

DEATH BY AUDIO

Total Sonic Annihilation 2

By Charles Saufley



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REVIEW
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It's easy to overstate Death By Audio's renegade, oddball reputation. For every few instruments of sonic terror in their line, there is a completely practical and masterfully executed stomp like the Fuzz War or Interstellar Overdriver. The Total Sonic Annihilation 2, however, is not one of these. It's an oscillator, it's a fuzz, it's a sonic blender that feeds your pedalboard's signal back into itself before turning it all into rainbow-colored tone puree. It's awesome. And for better or worse, it will certainly reinforce the perception that Death By Audio are circuit-twisting maniacs. But it's also capable of very musical, even beautiful manipulations of your core tones. And it's cleverly designed to walk the line, if somewhat precariously, between the sublime and the insane.

Vicious Cycles

The principle behind the Total Sonic Annihilation 2 (a re-think of the first pedal DBA ever built) is pretty simple: The pedal sends and receives the signal from your pedal chain. When you activate it, it sends that signal back through a feedback and high-gain boost circuit that you can manipulate with the TSA2's deceptively simple control set. Needless to say, situating the TSA2 first in your chain opens up the greatest number of tone manipulation possibilities. But you can place it anywhere in an effects chain, and there is a measure of extra control afforded by having fewer pedals in the TSA2's sound mangling clutches.

It's not essential that you use the send and return functionality to make the TSA2 sound

killer—it's a very cool fuzz and filter effect all on its own. But using the TSA2 to manipulate other effects exponentially expands your sound palette and compounds the fun.

The biggest of the knobs is the feedback control, which regulates the amount of external signal you stuff back into the TSA2's circuit. The big knob means you can theoretically make changes to feedback level on the fly with your foot. But as we'll see, there is an inherent twitchiness to the circuit that makes imprecise adjustments risky business.

The cluster of four controls just below the feedback knob manipulates the active boost portion of the TSA2's circuit. There's an on switch that can drop the boost function in and out of the circuit entirely (though a second footswitch might have been a more practical choice). The left toggle is a phase switch that flips the phase of the boost in relation to the signal return. It can radically transform the sensitivity of the feedback control and shift the boost circuit's oscillation point. The small gain knob controls the aggressiveness of the boost, which can range from overdrive to full-blown fuzz. The limit knob, however, might be the most invaluable control of the lot. It sets the maximum level for the pedal's output. And though it's tricky to set up just right, it's critical for taming the inevitable resonance spikes and oscillations that the TSA2 generates.

Destroyer of Worlds (With a Sensitive Side)

As with many DBA effects, TSA2 requires a certain appetite for randomness. Control freaks need not apply. But the TSA2 isn't solely a chaos generator. And with practice and experimentation you can create unique, unexpected, and even subtle twists on familiar stompbox textures.

TSA2 is most fascinating as part of a pedalboard populated by a diverse selection of effects. But one of the coolest things about the TSA2 is that it reacts differently and—contrary to what you



Boost phase switch

Output volume limit control