

The world of guitar effects can be a very conservative, boring place sometimes. For instance, for every guitar pedal company that goes out of its way to design innovative, exciting products that inspire the ears, fingers, and creative spirit, there are fifteen others that recycle the same old “classic” circuits again and again, cramming them in the same old boxes, with only the (often half-assed) graphics allowing one to distinguish among them. This is a shameful state of affairs, but I suppose the pedal game is a lot like any other industry. It’s not all bad, though. Luckily there are more than a few shining lights amidst the dank fog of mediocrity that sometimes infiltrates the stompbox business, and one of the brightest of these is Boston’s own Source Audio.

Source Audio is responsible for some of the most innovative and exciting stompbox-based effects in recent memory. The company has shown itself to be unfazed by the technophobic attitudes that have long plagued the guitar community, designing products that marry the latest technological marvels with the most marvelous guitar tones. The success of this approach can be traced back to the way Source Audio implements it, focusing on real world usability and intuitive layout to make bold, futuristic designs that are

still musician-friendly. It’s a tricky balance that few other companies have been able to achieve.

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Source Audio has really been operating in high gear over the past year. The company’s streamlined, deceptively sophisticated One Series pedals are poised to be its greatest success yet, showcasing a knack for applying cutting edge design in a non-intimidating, highly musical way. It is based primarily on compact, sleek four-knob stompboxes with a minimalist aesthetic that belies the powerful, multi-faceted tone engines that lurk within. Much of their power emanates from the Neuro App, which allows One Series users to create, access, and share fresh algorithms and presets via a smartphone. The One Series is expanding rapidly as of late, so let’s take a moment to explore some of its highlights.

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VERTIGO TREMOLO

The Vertigo was the first pedal to be launched in the One Series, and it's practically a classic at this point. It marked something of a change in direction for Source Audio, in that it was much more conventional looking and luddite-friendly than many of the company's older designs. It quickly won over aficionados of throbbing, swampy tremolo with its unparalleled tonal quality and ease of use, yet tweaker types who wanted to dig deeper found endless inspiration in the many possibilities offered by the Neuro app. The full-stereo Vertigo offers

four knob controls on the face for rate, depth, wave shape, and output volume, and a three-way toggle for choosing between a trio of amp trem sounds, including optical, harmonic, and bias. Players that merely want the finest stereo amp trem sounds in the world with minimal fuss can stop there, but for those wanting more, the Vertigo will give it up. Engage the Neuro App and the parameters available for adjustment multiply drastically, letting one dial up tones that mimic phasing, chorus, filters and other far out mod sounds.



L.A. LADY OVERDRIVE

Most guitarists today are pretty comfortable and accepting of digital delay, reverb, and modulation effects, but the issue of digital drive and distortion is still a thorny one. This is because organic sounding dirt has traditionally been the most difficult thing to simulate effectively in the digital realm, and early efforts were pretty dismal. Source Audio has cracked the code, however, and its L.A. Lady Overdrive is a game changer. Sticking to the “four knobs and a three-way toggle” layout scheme, it lets the user select between a cranked

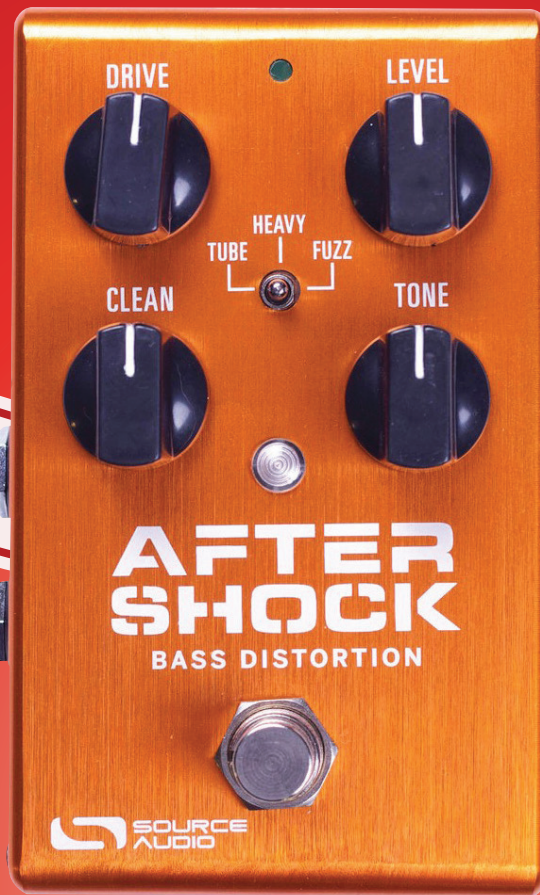
Marshall type of sound, a mid-heavy Tube Screamer tone, or a very versatile original preset, labeled “Smooth,” that mimics a tube amp in the midst of sweet overdriven saturation. Under the hood is where things get really exciting, though. With Neuro hooked up, many more algorithms and adjustments are available, and the user can even stack drive engines in series or parallel. Better yet, parallel drive sounds can be sent to different outputs, making it possible to have two completely different drive tones split between the Lady’s stereo channels.



