COSM? Damn near killed 'em

by **zentropa** » 28 Jul 2012, 05:55

Since as long as i have understood what decent tone is, I've had a disdain for digital effects, modelers, etc. why overpay for a fake when you can get a couple of real ones for not that much difference in price?

The invention of COSM was supposed to correct all of that by being superior to what had been done before on that front... And it was, but still not good enough. Part of what irks me about them is that they're "supposed" to sound like something specific but if you are familiar with the actual emulated item, where it fails to adequately replicate tends to stand out more than what it does well. E.g. Any tubescreamer "model" tends to fall short if you have ever owned an 1984 or earlier tubescreamer (and others will argue for anything made after the original 808).

After checking out some of the newer cosm-based effects and after the ML-2 beat out the MT-2, HM-2, HM-3, etc on my board I've come to realize the weakness of cosm can also be its strength.

My least favorite part of any modeling attempt is the loss of dynamic response vs the real thing. You get a programmer's interpretation of a digitial conversion of an analog sound... And that sound is centered around the particular nuances of whoever is responsible for playing the analog sound used as its source. Think about strings for a minute. Nickel vs nickel plated steel vs nickel wound steel core vs steel. Round wound vs flat wound. Hex core vs round core. New vs lightly played vs broken in vs old. 8's vs 9's vs 10's etc. They all sound a little different and have slightly different dynamics. With any digital simulation, the dynamics of the strings used in creating said simulation will dominate the actual simulation, and may or may not be accurate to what you think sounds "best." Take every possible variable involved in creating said sound and you have created 1 representation of over a billion potential variables.

Im probably one of the few that dislikes digital for that reason but i'm in the same boat for generally disliking it because it sounds like crap compared to the real thing.

However, over the past few days I've been developing new thoughts on the subject. I've looked at how many analog pedals I've sold off because it "only sounded good when <insert magical conditions here>" or it "sucked when i tried to <insert situation i wanted it to do>" and man, it's like 200+ pedals.

Being limited to bedroom volumes for the past 8 years has finally changed my view on things a bit. The ML-2 is the first digital distortion pedal i've actually enjoyed. I dont't play metal, but to me it sounds like a super strat into a maxed out OD-1 going into a Marshall JCM800 that has been warming up for 6 hours and has the gain and level cranked to 11.

The thing is, during this stretch I have had a super strat, an OD-1, and a jcm800. What i've found is that a fake OD-1 into a fake cranked jcm800 at 11 sounds more like i want to sound than the real thing when the real thing can only be played at 0.75 on the volume. I'll take the fake crunchy palm mute dynamics over a dead fart/thud from the real thing.

If i was gigging it'd be a different story, but for what i am limited to now i actually prefer it.

As for the "why do these kids keep buying all these crappy digital pedals?" view, it's that they are only able to achieve part of the equation (this pertains to casual players and hobbyists as well). I'm generally biased because i have been playing nice stuff for a long time. If you take someone with a $100 chinese import guitar with pickups that cost $0.79 to manufacture, the cheapest cable at the music store, and an old crate amp they got at the pawnshop for $60 and give them a tubescreamer, it's going to sound like ass. Give them a cosm pedal that's based on a les paul into a tubescreamer into a marshall and they will probably sound more like what they want to sound like.

While there's a lot to dislike about digi stuff, they're getting "adequate" at it now and i feel like there's a lot of situations where it will probably work better for my own purposes.

zentropa

Re: COSM? Damn near killed 'em

by **nathanscribe** » 28 Jul 2012, 10:30

I think that's a nail-on-the-head post.

I've been using and collecting old synths for 20+ years, and no software has ever come close enough to the real deal, not to my ears. But it's contextual. I record, so can take time over things, and also work better when I'm feeling the vibe of whatever kit I'm using. I get no vibe at all from software of any kind, except one of glassy distance, so I don't use it except where I have to. But when I listen back to things I've done using software, I don't care that it was software that got me there - just that the results are right. The situation's different because I think a lot of synth types would say that having the 'real deal' is more useful in the studio than live, but your argument still stands.

nathanscribe

Re: COSM? Damn near killed 'em

by **Dirk** » 28 Jul 2012, 10:47

I guess it depends on the situation, let's say you have a killer vintage amp, that you don't want to use live because of it's value.
If one can model the same type of tone or something close to it that works for live work, then I'd say Cosm all the way, all the better.
BTW, your audience won't hear the difference anyway, it's just you who has to adapt...

On the other hand, if you can get good results using software in a recording situation, who cares? It's the outcome that counts.

Dirk

Re: COSM? Damn near killed 'em

by **zentropa** » 23 Sep 2012, 22:21

Now that i've noodled on a few more of the cosm devices... It seems very clear to me that a lot of these are being designed with roland cube amps in mind. It seems most of the demoing i hear using cubes seems to sound rather solid but once you toss them in front of a tube amp, especially a class A tube amp, their weaknesses become a bit more apparent.

I can say that i don't know what the average dude plays anymore after they ditch their first starter amp. Back when i started most people upgraded to a 100 watt solid state amp or so. Now it seems you can get a low watt tube amp for about the same price as most "band worthy" solid state amps so i have no clue what people are buying anymore.

zentropa

Re: COSM? Damn near killed 'em

by **sclitheroe** » 24 Sep 2012, 06:07

My take on it is to accept the COSM tone for what it is, rather than try to use it to pursue an exact replica of an existing tone. I use a FBM-1 all the time with my JC-120. Do I think it sounds like a Bassman? Sorta I guess, but I've never had the privilege of playing one so I don't know for sure. But it does give me a basic just-barely breaking up tone that I find hard to get otherwise, with decent subtlety and responsiveness that I can't get from the JC-120 alone. I could probably get by with a BD-2, but I'm starting to think that the touch sensitivity of that pedal is exaggerated to the point where it is an even poorer representation of an almost-overdriven amp (maybe I'm wrong, I don't know because the JC is all I have)

JC-120 + FBM-1 gives me A tone, but maybe not THE tone it says on the lid. And I'm OK with that, since I wasn't really trying to get THE tone in the first place. What I have is MY tone, and I'm good with it (as good as any of us can be once afflicted with GAS).

Standard disclaimer - I'm a basement player, so I have no idea if the FBM-1 would stand up as a quality tone at vastly higher volumes.

Standard disclaimer #2 - I really have to get more experience with tube amps, because I think only having a solid state amp gives me a very different experience of the pedal world.

Standard disclaimer #3 - if COSM gets say 80% of the way to real thing, I don't think my playing is able to get 80% out of the real thing, so I probably don't bump into the limitations of the FBM-1 quite the same way a good player would. I still have headroom on the FBM-1, since i'm the weakest link in the chain I gotta work on that too.

sclitheroe

Re: COSM? Damn near killed 'em

by **sclitheroe** » 25 Sep 2012, 20:57

Here's a great article on how component-based (like COSM) modelling is done:

http://www.uaudio.com/blog/ask-doctors-ua-modeling-plug-ins/

sclitheroe