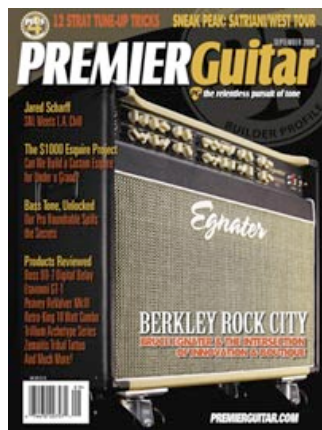


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Review: Source Audio Soundblox Tri-Mod Effects

by Gary Guzman

With so many different effect pedals on the market today, it can be difficult and overwhelming for a guitar player to pick which effects to purchase and play with. It must be even more difficult for a company to put out fresh, innovative products that really stand out from the rest. The Source Audio company shouldn't have to worry about that too much. They initially introduced the Hot Hand Motion Control Wah Filter and Phaser/Flanger effects units, which were the first proprietary effect systems controllable by hand and body motions. They are now bringing that same innovation, creativity and quality to their line of Soundblox pedals. Their new Wah, Flanger and Phaser pedals are Tri-Mod effects, meaning they can be modified with three different modulation sources: LFO (Low Frequency Oscillator), Envelope Follower, or using the Hot Hand motion controller. The innovative Hot Hand is a sensor ring that you place on your picking hand or various parts of the body. The sensor picks up the movement, from subtle picking to extreme gestures, and modulates the effect based on the motion.



Gary reviewed the first in the Soundblox series, the Multiwave Distortion, in August. [Click here](#) to read the review.

All three pedals utilize a 56-bit Digital Signal Processor, the SA601, with crystal clear 24-bit converters. They each feature 11 different types of effects, active analog bypass, and a modern design with rugged construction. The setup for each pedal is basically the same -- an on/off switch, one effect knob and three knobs that control different parameters of that effect. The back panels on each pedal include the guitar input and output, a 9V DC power jack and the Hot Hand input jack, which works with both wired and wireless sensors.

I'm always too eager to try out an effect without reading the manual first, so I plugged into each pedal right away to check out the sounds. Fortunately, each pedal was user-friendly and easy to understand. I was pleasantly welcomed with a wide palette of sounds on each pedal.



First up was the Tri-Mod Wah. I was very curious to see how the wah effect would work without the traditional expression foot controller. I was surprised to find out that this could do everything a regular wah pedal can do and more. By dialing the Depth knob to the envelope follower position, the wah effect responds to the guitar's input signal and amplitude. It then creates the control signal based on that input level that modulates the filter. Basically what that means is the wah effect can be applied to each note you play. The effect was really impressive when I was playing a fast passage, and the wah kept up on every note flawlessly -- something you can't achieve with a regular wah pedal.

Another way to modify the effect is by LFO. Frequency Oscillators are commonly used in phasers and flangers, and the constant sweep works great in this effect as a "foot-free" wah pedal. The speed and frequency knobs allow you to fine-tune the effect to your liking. The nice thing about the Tri-Mod Wah is you're not stuck in one spot on stage, pumping a pedal with your foot. It gives you the freedom to move around a bit and still

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maintain that traditional wah sound.

 [Download example 1 \(wah\)](#)

The wah effect settings include Low Pass & Band Pass (both with Hi and Lo options), Multi-Peak, and Classic Wah. I loved playing around with the Multi-Peak settings since it can greatly change the character of the wah. It can actually change from a "wah" sound to a "yah" sound, which I thought was a very cool effect.

 [Download example 2 \(wah\)](#)

The Flanger and Phaser each have 11 different types of effects, and feature excellent and diverse sounds. The Tri-Mod Phaser sounds especially great with a clean tone. It can emulate warm, swirling tones including a nice Uni-Vibe kind of sound. Adding distortion in front of it and playing around with the different controls provides a great variety of tonal options. The Tri-Mod Flanger can go from a very subtle sweep to a really crazy vibrato. There are plenty of options available by playing around with the Depth, Speed and Delay controls. After spending some time experimenting with the effect, I dialed in a really wild sound that most people wouldn't think is possible with a guitar -- by adding heavy percussive strumming, it actually sounded like electronic drums creating a techno drum loop!

 [Download example 3 \(flanger\)](#)

Eventually I did have to break out the manual to figure out how the Hot Hand sensor works. There are two extra components for the Hot Hand setup (which is sold separately): the wireless motion sensor ring and the receiver. I had to charge the sensor ring first, which took about an hour. The small receiver module plugs into the sensor jack on the back of the effect. I placed the sensor on the ring finger of my picking hand and pushed a little button on it to power it up. It took a short while to experiment with hand movements and the control knobs on each pedal to understand the capabilities of the sensor. Once I did, the experimental floodgates burst open!

I started with the Tri-Mod Wah pedal. I quickly discovered that I could do a faster wah with the Hot Hand than I ever could with my foot. For example, if you play a chord, let it ring out and want to add wah to the sustained chord, your foot can only move so fast. With the Hot Hand, you can shake your finger or whole hand a lot faster and create a wilder effect!

I then used it on the Tri-Mod Phaser and achieved some nice tremolo effects. Using a traditional tremolo effect, one thing that can be frustrating is trying to match the guitar vibrato with the tempo of the song you are playing. It can be awkward in a live situation -- you have to crouch down low by your pedal trying to dial in the tempo, while trying to play with a drummer who's inconsistent in his meter. The Hot Hand solves that easily. You simply strum a chord and wave your hand to the tempo, and you're in complete control of the effect.

 [Download example 4](#)

The Hot Hand works nicely with the Tri-Mod Flanger as well. Fortunately, you can set the Hot Hand to react to either subtle movements or wild arm gestures. The technique I used was simple -- I played a chord and just moved my fingers as if I was tapping on the guitar. It's perfect if you only want certain notes flanged while you are playing. With the right combination of the HH Motion (Speed) knob setting as well as your motion technique, you can strum chords that are unaffected, yet apply the Flanger with stronger hand movements.

 [Download example 5](#)

The Hot Hand sensor ring is very small and lightweight, so it's never a burden on your picking hand. It does have a bright blue LED power indicator on it, so eyes may be drawn to it while you are playing. I would actually cover that up with black tape if I were to play with it live, to make it less noticeable -- a great magician never reveals his tricks!

Some guitarists may shy away from the whole motion control concept, thinking they will look foolish waving their arms around like a madman. Since the Hot Hand can be adjusted to respond to even the slightest picking movement, they need not worry. The Hot Hand doesn't change your picking technique or playing style, it can actually enhance it. Plus, your audience will probably appreciate a little bit of showmanship in your performance!

The Source Audio Soundblox pedals are incredible and powerful enough as standalone effects. They are of high quality, very versatile and easy on the eyes and ears. With the extra compatibility with the Hot Hand motion sensor, the Soundblox pedals are a tough act for others to follow.

Buy If...
you wish to expand your creativity, sound palette and showmanship

Skip If...
you refuse to make any more movement on stage than you have to

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