



Electro-Harmonix Effects Interface

From the creator of the Big Muff comes a handy unit for getting your pedalboard and your DAW effects talking to each other

BY ALEX LYNHAM

THE NEW EHX Effects interface is a generic version of the idea they first trialled with its Big Muff Pi Hardware Plugin.

Build quality

The Effects Interface has a neo-retro vibe, with chunky, tactile sliders and a well laid-out front panel. The case is about the size of an old-school Big Muff, so it's compact enough to fit on a pedalboard or on the studio (or bedroom) floor next to a 'board.

There's a footswitch for when you're using the pedal as a DAW effects insert, and stereo input meters to check your level. Since one of the best uses for this pedal is using analogue distortion pedals to gain-stack inside your DAW, this is a crucial feature.

Even with a delay pedal or similar you can use the output of the Effects Interface to generate a bit of extra 'push.'

Usability

The unit itself is simple. Connecting a pedal is straightforward and the indicators on the front panel tell you when it's powered and connected. The metering is solid and makes the pedal usable rather than a frustrating exercise.

On the DAW side, the plug-in required to use the Effects interface is good, telling you clearly when the unit is connected, and what the status is. On first connection, it needs to be calibrated, but this is straightforward.

All of that said, as you'd expect with a pedal this niche and technical, it's not a plug-and-play affair. Although it is possible to set up in under five minutes, you will need to consult the manual and follow the instructions.

Once it's set up, there's not much else required to figure out, but if you want to use it to insert DAW plugins onto your board, you will need to switch around the settings on the plugin, and follow some suggestions for reducing latency.

Sounds

Used as a pedal insert, the Effects Interface is at its best when used to apply analog gain stages to tracks in your DAW projects. Bored of the same digital emulations? Run your drums

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through a real Big Muff, Tube Screamer, or Smallsound/Bigsound Mini. This is incredibly powerful, as you effectively end up with a new collection of gain plugins.

Taking things a step further, delays and reverbs open up sonic options, especially when you start to include pads and granular reverbs. However, if you're experienced at studio sound manipulation, most of what digital effects on your 'board can do is already easier to create with plugins.

Instead, where the pedal shines is dynamic and expressive effects. Think things like loopers, or any pedal with a rocker footswitch. I found myself processing distorted drums with a wah pedal while chuckling like an idiot, and bit-crushing guitar busses by re-processing them through a pair of DigiTech Whammy pedals that were manipulated in real time.

Because the input and output sections of the Effects Interface are an active amplifier, there's a bit of gain applied by the pedal that also gently improves the punchiness of most things that you throw at it, and also stacks pretty well with gain stages that are in the loop.

Obviously with any pedal of this type, there's a concern about latency. In the case of using the pedal as an insert for pedals, for example, by sending a bus or single track to it, the latency is unnoticeable with a fast computer.

Moreover, it is simple to bump the recorded output of the track - since you'll probably be printing the output - back into time. In general, for use on guitars, I found that the slight lag resulted in a double-tracked effect that was actually pretty useful as an effect in of itself.

Verdict

While there are other ways of doing what the Effects Interface does, it really tries to make this process smooth and intuitive for guitarists.

GUITAR VERDICT



Every once in a while a pedal comes along that takes you by surprise. The EHX Effects Interface is one - a pedal I didn't even know I needed. The only drawback is the price. It's not cheap, at about the price of an audio interface.

PROS

- + Incredibly useful utility pedal.
- + Intuitive and fun with dynamic effects.
- + Easy to set up, and designed with guitarists in mind.

CONS

- Using it to insert DAW effects on your pedalboard is harder to set up.
- Price might deter some.

SPECS

TYPE: Direct box/Pedalboard Audio Interface
MADE: USA
CONTROLS: Level, Monitor, Stereo Input, Stereo Output, Footswitch
FEATURES: Hardware Plugin Mode (Pedalboard Insert), Pedalboard Mode (DAW Insert), Audio Interface
CONNECTIVITY: Stereo Input, Stereo Output, Power, USB-C
BYPASS: Buffered
POWER: 9V DC Center-negative, 200mA or via USB-C
DIMENSIONS: 146 x 57 x 114 mm
WEIGHT: 1.45lbs/0.66kg (shipping weight)
OPTIONS: None

That makes sense.
Besides some of their more out-there offerings, EHX are a company that have thrived on a line of pedals that broadly speaking do one thing, and do it well. That much is true of the Effects Interface as an insert.