

## ROGER MAYER VOODOO-VIBE+

THE LATEST EVOLUTION OF THE MIGHTY VOODOO-VIBE HAS DAVID GREEVES ALL IN A SPIN

## ROGER MAYER VOODOO-VIBE+

TYPE: Tremolo/vibrato/chorus pedal

FEATURES: Speed, intensity, symmetry, bias & output controls, function (trem/vib/chorus) & speed range (classic/pulse) rotary switches, 1 x hard-wire (true bypass) output, 2 x buffered outputs, external speed control input & output

POWER: 9V battery or 9V DC mains adaptor (not included)

DIMENSIONS: 75(h) x 220(w) x 150(d) mm

For those that don't already know, Roger Mayer is a legend in the field of guitar effects pedals. Having designed and built treble boosters and fuzz boxes for the cream of the London session scene in the early 1960s, including Jimmy Page, Jeff Beck and Big Jim Sullivan, Mayer invented a certain octave-doubling fuzz effect called the Octavia. A suitably impressed Jimi Hendrix used it to lay down the solo on 'Purple Haze' and subsequently hired Mayer as his effects builder in chief.

The work he did for Hendrix was all about trying to create and capture new sounds, and Mayer is firmly committed to looking forwards rather than back. He has consistently refused to simply trot out reissues of his old designs (even though there's no doubt that there would be no shortage of takers) and has instead focussed on refining, improving and expanding what his effects can do.

A perfect example of this commendable approach is the new Voodoo-Vibe+, the latest stop on a journey that began with the modifications Mayer made to Hendrix's Uni-Vibe effect back in the late '60s. These formed the basis of the Supervibe rack unit, which was then superseded by the more compact, floor-based Voodoo-Vibe. The new '+' version of that well-respected pedal adds new modulation waveforms and wider-ranging controls to what is already a very powerful effect, so is this the best Vibe yet?

## CONSTRUCTION & FEATURES

At a glance, the Voodoo-Vibe+ looks practically identical to the original Voodoo-Vibe. Appearances can be deceiving, however. The rotary function switch is still in place, offering a choice of tremolo, vibrato and chorus modes, but the speed range control, which previously offered a choice of sine or triangle waveforms, now offers 'classic' and 'pulse' settings, the latter tailored for more aggressive, choppy sounds. There are three settings for each, offering slow, medium and fast modulation speeds. Once selected, you can then fine-tune the rate of the effect using the speed knob.

Of the remaining controls, the most straightforward are the intensity and output knobs, which set the depth of the effect and the output level respectively. Next, the symmetry control adjusts the behaviour of the waveform that controls the sweep of the filter. With the control at 12 o'clock, the waveform is symmetrical – the rise and fall portions of the wave are the same length. By adjusting the symmetry control you can set a fast rise and slow decay, or vice versa.

The bias control is a little more tricky to explain, as its function changes depending on the effect selected. In the case of the chorus and vibrato modes, it sets the centre frequency of the filter sweep, allowing you to move it towards the higher or lower frequencies. In the case of the tremolo mode, there is no frequency to alter – tremolo modulates the amplitude (volume, in other words) of the signal, not the pitch, as is the case with vibrato and chorus. Instead, the bias knob acts a little like a secondary intensity or depth control and allows you to create a smoother or more staccato, pulsing effects.

As with all of Roger Mayer's effects, the internal circuitry of the Voodoo-Vibe+ is meticulously designed and engineered, and opening it up reveals a large and exceptionally neat circuit board, assembled by hand in the UK. It's securely housed inside the tough metal enclosure, with all the jack sockets, pots and switches mounted on the chassis rather than the circuit board thereby avoiding any unnecessary stress, just as you'd expect on any high-quality pedal.

Like the rest of Mayer's Voodoo Series effects, the Voodoo-Vibe+ is blessed with a generous selection of outputs. Alongside the single, high-impedance guitar input, there's the choice of a hard-wired, true-bypass output or a pair of low-impedance, Class-A buffered outputs. Thanks to the profusion of low-quality, tone-sapping buffered pedals out there, this type of output often gets a bad press, and many know-it-alls will tell you that true-bypass (where the input is routed directly to the output when the pedal is off) is best. This is simply not the case – a high-quality buffer has little or no effect on tone and is essential to maintaining signal strength and retaining high frequencies over long cable runs.

An additional pair of sockets at the rear let you connect a regular volume pedal to control the speed of the effect – a very welcome addition. The 9V DC mains adaptor socket is also at the rear. This pedal will run off a single 9V battery, housed internally, but it does consume a fair amount of power, so a power supply is recommended.

## SOUNDS

The Voodoo-Vibe+ is completely analogue and uses Class-A discrete circuitry throughout the audio path. The result is a very transparent, high-fidelity pedal with exceptionally low background noise – Roger Mayer gives the signal-to-noise ratio as 102dB, around 12dB better than a CD! Considering that vibe and chorus effects are hardly renowned for their low noise, this is especially impressive.

In all three modes, the interaction of the intensity, symmetry and bias controls is very sophisticated, and once you get your head around how these three knobs behave in relation to one another, the breadth of sounds available and the detail in which it's possible to shape and mould them is fantastic.

The tremolo mode alone almost seems worth the asking price. For real trem fanatics, being able to precisely adjust the speed, depth and shape of the waveform across a vast range is a real treat – this pedal goes way beyond the average tremolo's triangle and square wave options.

The chorus mode is this pedal's main draw, however, and it doesn't disappoint.

Again, the controls allow for very precise adjustment, and the bias knob means you can adjust the filter sweep range towards higher frequencies for a more heady, shimmering sound or towards the mid-range and lower frequencies for a pulsing, churning vibe effect with an authentic low-end thump as the filter sweeps around.

The vibrato mode offers pure pitch modulation without the phased swirling of the chorus mode. You can set up a subtle undulation that adds atmosphere and interest to clean sounds, or ramp up the speed and intensity for a demented wobbly tone.

The maximum speed available has been increased in the Voodoo-Vibe+ as compared to the original, and the control range is indeed huge.

In fact, it would be fair to say that all the controls go to extremes that are well beyond what the average player will require. The pulse waveforms, where the effect pulse on and off rather than sweeping in and out, are a case in point – we found that these worked best at lower intensity settings, but more adventurous players will find a use for them at their most extreme.

## CONCLUSION

The tonal transparency of this pedal, its superb sound quality and the almost surgical precision with which you can adjust the effect really set the Voodoo-Vibe+ apart. This is a very different proposition to a two-knob tremolo or vibe simulator that offers a few simple variations on a single effect. Though some people might prefer the ease of this approach, others will love the depth and detail of this pedal's controls and the fact that it doesn't unduly colour your sound – if you have other well-chosen pedals to do that, why would you want this pedal to get in the way? For super-versatile tremolo, pure vibrato and throbbing chorus – plus a whole truckload of weird and wonderful sounds – the Voodoo-Vibe+ is very hard to beat. GB

ROGER MAYER VOODOO-VIBE+

GOLD STARS

Very high standard of build

Powerful, detailed controls

Transparent, high-quality sounds

BLACK MARKS

None

GBRATING 5/5