

GT135

Session Secret

Wah

Get a good one, and you can sound like a God, get a bad one and it's squeak will drive you to hell. This month a few tips and tricks on one of the most used pedals ever: the wah-wah.

Of all the players who have wah'd, Mr Hendrix is probably most responsible for the huge success of the pedal (along with the Strat and Marshall amps). Even for players who don't dig his music, his 'vocal' use of the wah was inspirational, and it's echoes are heard everywhere.

This month will learn how to choose a wah, how to connect it and hopefully, how to use it.

Which Wah?

This is easy, even if it sounds stupidly obvious! A good wah is the one that goes 'wahhh'! By this, I mean it has to sweep evenly from the 'w' through to the 'ah' and not 'jump' anything in between. Also, bear in mind that some sweep much higher or lower than others; some have a bassier 'W' but don't go as high on the 'ah', and vice versa. Bear in mind the useful range is really through the middle of the sweep.

Where wah?

If you're using just a guitar and amp, go from guitar to wah to amp. If you're using a pedal board, the wah is usually put right after the compressor. The reasoning being that this way, the compressor acts on only the guitar signal, and not the noise that might come from the wah. So, if you're looking for noise reduction, this is the position for you.

More Ways to Wah

Yes, just swap the position of compressor and wah. The risk is a little more noise here, but the compressor evens out the wah effect for a more 'refined' sweep. Basically you don't get any major volume differences between the low and high

point. You can also connect the wah in the amp fx loop; not the best but always worth an experiment....

Wah work

Initially, lets start with opening the wah on every note of a scale. The challenge is to get the foot working independently whilst your brain copes with the scale. Repeat this exercise, only closing the wah on every note this time. Pete Whittard told me he used to open his mouth as he played to really connect with the effect that the wah is having (only do this in the privacy of your own home...). Once you become comfortable, play your favorite rock-blues lick and find the best moment to open/close the wah.

Wrong wah

A very common mistake is to play the wah in time, 'tapping' the foot on the downbeats. This can sound cool for rhythm parts, but for solos it's generally not so good. The aim is to move the foot as a conscious movement, and not as a 'footronome'! If you struggle with this, go back to a blues lick and slowly find the best point to open the wah, and practice slowly until you have isolated the two tasks, and can play the lick and wah separately.

Auto-wah

It's all in the name; these pedals Wah automatically! In these you don't have to move the pedal, the wah is triggered by the dynamics of your picking. If you play loudly, it opens the wah, and if you play quietly, it closes it. Typical settings you'll find on and auto-wah control the modulation (sometimes called 'frequency' or 'gain') of the wah (this sets how far apart the high and low points of the sweep are), 'Q' (the width of the modulation) and occasionally the speed (how quickly the pedal sweeps).

One of the reasons the wah is still a favorite is because it can be used in so many different ways; almost every player can make their own sound with it, which is surely our aim as musicians! Thanks again to the Institute's bass tutor Dave Marks for the low end!

Ex 4: Play a section of the E minor pentatonic and open the wah (a single one! I've use the RMC3) for each note, then play it again and close the wah each note. The following lick is another common trick with the wah: just play a repetitive lick and modulate the pedal very slowly, all the way up and back, very slowly.

Swing ♩ = 180

Ex 5: The intro for this example was recorded using the Z-Vex Seek Wah (just play the E power chord and the pedal will do the rest) whereas the single note riff was played using the Mu-Tron III. Make sure that the picking hand plays on all the strings while the fretting hand mutes the unwanted ones.

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TONE SETTINGS

If you're looking for a wah, the best thing to do as usual is try as many as you can, keeping in mind what are you gonna use it for. I have found a huge difference in how well wahs work, depending upon what use you put it to; clean or distortion.

Common choices are Dunlop Cry Baby, Vox, Morley and the good Colorsound. If you are looking for something serious take a look at the boutique pedals like Budda Wah, Fulltone Wah or the wonderful Real McCoy Custom RMC3 (this pedal can do everything and the sound is absolutely amazing).

For those keen on the autowah, if you can't find a real old Mu-Tron III (known as one of the best autowahs ever), try the Boss AW, or the MXR autowah. If you're looking for the evolution of wah technology, try the Z-Vex Seek Wah.

You can also get a Line6 FM4, which simulates the Mu-Tron and the Z-Vex.