocal effects, but effects that incorporate guitar require both a mic for the voice and a guitar to be plugged in. A vocoder works with two input signals: a carrier and a modulator. The modulator is typically the voice and it's used to modulate the carrier signal, typically a synth but it could be your guitar. In short, via a complex process involving filters and VCAs, your

vocal or speech characteristics are superimposed on the carrier signal, resulting in a 'talking' synth (it has one built-in) or 'talking' guitar.

Sounds

Without the guitar plugged in, the V256's nine different programs each produce vocal effects. Six of the programs are typical vocoder effects that can make you sound like a robot or give your voice a musical drone – monophonic or based on a major or minor chord. Two other programs offer creative pitch shifting to transpose the voice or add a harmony (one of these programs requires input from an instrument – the voice will follow your guitar chords). The last program offers pitch correction for vocals in a manner much like the Antares Autotune software, which taken to extremes creates the vocal sound that many will have first heard on Cher's not-at-all-necessary comeback hit Believe, and which has since become quite popular (or extremely irritating depending on your point of view).

A series of knobs control the smoothness, tone, gender and pitch of the vocal effect, allowing a wide range of off-

the-wall sounds that can also be manipulated by MIDI input to the internal synth.

Plugging in a guitar, you can create a hybrid mix of guitar and vocal effect by setting the blend knob. With a 50/50 blend you can hear the two signals, with little or no interaction between them, but moving the knob clockwise so there's more effect gives you the talking guitar sound. Depending on how you use the microphone, you can give the effect that you're singing through the guitar or create vocally-controlled wah. Getting the exact sound you want by tweaking the knobs takes a little experimentation but, once you've hit on a sound that's perfect for a particular program, you can store it so it will come up whenever that program is recalled. Some coordination between singing/speaking and playing is needed to get the full potential out of the V256, but the potential is

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The Rivals

V256 Vocoder

Fancy building your own? Try the **PAiA Vocoder kit** (\$175.95), which has stereo outputs and built-in fuzz. The **Heil Talk Box** (£269) is a classic design controlled by a plastic tube placed in your mouth. For a harmony processor try the **DigiTech Vocalist VL3D** (£316).

Cathedral Reverb

DigiTech's stereo **Hardwire RV-7** (£149.50) is a versatile unit with built-in Lexicon quality reverbs; the **BOSS RV-5** (£109) offers six stereo reverbs in a hardy BOSS enclosure. **TC Electronic's NR-1 Nova Reverb** (from around £185) occupies the higher-end digital stereo market and offers five studio quality reverbs, switchable settings and DynaMix.

there to coax some interesting sounds from the unit.

Cathedral Stereo Reverb

The Cathedral digital stereo reverb is set among Electro-Harmonix's single-stomp reverbs such as the Holy Grail and Holy Grail Plus. But despite the Cathedral's extensive feature list, the clever guys at Electro-Harmonix are experts at keeping things player-centric and sonically involving.

There are eight reverb effects, all easily selectable via a mode/preset knob and indicated with bright orange and green LEDs – holding down the white push preset knob will save and load up presets for each mode.

The Cathedral features two spring reverb modes, one of them borrowed from the Holy Grail and the other an Accutronics Spring tank emulation. Alongside these, there are the usual suspects, such as hall, room, plate and



reverse reverb algorithms.

Finally, according to Electro-Harmonix, the Grail Flerb mode (a flanging reverb) is the Holy Grail Flerb with a greater range of adjustability, while Echo provides up to two seconds of digital delay. One of the most exciting features on the Cathedral is the Infinite Reverb. This effect is enabled by holding down the tap/infinite footswitch (indicated by the green Beat LED) and allows you to play over a reverb wash without adding to it. The tap tempo sets your pre-delay section and the bypass footswitch switches the effect in or out of the signal chain, indicated by a red status LED.

There are five extra controls, including blend, reverb time, damping/tone, feedback and pre-delay.

Sounds

The eight reverb modes encompass anything from Spaghetti Western tones to more experimental post-rock reverb. Particular highlights include the Grail Spring, which produces ethereal and lush sounding spring reverb tones (think Jeff Buckley), while the Accu Spring offers a much tighter sound, suited to players with a taste for more authentic tones. Room mode presents a nice and simple bluesy twist to proceedings, while Reverse provides weird backward swooshes to create a spooky like-you've-already-played-it type of sound. Which leads us nicely onto the ingenious Infinite Reverb. The ability to play over an infinite reverb note and layer your own textures over the top really opens up new paths of experimentation and leans towards the soundscapes created by bands such as Explosions In The Sky and The Appleseed Cast.

Verdict

Hardware Vocoderes are few and far between, so the V256 is a welcome addition and, as a purely vocal effect, does its job very well. Vocodering isn't to all tastes and is perhaps of limited use, but the transposition modes give the unit a broader appeal. As a guitar effect, the V256 takes a bit of getting used to and requires you to sing or at least speak into a mic, but if you

don't mind the hassle, it will reward you with a new guitar vocabulary to explore.

The Cathedral reverb is much more guitar-friendly and is packed to the hilt with great sounding and highly usable 'verbs. This reasonably priced and well-built unit enables you to create anything from simple room reverbs through to the more experimental, enabling you to build an array of ethereal, engrossing sounds. We had hours of reverb-fuelled fun – and so will you. **G**

The Bottom Line

V256 Vocoder

We like: Weird vocal effects and wah effects; harmonies triggered from guitar chords

We dislike: Needs careful juxtaposition of the controls

Guitarist says: Add a new voice to your guitar with this vocal effect stompbox

Cathedral Stereo Reverb

We like: Array of reverbs; sound quality; ease of use

We dislike: Flerb mode isn't for everyone and difficult to apply in a live setting

Guitarist says: A well-priced and unbelievably spec'd digital stereo reverb that can cater for a wide range of playing and musical styles



Electro-Harmonix V256 Vocoder

PRICE: £179

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Vocoder pedal

CONTROLS: Mic bypass footswitch, preset footswitch, lo/hi mic gain switch, phantom power switch, blend, bands, tone, gender bender, pitch and mode

PATCHES: Nine programmable memories

CONNECTIONS: 6.4mm instrument input and output, XLR mic input, MIDI in, XLR effect output

POWER: Supplied AC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 155 (w) x 120 (d) x 62mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 0.56/1.23

OPTIONS: MIDI controller

RANGE OPTIONS: Voice Box (£131), Nano Iron Lung (£90)

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Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



Electro-Harmonix Cathedral Stereo Reverb

PRICE: £140

ORIGIN: USA

TYPE: Stereo digital reverb

CONTROLS: Tap/Infinite and bypass footswitches, blend, reverb time, damping/tone, feedback, pre-delay, push preset/mode

PATCHES: Eight programmable memories

CONNECTIONS: Dual 6.4mm jack mono/stereo instrument inputs and outputs

POWER: Supplied AC adaptor

DIMENSIONS: 155 (w) x 120 (d) x 62mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 0.56/1.23

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS: Holy Grail Nano (£80), Holy Grail Plus (£99)

Test results

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

GUITARIST RATING ★★★★★



There are eight different reverb modes available



You can store up to nine presets in the V256's memory