

Guitar Player

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GEAR Bench Test



Source Audio Hot Hand Phaser/Flanger

TESTED BY MATT BLACKETT

I'VE ALWAYS BEEN AN EXPRESSION PEDAL GUY. From the first time I tried a wah pedal, I've been hooked on the concept of real-time control of effect parameters. In the rack-tastic '80s, I took things up a notch by using expression pedals to fade in delays, speed up and slow down Leslie simulators, and regulate chorus levels. In my mind, this

manipulation—or *pedipulation*, if you will—of effects was more organic and interesting than just turning them on and off. These machinations became an integral part of my style.

Source Audio obviously thinks there's something to real-time control, as well, as evidenced by the release of their Hot Hand Wah (reviewed in the April '06 *GP*). Rather than controlling the effect with a foot, however, Source provided a wired ring, that, when moved, controlled the sweep of the wah. A neat idea to be sure, but the leash component of a cable coming off the ring and connecting to the box pretty much took away the freedom tweakers crave.

Now, Source Audio has not only released another stompbox—the all-new Hot Hand Phaser/Flanger—but they've paired it with a *wireless* ring controller.

SPECS | Source Audio, (781) 932-8080; sourceaudio.net

PRICE	Phaser/Flanger \$299 retail/\$299 street; Wireless Adapter \$150 retail/\$125 street; Bundle \$434 retail/\$399 street
I/O	Guitar, Sensor, Expression Pedal
ONBOARD PRESETS	4
WEIGHT	3.2 lbs
KUDOS	Stellar sound quality. Unprecedented control over effects.
CONCERNS	Deeper parameters difficult to access.

The result is a unique and great-sounding signal processor that's deep enough for serious effects nuts but simple enough to use that it provides tons of instant gratification.

Before getting into the wild and woolly world of real-time control with the Hot Hand ring, let's take a look at the Phaser/Flanger as a stompbox. This is a super-sturdy, great-looking box that clearly benefited from a lot of industrial design. The two footswitches are beefy, and they have a great feel. Of course, any stompbox this size needs to bring a lot to the table to justify its footprint, and this one surely does. For starters, you get 14 different effects—seven each from the phase and flange families. For every effect, you can choose from four different modulation-control sources: Hot Hand, Low Frequency Oscillator (LFO), Sequencer, and Envelope Follower (where the effect is controlled by the intensity of your picking attack). The unit's three knobs appear simple enough, but they offer a boatload of options, and their functions change depending on which modulation mode you choose. We'll examine the effects in depth in a minute, but, to cut to the chase, they sound amazingly good. Source provides a powerful 56-bit engine for its processing tasks—as well as 24-bit converters for pristine audio resolution—and this pedal could absolutely stand on its own as a high-end effects processor with no real-time control whatsoever. The phasers give you everything from a super-vibey Leslie simulation (that falls somewhere between a rotary speaker and a Uni-Vibe) to swirling, churning shifts, and spiky, notched filtration. The flangers go from a gentle swoosh to a metallic clang and all points in between.

As the “Hot Hand” name suggests, the most obvious means of control for all these phasers and flangers is Source Audio's bitchin' Green Lantern-approved ring. Getting up and running is a breeze. Charge the ring (it

The wireless Hot Hand ring allows the player to control the effect with hand movements.



takes about an hour), place it on your finger, and turn it on via its little button. Then, engage the effect with the left footswitch, or by knocking the ring twice in rapid succession—which means you can turn the box on and off from anywhere on stage. Nice!

Now hit a chord on preset 1 (a groovy phase shifter), and start moving your picking hand. You will be greeted with a deep, musical phase that's very different from a “normal” phaser's regular pulse and rate. Thanks to the ring, *this* phaser is a living, breathing tone that you control with hand movements that would be nearly impossible to duplicate with an expression pedal. For example, hit a chord and stay still, and you'll hear a light filtering of the tone. Hit the same chord and keep your hand moving, and you'll hear an incredibly dynamic, ever-changing phase shift. A simple strumming pattern keeps the phaser chewing away in rhythm, and a funkier strum syncopates the phase. Letting a chord ring while giving your picking hand a gentle shake animates the sound with what I can only describe as a sexy whammy-bar-like shimmer.

Right away, I was hooked. I hit the footswitch on the right to call up preset #2—a flanger that's also controlled by the ring. Moving my hand subtly kicked in a rich, warm flange, and more

exaggerated motions caused the tone to swoop, pump, and breathe for a sci-fi special effect. I scrolled through the other flangers and phasers, and forced them to do my bidding. At this point, I decided to tailor the ring's control to even *more* expressive levels. This is accomplished by dialing in the Hot Hand's Motion/Speed knob from Flail/Slow (where only very broad picking-hand movements change the effect) to Pick/Fast (which causes the effect to respond to much more subtle—as in fingerpicking—movements).

Despite the addictive nature of the Hot Hand ring, I did try the other modulation sources, two of which are conveniently programmed into the final two presets. Preset 3 is a phaser that uses the LFO mode, with a low-frequency oscillator governing the effect at whatever speed I set with the Motion/Speed knob. Once again, the tone was thick and rich, but it's funny how normal it sounded once I couldn't control the sweep with my hand. Preset 4 introduces us to the Hot Hand's Sequencer function, which, according to Source, “drives each effect with patterns of steps, instead of the typical sweep signal to produce the sounds of a synthesizer.” This is a *great* sound that cranks out a series of rhythmic yow-ee-yow gurgles on the phase settings, and chum-chum-chums on the flangers. There's no tap

tempo, but I was able to use the Motion/Speed control to sync the pulse to a drum loop pretty easily for an undulating bed on a rock track. I then switched over to Envelope Filter mode, and heard how the effects reacted to my picking dynamics. This adds some interesting auto-wah-style spice to the phase/flange recipe, and it certainly increases the flexibility of this already flexible box, but this wasn't my favorite application.

Most of what the Hot Hand can do is fairly intuitive, and the well-written manual can easily guide you through anything that's not self-explanatory—such as the deeper editing capabilities they call Back Page Features and Controls. These include esoteric functions such as addressing movements along the x/y axis of the ring and changing the number of steps in the sequencer. For what it's worth,

I didn't need to tweak any of these parameters to get my Hot Hand on.

The main objections from guitarists to the Hot Hand revolution seem to revolve around fears that [a] the ring is uncomfortable, [b] the hand motions are unnatural and get in the way of normal playing, and [c] the whole thing is nothing but a gimmick. These are easy to dispel, because the ring is perfectly comfortable—after a few seconds I barely noticed it. The hand motions can take a little getting used to—just like any new technique, such as rhythmically working a toggle switch, or phrasing with a whammy bar. As for the Hot Hand being gimmicky—that's pretty much up to the individual. The sounds can be as subtle or as far out as you want. For example, I let a singer wear the ring and manipulate the effect while I played. This was weird—but in a

super-cool way—because I loved the random and chaotic nature of the sounds. I also used the device as an outboard signal processor for a pre-recorded guitar track, using the ring to manipulate the phase shifter during playback, and printing the results.

But wait, there's more. You can chain together more than one Hot Hand effect, and control them with a single ring. You can also use an expression pedal in conjunction with the ring. My prediction is that it won't be long before some artist really harnesses this technology, and does some truly groundbreaking stuff. (DJs, for example, are going to love what the Phaser/Flanger—not to mention the Hot Hand Wah—can do for their performances.) Unique, powerful, and musical, the Hot Hand Phaser/Flanger is well deserving of an Editor's Pick Award.



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