

FIELD TEST SOURCE AUDIO HOT HAND

TESTED BY MICHAEL MOLENDRA



Gestural control of synthesizers has been embraced by cutting-edge performance artists since the '90s, when alternate MIDI controllers were first developed by techno visionaries such as Don Buchla. And yet, guitarists—typically the most movement-oriented of instrumentalists—have been pretty much denied the artistry of sonic choreography. Sure, wireless systems have de-cabled wandering pickers from their amp rigs, but, until now, no one has offered guitar players a readily available and affordable method of translating their body movements into sound.

Source Audio's Hot Hand Motion-Controlled Wah Filters (\$299 retail/street N/A) finally invites guitarists to the dance party via a wired, motion-sensing "ring" that can be slipped onto a finger, and used to control the Hot Hand's wah and filter parameters. More adventurous types can even adapt the sensor to anything that can be affixed to a body part, and use their head, legs, or torso to manipulate wah sounds. This synthesis of technology, sound, and motion began in 2004, when engineer—and guitarist—Jesse Remignanti was developing software tools for a new 56-bit processing chip from Analog Devices, Inc., and was also aware of an ADI nanotechnology product that could track motion and use that information to control common guitar effects. Ultimately, former Kurzweil signal-processing wizard Robert Chidlaw was brought on to help craft the Hot Hand's effects, and Source Audio is actively developing more motion-controlled goodies for future release.

As a wah freak, I was intrigued to see whether the Hot Hand's motion control offered any significant benefits over a conventional pedal controller. I also feared looking like some crazed goony bird as my arm, hand, and body gestures manipulated filter parameters. Happily, you can set the motion sensor to react to anything from subtle move-

ments (the Dean Martin mode) to outright flailing (the Jerry Lewis mode). In addition, you can tweak the frequency range, use the Select treadle to click between three presets, and choose between Classic Wah, Low Pass, High Pass, Multi Peak, and Auto Wah effects.

The Hot Hand indeed allows a fantastic array of aggressive and incredibly subtle and expressive filter effects—everything from precisely timed wahs to dead-on punches with drum accents to vocal-esque waaaaaaaah-ah crescendoes. It's like being an orchestral wah-wah conductor, but minus the tux and tails. The wah and filter sounds are way cool—not as blissfully aggro as my classic Vox and CryBaby pedals, but definitely evocative and gutsy.

There are only two downers to this fabulous technological breakthrough. First, I didn't dig being wired up. The cables, elastic-ring-mounted sensor device, and athletic-sweatband-styled cord holders didn't actually impede my playing in any way, so it's all kinds of whiney to complain about the apparatus, but I still felt "encumbered." However, Source Audio's Roger Smith reports that a wireless unit is under development.

The trickier bit is if guitarists will embrace transforming their movements into a "performance." I'm a bit of a ham with a theater background, so I was okay with it, and Source Audio states that jam-band guitarists who beta tested the device were totally jazzed about using their bodies as wah controllers. But given some of the strange looks directed at the Hot Hand's demonstrator at the Winter NAMM Show—who occasionally secured the sensor to his head and emulated a jumping bean—the concept of motion control may be a tad much for some guitarists. But I hope every player will give the Hot Hand a fair chance, because it is absolutely a viable control paradigm for discovering new twists to old tricks. **E**

