



Roger Mayer Vision Octavia & Voodoo Blues

Hendrix's original FX guru puts a new spin on two of his best-selling recipes by Adrian Clark

We often tend to overlook our home-grown talent – be it musicians or gear manufacturers – in favour of US imports. But UK-based Roger Mayer is a true legend. He made his first pedal back in 1964 for a certain Mr Jimmy Page while still holding down a day job with the British Admiralty. “I met Jimi Hendrix first in 1967 in a club and in two weeks time we were in the studio overdubbing the solo to Purple Haze using the Octavia that I had invented,” says Mayer. By 1969 Mayer had his own company in the US and went on to work with the likes of Stevie Wonder, The Isley Brothers and Bob Marley. By the eighties, interest in the pedals of yesteryear led Mayer to create his famous rocket-shaped range including the Octavia and the Classic Fuzz (based on the Fuzz Face), and by 1989 he had returned to the UK primarily to concentrate on the growing business of making guitar effects pedals

Vision Octavia

The Octavia can be heard on various Jimi Hendrix tracks. It uses analogue circuitry to produce a doubling effect, pitched an octave higher than the original note. On the original effect that Roger designed for Hendrix, there was an independent overdrive circuit as well, but those units were discarded after the Purple Haze sessions in early 1967, and the two effects have been combined in one box ever since.

The new design follows the standard pattern of the other pedals in the Vision series. The whole unit is large, quite heavy and solid, and as a result there's loads of space on the control surface. The three control knobs are a sensible distance from the footswitch, to avoid accidental adjustments, and the four connections are hidden on a recessed panel round the back. The nine-volt battery is behind an ingenious sliding panel that serves the combined purposes of protecting the battery, holding it in place and

MAYER VISION OCTAVIA TEST RESULTS

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

■ **WE LIKED** Quiet operation; responsive to playing style and signal chain

■ **WE DISLIKED** Nothing objectively... it's all down to your personal taste

providing quick and easy access.

Along with the standard input and output, there are two buffered outputs, designed to drive long cable lengths with no high frequency loss. The three controls cover drive, tone and the output level.

SOUNDS: Don't confuse the Octavia (and its many tributes and imitations) with octave-down pedals such as the MXR Blue Box. The additional tone generated by the Octavia is an octave higher than the fundamental, and is well blended with the fundamental to create rich sustaining tone,

ROGER MAYER VISION OCTAVIA

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Octave/overdrive pedal

FEATURES: Choice of hard-wired or buffered outputs, convenient battery access

CONTROLS: Drive, tone, output

CONNECTIONS: Input, hard-wired output, two buffered outputs

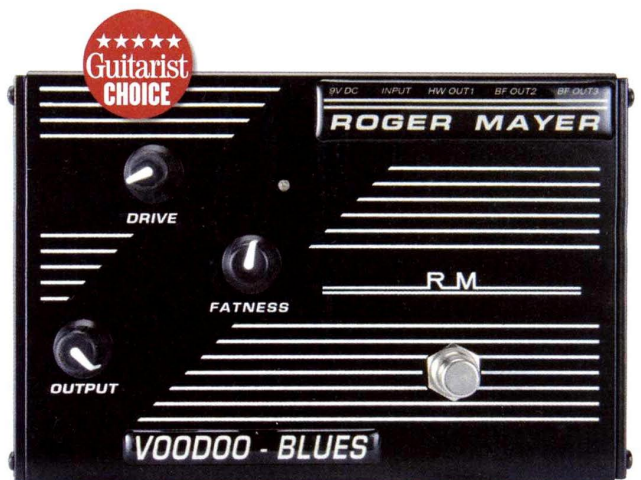
MIDI: No

POWER: Single nine-volt battery or adaptor (not supplied)



ROGER MAYER VISION OCTAVIA & VOODOO BLUES

EFFECTS  GUITARIST INTERACTIVE



ROGER MAYER VOODOO BLUES

ORIGIN: UK

TYPE: Overdrive pedal

FEATURES: Choice of hard-wired or buffered outputs, convenient battery access

CONTROLS: Drive, fatness, output

CONNECTIONS: Input, hard-wired output, two buffered outputs

MIDI: No

POWER: Single nine-volt battery or adaptor (not supplied)

The rivals

VISION OCTAVIA
Pigtronix OFO Distortion

Chicago Iron Octavian

DigiTech Hendrix Experience

The Chicago Iron Octavian is a remake of the Tycobrahe Octavia, itself modelled on Roger Mayer's original. Chicago Iron has a range of Octavians, featuring tweaks to the basic design. The Pigtronix OFO combines fuzz, overdrive and octave effects. For the ultimate in hero worship, the DigiTech Hendrix pedal uses digital modelling to create seven of Jimi's classic sounds.

