

# MXR

## M76 STUDIO COMPRESSOR

REVIEW BY **NICK RAMBO**

STREET PRICE **\$189.99**



When I think about effects, I typically organize them into three broad categories: workhorses, gadgets and tools.

*Workhorse* pedals are the go-to type—pedals like overdrives and analog delays that can be used all the time and for a variety of purposes. *Gadgets* are almost the polar opposite, best implemented sparingly and for a specific sound. Anything shimmer-related goes here, for instance. And then there are *tools*. These pedals do the seemingly invisible work in your signal chain and can be switchers, volume pedals, EQs, noise gates or, in my case,

compressors.

For the M76 Studio Compressor, the MXR design team sought to retrofit the sounds of a vintage compressor unit—one you'd find, circa 1969, in the rack at your favorite recording studio—into a stompbox that's the size of a Phase 90.

It succeeded.

### **SQUEEZE PLAY**

When I first got into pedals, a friend gave me a walkthrough of his pedalboard. When he got to the MXR Dyna Comp, I must've fallen silent or made a face because it was obvious to him that I had no

idea what it did.

He explained compression this way: it's a funnel. It takes all the incoming signal, the loud notes and the soft notes, and forces them into a space that you define.

Maybe it's not a perfect analogy, but it works. And so does compression. By normalizing and optimizing the incoming signal from your guitar, compression adds balance to your playing—making sure quieter notes don't get lost on those fast arpeggio runs.

Of course, if your playing or genre relies more on dynamic playing, a

compressor might not be a good choice. But if you want some extra pop and sustain for your solos—it's exactly what you need.

## STUDIO | STAGE

What separates studio compressors from most pedalboard-based options is the number of onboard controls. Most compression stompboxes have two or three knobs—the M76 has five.

The Input knob adjusts the gain level coming in and Output controls the level going out—pretty basic. Once those levels are set, you can use the Attack knob to adjust the reaction time it takes for the signal to become fully compressed once it comes in. Slower speeds are located to the left side of the control range and faster speeds to the right, and all are indicated on the Gain Reduction meter at the top of the pedal.

Sidebar: Since we're talking about the Gain Reduction meter, I really enjoyed having a visual reference for what was happening inside

the pedal. It's one thing to hear the effect a pedal is having—and something entirely different to see it in real time.

When the attack time is set where you want it, rotate the Release knob to adjust how long it takes your sound to get back to its original, uncompressed state. This control is literally the opposite of Attack knob, so keep that in mind as you tweak.

And finally, there's the Ratio knob. Without getting overly complicated, know that the higher the ratio, the more intense the compression. So, if you want something mild to make your cleans *cleaner*, the 4:1 ratio is ideal. But if you want a squashed sound for chickin' pickin', then 20:1—the highest level on the M76—is perfect.

And how does it sound? Really good, which shouldn't be a surprise. MXR has been building better-sounding, cooler-looking and more reliable stompboxes for more than 40 years. The M76 is no exception.

## WHAT WE LIKE

This pedal sports a feature called CHT, short for Constant Headroom Technology. When you strip away the fancy name, what you have is an internal voltage doubler that jumps the power from nine volts to 18 volts whenever you plug it into a power supply or connect it to a battery. What this means is that, when you turn it on, you get plenty of clean and clear headroom.

## CONCERNS

The M76 has a bit of a learning curve, and may not be the best fit for a novice, or new players.