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Roger Mayer Vision Series Pedals

By Dave Hunter | September, 2005

British effects designer Roger Mayer is best known as the man who built and modified many of Jimi Hendrix's tone tools. Appropriately enough, two of the four pedals in his new Vision Series are descendents of Hendrix pedals, while another takes a new look at a classic British booster, and the fourth updates a pedal originally made for a pre-Zep Jimmy Page. In characteristic Mayer style, however, none of these is a "vintage reissue." The Page-1 Fuzz, Vision Octavia, Concorde+ Treble Booster, and Voodoo-Vibe Jr all offer considerable advances and improvements on the original designs. Their slim enclosures are stomp-ably robust, and they benefit from slide-door battery access. Each device has a single Hard Wire Bypass output plus dualbuffered outs to put a cork in the "true bypass versus buffered" debate. All pedals were tested with a variety of amps and single-coil and humbucker guitars.

Page-1

Way back in 1964—before Jimi Hendrix even landed in London—Roger Mayer built a fuzzbox based roughly on the Maestro Fuzz-Tone for his pal Jimmy Page. The Page-1 recreates that early project, but with added circuitry for extra gain, and a Tone control for increased versatility. At its heart, however, beat two carefully selected AC128 germanium transistors (the same type used in many early versions of the Fuzz Face) that deliver a rather nasty, percussive, early-'60s-style fuzz. Germanium fuzzes are lauded for being smoother and more musical than silicon, but this is one hard, harsh mutha of a pedal. With the Gain set low, it gives a honking, dirty boost with seemingly no end of level. Bring Gain into the one-to-three o'clock range, and the tone is brutal and filthy with odd pulsating and gating effects at extreme settings. Amid a thumping band this pedal makes a major impact, but it's definitely one for brave souls or early fuzz purists.

Vision Octavia

Octave pedals can be an acquired taste, but players addicted to that sleazy, pinched, octave-up sound find it hard to keep their toe off the "on" button once they get the knack. It all began with Mayer's Octavia, and the Vision Series update contains the feed forward and gating effects added to the final Hendrix version of the Octavia that were lacking from the previous RM production models of recent years. The Tone control is a new bonus, and the Drive control lets you push the effect into a degree of self-distortion in front of the octave note. The Vision Octavia is still a one-note-wonder (any attempts at polyphony elicit a

dissonant clank—which is cool in itself for some applications), but use it “right” and that classic, wild, edgy sound is all there. A fine update to the original classic, this pedal works best with a neck-position single-coil à la Hendrix.

Concorde+

As much as treble boosters helped countless ’60s rockers kick some balls out of the big tube amps of the day, the mere notion sounds like a one-way ticket to Tinnitus Town. So to stem the brutal highs of vintage units such as the Dallas Rangemaster and Vox boosters, the Concorde+ carries a well-voiced Tone control (think “fatness”), plus Drive and Output knobs. The circuit contains a single germanium AC128 transistor preceded by a low-noise silicon drive stage for added gain. A little experimentation quickly proved that this is far more than just a booster. You can achieve a considerable but fairly clean linear boost with Drive reined in, but with the Tone set at three o’clock, Drive at 11 o’clock, and Output at around two o’clock, it outshone any of nearly a dozen Tube Screamer-style overdrives I had on hand with regards to transparency, dynamics, and bottom. I really enjoyed this pedal’s muscular sweetness and touch-friendly compression. It definitely has its sweet spots, though, and you will find some fizzy “tranny” sounds in certain positions, but with just a little tweaking it can prove an extremely musical booster/ overdrive.

Voodoo-Vibe Jr

The compact Voodoo-Vibe Jr pedal uses the same circuitry that’s at the tone-shaping core of RM’s much bigger Voodoo-Vibe unit, including four carefully matched **photoresistors**, but with much simplified control functions. Mayer also says these pedals represent a continued evolution from his modifications to the last of Hendrix’s own Univox Uni-Vibes. The Jr was designed such that the player can set its Sweep, Speed, Intensity, and Mix (Chorus-Vibe) controls to 12 o’clock and get the instant gratification of usable sounds. It’s very true, and even after days of fiddling and playing, my favorite settings mostly remained within a short twist of these positions—the one exception being a Mix leaning more toward Chorus than Vibe. The Jr nails a classic Vibe’s heart and soul without coming off as a clone or copy. It is watery, gurgly, and lush, yet it retains an impressive degree of the sound and dynamics of your guitar. It also introduces negligible noise into the brew. Once sampled, it’s hard to live without at least a little of that warm bubble in your tone.

INSTANT GRATIFICATION: PAGE-1

Who's it for?
Players craving vintage buzz.

Kudos:
Harsh, percussive, and authentic '60s fuzz tones.

Concerns:
Odd sounds at extreme settings.

INSTANT GRATIFICATION: VISION OCTAVIA

Who's it for?
Those seeking a more civilized version of the classic Octavia.

Kudos:
More versatile and refined than earlier octave effects.

Concerns:
As with most octaves, it generates quirky frequencies that can make it tricky to use.

INSTANT GRATIFICATION: CONCORDE+

Who's it for?
Fans of classic treble boosters who want more tone control and overdrive capability.

Kudos:
Sweet, fat, and dynamic boost and overdrive tones.

Concerns:
Some tizzy sounds outside the sweet spots.

INSTANT GRATIFICATION: VOODOO-VIBE JR

Who's it for?
Players who want classic Uni-Vibe tones from a compact pedal.

Kudos:
Simple functions. Juicy sounds.

Concerns:
None.

HUH?

A **photoresistor** is a sensor whose resistance varies with light intensity, typically decreasing in resistance as the light intensity increases. In a classic Uni-Vibe, four photoresistors and a variable pulsating light source are used to modulate the phase-shifting circuit.