

ELECTRO-HARMONIX STEEL LEATHER, KNOCKOUT & BASS BIG MUFF PI £49, £40 & £49

BASS



PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOBY SESSIONS

## Electro-Harmonix Steel Leather, Knockout & Bass Big Muff Pi **£49, £40 & £49**

Under £50 each! Bargain 'bassment' prices with top-shelf performance from Electro-Harmonix *by Roger Newell*

**W**hile the convenience and compact elements of bass multi-effects units cannot be denied (and every home studio should certainly have one), when it comes to live performances many players still prefer to use individual pedals. Truth is most bassists really only favour one or two specialised sounds on stage so just having those to hand makes sense (it's less confusing and there's less to go wrong!). What's more, in many cases the individual models do their specific jobs rather better than a multi-effects unit can.

Long gone are the days of trying regular guitar pedals and hoping they work for bass. These days there are a host of specifically designed stompers and the Electro-Harmonix range holds some of the most intriguing. Here we examine

three of its latest designs that are not only different but relatively inexpensive as well.

### **Steel Leather Bass Expander**

The smallest of our review models, the Steel Leather is part of the Electro-Harmonix Nano Series. Built within a die-cast chassis it's very tough and roadworthy and, although compact, it does a lot for something so small. What does it do? E-H says it's the opposite of a compressor: it enhances and excites your sound to make it punch out in a mix. Practically, that means thinning out muddy lower midrange and exciting the top to make it cut, with added dynamics relative to your pick attack: it's not just a tonal thing. When the effect level pot is set at zero the dry signal is unaffected, but there's loads of

adjustment so it's best to be cautious as this pedal is all about sensitivity and relies on the volume of your individual notes. The response control alters how the strings speak in relation to each other so if it's set low, only the louder notes are effected. For a balanced sound turn this control up until you hear a more even effect.

This not only gives more note definition to your bass it also adds a percussive element that improves punch and projection. It's not really designed for use in the studio, as it can be a little brash, but during live performances it really shines.

With its enhanced attack abilities it enables those sometimes elusive upper notes to cut through the boom of the lower strings, so if you need to solo or even pop and slap, this will ensure you get a more even sound. Cut the flab, stand out in the mix: that's what it does.

### **Knockout**

This very aptly named attack equaliser neatly passes the signal from your bass through a seven-pole low pass and six-pole high pass filter; in other words it sets you up for a seriously punchy delivery. With just three controls on board it again works incredibly simply and has the ability to turn a very average sounding bass into a mighty beast – so imagine what it can do with a great guitar!

These controls are essentially three volumes, one for low frequencies, one for high, and a dry that adjusts the input gain. That means you can use any one to enhance an area where you think your bass is lacking, or by gradually balancing these level controls you are presented with a whole new world of tonal possibilities that targets both

Whether you require a hint of overdrive or downright dirty, white flag-waving speaker flatulence, the Big Muff is the unit for you

### The Rivals

**Behringer's BLE100 Bass Limiter Enhancer** (£17) is one of the cheapest effect pedals available and offers smoother tone and even playing levels. Slightly more sophisticated is the **BOSS LMB-3 Bass Limiter Enhancer** (£62), which also eliminates nasty volume peaks whatever your playing technique may be. For alternative enhancement the **Hartke Bass Attack Pedal** (£80) offers tonal shaping in the form of a preamp with a three band EQ plus a Harmonic control that emulates valve warmth and drive. For a touch of distortion try **DigiTech's XBD Bass Driver** (£58) that will provide good overdriven sounds with the added ability to emulate some of the classic examples.

ends of the spectrum. The dry control also has the ability to tighten the sound and add some extra note definition. As such it can give your trusty old bass a range of new sound characteristics, including many that are not usually associated with a specific model.

The Knockout's enhancement capability is huge, however, we do offer a word of warning to all bass players: it also works well with guitar, so take care that you keep this pedal well away from your lead guitarist! Take it from us; you'll like this pedal a lot, and so will they.

