



Photo: Anthony Rubolotta

Mike Matthews

Vintage Guitar Magazine Hall of Fame Inductee

Just four years old when his mother began teaching him piano, Mike Matthews took to music early and never let go. A rebellious streak led him to discover rock and roll in the 11th grade, which in turn led him down life's path.

As a way to stay involved in music and support himself while still studying at Cornell University, Matthews worked as a concert promoter. His keen sense of the sounds happening in popular music led to development of his first pedal – the Linear Power Booster (LPB-1), the world's first overdrive pedal – which led to a friendship with Jimi Hendrix, which led to Electro-Harmonix. With Matthews constantly devising new devices, the company quickly established itself as the predominant effects builder, offering legendary boxes along the way, such as the Holy Grail and Big Muff.

Forty-some years later, Matthews is a very active member of his crew, always thinking about the next greatest effect/device to lend guitarists' pallets. Though the early '80s – an era when the guitar waned as a tool in pop music – were a challenge and E-H went bankrupt, another Matthews invention, the low-cost sampling chip – kept him afloat after he sold the technology to Japanese electronics manufacturer Akai, who used it in key-boards. He also took advantage of poor economic conditions in post-Cold-War countries of the former Soviet Union to buy a factory that made vacuum tubes. Where most saw a dying industry, he saw opportunity specifically in his market – guitarists – who of course, preferred tube-driven amps. At the same time, he recognized the possibilities offered in the burgeoning "vintage instrument" market; the pedals his company made in the '70s were selling at many times their original price. Using connections in the Russian electronics-manufacturing industry, he once again began building E-H pedals. Once re-established, he moved some production back to the U.S. and ultimately, pedals once again became the company's predominant interest.

Today, Matthews remains very hands-on day to day, monitoring production and design, and the company occupies a 90,000-square-foot facility overlooking New York's East River.