

TONE GAMES

LEVEL 3: MODULATION

JAM PEDALS WATERFALL

By Gary Guzman

Jam Pedals, who build their stompboxes in Greece by hand, aren't yet a household name among guitarists. But with users that include Nels Cline, John Abercrombie, and Greg Koch, Jam's analog pedals are steadily popping up on more pedal junkies' wish lists. Most Jam stompboxes are based on old circuits of the '60s and '70s and incorporate rare NOS chips, matched NOS transistors, and carbon comp resistors. The Waterfall is not based on any specific vintage circuit, but in terms of delivering warm, analog chorus sounds that can range into the realm of Leslie-quality modulations, the Waterfall has few equals.

New/Old Wonder

Under the hood, the Jam Waterfall is built around original NOS Panasonic MN3101 and MN3007 chips. But on the outside, it's designed around a fairly basic set of controls consisting of knobs for Speed and Depth, plus two toggle switches—one to control intensity and the other for switching between chorus and vibrato. Inside the pedal, there's an internal trimmer for adjusting the maximum modulation speed, should you want an even more intense chorus.

All of Jam's pedals sport folk-art graphics that enhance their cottage-built vibe. The Waterfall features brushed blue paint to simulate rushing water, and it also has a water faucet on the face of the pedal, with the two mini toggle switches cleverly placed on the handle of the faucet.

Let It Flow

The Waterfall is a plug-and-play effect with a forgiving and intuitive set of parameters. Using a Parker Fly with humbucking pickups and an Egnater Tourmaster amp, I started working with the Waterfall's basic rich, smooth chorus and immediately fell in love with sweet tone of the humbucker in the neck position and a clean, uncomplicated chorus setting.

Working the Speed and Depth knobs yields everything from a subtle doubling effect to a really swirly, warbling sound. The Waterfall also works well within an amp's effects loop. For example, if you want to treat your preamp overdrive with some chorus, the Waterfall adds a smooth, liquid tone to the distortion that sounds great for either rhythm or lead playing. With the pedal in its more extreme settings, it can also add some wilder effects to your playing, such as super-fast speed rates or a crazier vibrato sound.

The two toggle switches add variety—and extreme sci-fi textures—you won't find in many analog chorus pedals. The switch labeled with plus

and minus signs enables you to move between a contemporary chorus sound and a fuller, more Leslie-like tone. The other switch allows you to select a chorus or vibrato effect.

The vibrato can get pretty crazy, especially when you start tinkering with the speed knob. My favorite vibrato effect was setting the depth



about 3/4 of the way up, resulting in what sounds like a minor second trill. By adjusting the speed, you can make the trill speed up and slow down. With the toggle switch set to the plus side, the individual notes in the trill interval get more defined. On the minus side, the notes get a little more slurred. It's a cool effect if you want to make single notes sound like trills up and down the fretboard.

The Verdict

Rich, smooth, or wild, the Waterfall chorus is a pedal of great depth and flexibility. Both Chorus and Vibrato settings are very warm and musical. But this is also a pedal that can work for those inclined toward more radical use of modulation effects. This range—combined with the Waterfall's no-compromise quality, NOS-based circuitry, and hand-built look—make this one of the most remarkable chorus pedals made today.

RATING:



BUY IF...

you are looking for a chorus and vibrato effect that sounds as good as it looks.

SKIP IF...

you're not concerned with having a vintage chorus made of rare NOS chips or if you want a digital effect.

Jam Pedals
Street \$240
jampedals.com