VOODOO BLUES
Crowther Hot Cake
Xotic RC Booster
Keeley TS808+ Mod

The Hot Cake has possibly the most gain available, and can create some squishy fuzz sounds. The RC Booster has a similar clarity and crispness to the Voodoo Blues. Robert Keeley's flagship mod adds a clarity and dynamic responsiveness that is not found on the original.

The Vision Octavia and Voodoo Blues are typical of the Mayer range in that they perform fairly simple sonic tasks, but do so with fantastic tone and unique character

→ simultaneously fat and piercing. We've always found that the best results can be gained from this sort of pedal by using a neck single-coil pickup and playing above the seventh fret. This creates a round, sustained tone, above which the extra octave note really sings. There's plenty of room for experimentation, though. The Octavia responds very well to changes in equipment. Boost the drive control to the max and turn your guitar's tone right down for a thick fuzz sound.

Although this sort of effect works best on single notes, you can get some great sounds using double-stops, especially parallel 4ths (think Ritchie Blackmore riffs, but at higher fretboard positions). The overtones can get quite overpowering, so this probably isn't the effect for sensitive smooth jazz ballads!

The Octavia responds very well to the presence of other pedals. In fact, if you want to get that authentic Purple Haze sound, you'll need to add a fuzz pedal before the Octavia, just like Jimi did. This definitely works, adding emphasis to the added high note. There are no rules, though; reversing the order of the fuzz and Octavia creates a more biting and tonally distinct sound. A wah pedal will add even more connection possibilities, each creating a unique tone from the Octavia.

Voodoo Blues

Roger's intention with this pedal was to build a versatile overdrive that wasn't just another Tube Screamer clone. His aim was to create a versatile pedal with clarity and dynamics that could also add clean sustain to chords. On the outside, the Voodoo Blues has the same basic design as the other Voodoo pedals, which in turn are quite similar to the Vision pedals, so for general design features see above.

Once again, the control layout is clear and easy to understand; the drive and output knobs are self-explanatory, and the fatness control is designed to do more than a standard high-cut tone control.

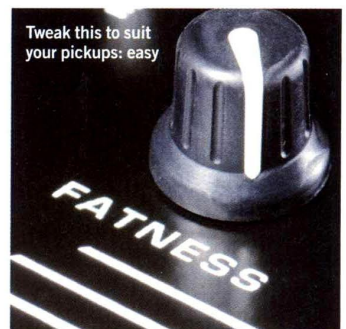
SOUNDS: Sure enough, the Voodoo Blues does sound completely different from all the Tube Screamer-alikes. It has a much crisper and more 'open' sound, without the mid-range emphasis. At low drive levels, the pedal works very effectively as a clean boost; you won't get as much extra gain as you would from a dedicated clean boost pedal, but there's enough to push a not-quite-overdriven amp over the edge or to add a solo boost for a jazz gig.

Winding up the drive control gives you a lot of extra level, as well as adding grit. There isn't a huge amount of fuzz available, but that's not really the point; this pedal excels at taking a good amp sound and making it bigger, louder and meatier. That said, though, if your basic amp sound is already slightly overdriven, you'll get masses of thick sustain with the Voodoo Blues set to high drive settings.

The fatness control is the icing on the cake, allowing you to fine-tune the low-end response to suit your rig. A common criticism of many overdrive pedals (including those based on the Tube Screamer design) is that they add mid-range bite at the expense of lower frequencies, but that's not true of the Voodoo Blues. With a Les Paul, we found a 50 per cent fatness setting was enough to create a rich, thick overdrive tone, but the extra range is perfect for thickening up the bridge pickup sound on a Strat. What's great about the fatness circuit is that the crisp clarity of the overall tone is not affected.


| MAYER VOODOO BLUES | TEST RESULTS |
|--------------------|--------------|
| Build quality | ★★★★★ |
| Features | ★★★★★ |
| Sound | ★★★★★ |
| Value for money | ★★★★★ |

- WE LIKED Ditto Vision Octavia
- WE DISLIKED Ditto Vision Octavia



Verdict

Roger Mayer has been doing things his own way for over 40 years, and he has a range of widely popular (not to mention legendary) products to show for it. The Vision Octavia and Voodoo Blues are typical of the Mayer range in that they perform fairly simple sonic tasks, but do so with fantastic tone and unique character. The simplicity also creates versatility – neither of these pedals is limited to a particular style of music or player, and will happily co-exist with a wide range of signal chains.

As ever, the build quality is excellent, and the pedals are quiet in operation. It's difficult to find anything to complain about, but one slight limitation (as a result of the otherwise ingenious design) is that you can't use angled plugs on your patch cables – they won't fit. Oh well, I think we'll manage to live with that! 

Roger Mayer Vision Octavia

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★

Roger Mayer Voodoo Blues

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★