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Electro-Harmonix Holy Stain

TESTED BY MICHAEL ROSS

THE ELVES AT ELECTRO-HARMONIX HAVE BEEN popping out new toys like Santa's helpers at Christmas, and one of the company's most recent debuts is the Holy Stain (\$130 retail/\$98 street)—a multieffect pedal with a hybrid twist: the distortion and tone sections are analog, while the reverb and modulation effects are digital. Two types of distortion are offered, along with Room Reverb, Hall Reverb, Pitch Shift,

and Tremolo—all in a die-cast metal enclosure that sports two footswitches, six knobs, a guitar input, an expression pedal input, and a mono output. The far right Dirt knob selects Clean, Fuzz, and Drive. Clean mode allows you to use the effects sans distortion (or with a distortion pedal in front of the Stain), while the Drive setting offers a musical-sounding overdrive with plenty of gain. The Fuzz position provides classic E-H fuzz à la the original Little Big Muff. As with that coveted vintage pedal, the Fuzz section cleans up well when you back off your instrument's volume.

The Color knob sports Bright, Dark, and Warm settings. These are well-chosen equalization notches for coarse coloration of the Fuzz and Drive settings (they don't affect Clean). The Tone knob sweeps a wide, usable range from piercing, but not painful, highs to "woman tone" treble cut. The interaction of the Tone and Color stages provides a huge variety of sonic possibilities. A Master Volume control helps match levels when switching from Clean to Fuzz or Drive, and when moving through the Color options.

The Mix knob adjusts the wet/dry balance for the reverb and modulation effects only. The

SPECS | Electro-Harmonix, (718) 937-8300; ehx.com

MODEL	Holy Stain
PRICE	\$130 retail/\$98 street
EFFECTS	Fuzz, Drive, Room Reverb, Hall Reverb, Pitch Shift, Tremolo
CONTROLS	Mix, Amount, Volume, Tone, Color, Dirt
FOOTSWITCHES	(2) Mode, Bypass
INPUTS	1/4" (1)
OUTPUTS	1/4" (1)
POWER SUPPLY	9.6VDC/200mA wall-wart
WEIGHT	1.2 lbs
KUDOS	Classic EH Fuzz. Great reverbs. Excellent pitch-shift sound and tracking.
CONCERNS	Not programmable.


GEAR Electro-Harmonix

Amount knob's function changes depending on the effect selected by the Mode footswitch. For the reverbs, it sets the decay time. In pitch-shift mode, it sweeps the pitch from the unit's extremes of down a major 4th to up a major 3rd, and it also adjusts the tremolo rate. You can vary the Amount with an expression pedal (not included) if desired.

I tested the Holy Stain with a 1965 Stratocaster equipped with DiMarzio Virtual Vintage pickups, an Orange Tiny Terror head plugged into a custom bottom with an Eminence Texas Heat speaker, and an MGear EXP expression pedal. In Drive mode with the Color switch set to Warm, my single-coil bridge pickup was kicked into the land of sweet and beefy humbucker sustain. Backing off my guitar volume and combining Drive with the Pitch Shift section set for a slight detune served up some serious chime. I wouldn't recommend the Drive effect for a classic blues gig, however, as its distortion is not very amp-like, and it doesn't have enough output to work as an overdrive. As for the Fuzz, between its excellent dynamic control response and tone options, I was able

to achieve everything from Hendrix-y rhythm textures to Fripp-like violin tones.

In the digital domain, both reverbs sound terrific, with nary a trace of graininess even at long decay/extremely wet settings. At a street price of under \$100 the Stain is worth it for the reverb alone (the Tremolo effect also includes some reverb). Despite the name, however, the tremolo warbles more like a Uni-Vibe—which is not necessarily a bad thing. The Pitch shifter tracks perfectly, and though it would have been nice to have a range of an octave up and down, the two extremes offered here comprise the most used intervals.

As with many E-H effects, the fun is in the Stain's oddball sounds—like sick detuning of solos or hitting a fuzzed chord with extremely fast tremolo, and then diving a whammy bar while slowing the trem rate with an expression pedal. As multieffectors go, the Holy Stain is obviously limited—no programming, one distortion type, and only one effect at a time—but Electro-Harmonix has never dealt in the obvious. They create pedals with *character*, and the Holy Stain is chock full of it. 

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