Technique: The Top 10 Effects Pedal Targets

By Craig Anderton

A lot of guitar multieffects have a footpedal that can be assigned to various parameters. Volume and wah are no-brainer pedal assignments, but there are a whole lot of other parameters that are well-suited to pedal control. Doing so can add real-time expressiveness to your playing, and variety to your sound.

Some multieffects make this process easy: They have patches pre-programmed to work with their pedals. But sometimes the choices are fairly ordinary and besides, the manufacturer's idea of what you want to do may not be the same as what you want to do. So, it pays to spend a little time digging into the manual so you can figure out how to assign the pedal to any parameter you want.

DigiTech’s GNX4 is one of many multieffects that has a built-in footpedal so you can add real-time expressiveness to your playing.
Certain parameters are a natural for foot control; here are ten that can make a big difference to your sound.

- **Distortion drive.** This one’s great with guitar. Most of the time, to go from a rhythm to lead setting you step on a switch, and there’s an instant change. Controlling distortion drive with a pedal lets you go from a dirty rhythm sound to an intense lead sound over a period of time. For example, suppose you’re playing eighth-note chords for two measures before going into a lead. Increasing distortion drive over those two measures builds up the intensity, and slamming the pedal full down gives a crunchy, overdriven lead.

- **Chorus speed.** If you don’t like the periodic whoosh-whoosh-whoosh of chorus effects, assign the pedal so that it controls chorus speed. Moving the pedal slowly and over not too wide a range creates subtle speed variations that impart a more randomized chorus effect. This avoids having the chorus speed clash with the tempo.

- **Echo feedback.** Long, languid echoes are great for accenting individual notes, but get in the way during staccato passages. Controlling the amount of echo feedback lets you push the number of echoes to the max when you want really spacey sounds, then pull back on the echoes when you want a tighter, more specific sound. Setting echo feedback to minimum gives a single slapback echo instead of a wash of echoes.

- **Echo mix.** Here’s a related technique where the echo effect uses a constant amount of feedback, but the pedal sets the balance of straight and echoed sounds. The main differences compared to the previous effect are that when you pull back all the way on the pedal, you get the straight signal only, with no slapback echo; and you can’t vary the number of echoes, only the relative volume of the echoes.

- **Graphic EQ boost.** Pick one of the midrange bands between 1 and 4 kHz to control. Adjust the scaling so that pushing the pedal all the way down boosts that range, and pulling the pedal all the way back cuts the range. For solos, boost for more presence, and during vocals, cut to give the vocals more “space” in the frequency spectrum.

- **Reverb decay time.** To give a "splash" of reverb to an individual note, just before you play the note push the pedal down to increase the reverb decay time. Play the note, and it will have a long reverb tail. Then pull back on the pedal, and subsequent notes will have the original, shorter reverb setting. This works particularly well when you want to accent a drum hit.
• **Pitch transposer pitch.** For guitarists, this is like having a "whammy bar" on a pedal. The effectiveness depends on the quality of the pitch transposition effect, but the basic idea is to set the effect for pitch transposed sound only. Program the pedal so that when it's full back, you hear the standard instrument pitch, and when it's full down, the pitch is an octave lower. This isn't an effect you'd use everyday, but it can certainly raise a few eyebrows in the audience as the instrument's pitch slips and slides all over the place. By the way, if the non-transposed sound quality is unacceptable, mix in some of the straight sound (even though this dilutes the effect somewhat).

• **Pitch transposer mix.** This is a less radical version of the above. Program the transposer for the desired amount of transposition – octaves, fifths, and fourths work well – and set the pedal so that full down brings in the transposed line, and full back mixes it out. Now you can bring in a harmony line as desired to beef up the sound. Octave lower transpositions work well for guitar/bass unison effects, whereas intervals like fourths and fifths work best for spicing up single-note solos.

• **Parametric EQ frequency.** The object here is to create a wa pedal effect, although with a multieffects, you have the option of sweeping a much wider range if desired. Set up the parametric for a considerable amount of boost (start with 10 dB), narrow bandwidth, and initially sweep the filter frequency over a range of about 600 Hz to 1.8 kHz. Extend this range if you want a wider wa effect. Increasing the amount of boost increases the prominence of the wa effect, while narrowing the bandwidth creates a more intense, "whistling" wa sweep.

• **Increasing the output of anything (e.g., input gain, preamp, etc.) before the compressor.** This allows you to control your instrument's dynamic range; pulling back on the pedal gives a less compressed (wide dynamic range) signal, while pushing down compresses the signal. This restricts the dynamic range and gives a higher average signal level, which makes the sound "jump out." Also note that when you push down on the pedal, the dynamics will change so that softer playing will come up in volume. This can make a guitar seem more sensitive, as well as increase sustain and make the distortion sound smoother.

And there you have the top ten tips. There are plenty of other options just waiting to be discovered – so put your pedal to the metal, and realize more of the potential in your favorite multieffects.