### Bass Big Muff Pi

This is the classic bass distortion pedal that players of a certain age all know and love, now reborn and made even better. The sounds are as outrageous as ever but now it has more scope for tweakery so you can distort your sound more cleanly (which sounds like a paradox, but isn't) and sustain longer: pluses all round.

The reason the original Big Muff was seen as such a breakthrough was down to the specialist, bass-friendly circuitry where adding distortion ceased to result in the loss of bottom end. Used for overdrive or full-on distortion,

shaping the sound is achieved by tweaking the volume, tone and sustain rotary controls. While these are self-explanatory, the additional micro switch enables you to re-introduce a boost to the bottom end when you're attacking the upper frequencies on the tone control, hence no depletion in the low frequency range. It's an essential ingredient to help you to make those big solo statements, or for boosting the performance quality of a song on stage. It's also the perfect excuse to watch guitarists squirm in discomfort as you totally out-fuzz them. Ahem...

This is a seriously effective pedal that has the ability to blow your socks off. Whether you require a hint of overdrive or downright dirty, white flag-waving speaker flatulence, this

is the unit for you. It didn't become the distortion pedal for a whole generation of hard-core bass players for nothing. Try at your peril – you'll want one.

### Verdict

Electro-Harmonix has an enviable reputation to uphold within the music industry so you know these units are going to be roadworthy and durable, and at these prices they are still very pocket friendly. Choosing to build within standard die-cast electric boxes is a sensible move as it helps towards keeping production costs down, so don't be fooled by the relatively low-tech appearance of these pedals: they are seriously effective and each offers its own brand of tonal enhancement. But don't just take our word for it, look at the excellent Electro-Harmonix

website or check out the Guitarist CD to hear what these pedals can do. All models come battery equipped but designated power transformers are available at extra cost. **G**

### Bottom Line

**We like:** No nonsense presentation; ease of use; great inspirational sounds – especially from the Bass Big Muff Pi

**We dislike:** Nothing major at these prices; Steel Leather a bit unrefined

**Guitarist says:** A trio of useful stompers to help bassists stand out. Clearly the Bass Big Muff Pi will be the big seller, but do give the others a try to see what you're missing



### Electro-Harmonix Steel Leather

**PRICE:** £49  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Bass expander for attack and percussion  
**DIMENSIONS:** 55 (w) x 110 (d) x 57mm (h)  
**CONTROLS:** Effect level, response, footswitch  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Input & Output jack sockets, compact die-cast chassis, true bypass, nine-volt battery included, optional power supply available  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Nano Bass Balls (£49); Nano Soul Preacher (£69)  
**Music Ground 0113 243 8165 (Plus many other UK outlets) www.ehx.com**

### Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★



### Electro-Harmonix Knockout

**PRICE:** £40  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Bass attack equaliser  
**DIMENSIONS:** 90mm (w) x 118mm (d) x 60mm (h)  
**CONTROLS:** Low, dry, high rotaries, footswitch  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Input & output jack sockets, XO-series die-cast box, true bypass, nine-volt battery included, optional power supply available  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Bass Micro Synthesizer (£169); Octave Multiplexer (£49); Q-Tron (£99)

### Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★



### Electro-Harmonix Bass Big Muff Pi

**PRICE:** £49  
**ORIGIN:** USA  
**TYPE:** Bass distortion/fuzz/sustainer  
**DIMENSIONS:** 90 (w) x 118 (d) x 58mm (h)  
**CONTROLS:** Volume, tone, sustain rotaries, three-way micro switch, footswitch  
**ADDITIONAL FEATURES:** Input, output & dry jack sockets, XO-series die-cast box, true bypass, nine-volt battery included, optional power supply available  
**RANGE OPTIONS:** Bass Blogger (£47); Bass Metaphors Distortion (£109)

### Test results

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

**GUITARIST RATING** ★★★★★