KINGMAKER FUZZ

The Kingmaker is the bombastic purple fuzz companion to the L.A. Lady, and it is destined to upend any prejudices that germanium nerds might be holding against digital fuzzboxes. Early digital fuzz was a recipe for bleeding ears and flat, lifeless response, but as with the Lady, Source Audio has cured what many had previously thought to be an incurable ailment of digital dirt. The Kingmaker has stereo ins and outs, knobs for Drive, Level, Bass, and Treble, and that all-important tri-way toggle switch with settings for Heavy, Normal, and Octave. Heavy

is a thickly sustaining violin tone, Normal is a very dynamic fuzz that responds beautifully to changes in the guitar's volume knob, and Octave is a raucous Octavio type of sound. These tones are uniformly excellent, as well as being very convincing to ears and hands accustomed to traditional analog fuzz pedals. As with the L.A. Lady, the Neuro app gives access to a plethora of additional fuzz tones and parameters, and lets the user stack and split the fuzz engines in series or parallel for unprecedented adventures in sonic wizardry.



AFTER SHOCK BASS DISTORTION

Source Audio made its name among bass players early on, for the simple fact that it made some really superb bass-specific effects like the Soundblox Pro Bass Envelope Filter and the Multiwave Bass Distortion. On top of that, most of the company's other effects also happen to work just as well with bass as they do with guitar. This is the kind of thing that will get the attention of the four-string crowd. SA's latest bass mangling engine is the new After Shock Bass Distortion. It's laid out like the other One Series dirt boxes, with knobs for Drive, Level,

Tone, and most importantly, Clean, which lets the user blend in the ideal amount of clean signal to keep the bottom end big and tight. Stock tones include an organic tube overdrive, a molten, mid-scooped distortion, and a responsive germanium fuzz. Go deeper with the Neuro app and 40 different stackable drive engines become available, in series, parallel, mono, or stereo, with extensive equalization parameters provided for super-surgical EQing.



MERCURY FLANGER

Ask any random group of guitarists what their least favorite effect is, and more often than not flanging will be among the most popular answers. In my opinion this has less to do with the fundamental quality of flanging as an effect, than it has to do with the poor quality of many flanger pedals. Everybody loves warm, fat tape flange, but only recently have stompbox effects begun to convincingly emulate this elusive studio-created tone. Source Audio's Mercury Flanger is among the best of this new breed of pedals, and it is sure to convert a lot of players that

have been burned by cheesy flangers in the past. Though the Mercury's Thru-Zero mode is unequivocally the star of the show, it also has a Classic mode, for standard analog-style pedal flanging, and Shadow mode, for generating that wild jet plane swoosh action. With the Neuro app the Mercury can do an array of flanger sounds, as well as other modulation tones that include phaser, chorus, and tremolo, and the parameters that become available for custom tweaking are quite extensive. This is the flanger for people that hate flangers.



Source Audio's One Series also includes the Lunar Phaser, Gemini Chorus, and the Nemesis Delay (a pedal that my colleagues at *Tone Report* have already covered extensively, and with great fervor). The whole line is uniformly magnificent, setting new standards for tone and functionality in the digital stompbox world. Though I have covered some of the basic functions here, it should be noted that the One Series pedals offer even more extensive control via Source Audio's Neuro Hub, which links as many as five pedals together,

and allows the user to save and manage up to 128 presets and 128 multi-pedal "scenes" with MIDI. The user can also connect the company's Hot Hand 3, Dual Expression Pedal, or External Tap Tempo Switch straight into the control input of any of the pedals for on-the-fly manipulations. Source Audio's One Series is one of the most innovative and exciting developments to hit the stompbox world in some time, and every player of electric instruments would do well to check it out.