

GT136

Session Secret

Chorus

This month we'll take a look at one of the most common pedals since the late 70's. It was used and abused in the 80's but is now due for a revival. It's the Chorus pedal! Andy Summers and Ry Cooder can't both be wrong!

Basically, as its name implies the chorus effect simulates the sound of two guitars playing exactly the same thing together: it makes the guitar sound bigger, warmer and mellow.

The first mainstream chorus pedal to hit the market, back in 1977, was the Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble. It soon became part of the pedal board of many session players (including The Police's Andy Summers and slide virtuoso Ry Cooder) and from them into our homes via their recordings.

As with everything, imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, and soon there were a raft of competing pedals available.

In the early 80's, Song Bird/DyTronics came out with the Tri-Stereo Chorus which has become a true classic, and the most sought after vintage unit nowadays. A two rack unit that featured three analog circuits working off of 12 low frequency oscillators and three separate delay lines it is simply the Holy Grail of chorus! It quickly found a home in the racks of all of the top LA guys like Steve Lukather, Dann Huff and Michael Landau, and it's still part of them today! You may have never seen one, but you've heard it billions of times!

What do the knobs do on a chorus?

In a typical pedal you'll usually find speed (to control the speed of the modulation), depth (the depth of the modulation) and level (to control the volume of the effect).

In a typical rack unit you can also control tone (to make the effect 'darker' or 'brighter'), mix (to set the balance between the original and effected signals) and pre-delay (to control in milliseconds when the chorus starts its work).

What is the best position in the effects chain?

All the modulation effects like phaser, flanger, etc go in the effect loop of the amp and always after compressor, wah and distortion pedals. If you have a rack they should be between pre-amp and amp. Usually the chorus is the first one after the effect loop and it's followed by delay and reverb.

How can I get the most out of my chorus?

Simple, connect it in stereo! When run as a stereo effect you can hear the modulation moving from left to right and creating a really three dimensional effect. A common choice is to use a stereo chorus, stereo delay and stereo reverb. This does mean you need two amps...

Are there any other types of chorus?

Yes. The chorus is an incredible effect but it can become a bit 'passe' and the swirling modulation can get a bit too much. There is a way to obtain the chorus effect without the modulation, and it's called detune. The idea, and the pedal that you need to execute it, is different but the result is similar. Basically, you need to duplicate the original signal two or three times with each slightly detuned. The detune is expressed in 'cents' (one hundredth's of a tone). You should also be able to set also a pre-delay tempo for each signal. A common setting is as follows:

- 1) Original Signal, center pan
- 2) Copy #1: detune -8 or -12 Cents, Pre-Delay 10/30 ms, Left Pan
- 3) Copy #2: detune +8 or +12 Cents, Pre-Delay 20/50 ms, Right Pan

You should end up with your original sound in the centre of the mix and the wet sounds that work at the top left and top right. This is an amazing 'chorus' without the modulation associated with a pedal/rack device, and it's been used by the top players as an alternative. In a modern 'detune' unit you should be able to duplicate the signal up to 8 times for a truly massive sound! A special thanks to Dave Marks for recording the bass on the tracks. See ya next month!

Ex 1: This example is in the style of Andy Summers. I've used my Tele with the Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble set as follows: speed (11 o'clock), Depth (2 o'clock), Level (max).

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Ex 2: I recorded this track using my Strat and a simulation of the Tri-Stereo Chorus set as follows: Speed (9 o'clock), Depth circuit 1 (1 o'clock), Depth circuit 2 (4 o'clock), Depth circuit 3 (12 o'clock).

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Ex 3: This example shows a common usage of the chorus: as a Leslie cabinet simulation. Jazz and fusion guitarists such as John Scofield and Mike Stern have made this sound part of their signature tone. I've used my Strat (don't ask me

why!) with the Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble set as follow: Speed (3 o'clock), Depth (max), Level (max).

Swing ♩ = 120

T
A
B

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Ex 4: For this example I used my Strat again, and detuned two stereo tracks respectively -8 cents (10 ms) and +8 cents (20 ms). For this example you'll need to master the 'harp harmonics' technique popularised by Lenny Breau. Pick the harmonic 12 frets above the fretting hand using the thumb (to pluck) and index (to touch the harmonic) and at the same time pick, with any other finger, a natural note. You should obtain a harmonic and a natural note simultaneously. The resulting sound is very close to a keyboard.

♩ = 90 Am⁹

T
A
B

5 G(add4) Am⁹

T
A
B

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TONE SETTINGS

There are lots of different types of chorus on the market so the best thing to do, as ever, is to annoy the local shop and try as many as you can! Good choices would be the T.C. Electronics' Chorus/Flanger/Pitch Modulation, the Fulltone's Choralflange, the VoodooLab's Analog Chorus or the Line6 MM4 that simulates 3 choruses.

On the used market you can still find an original Boss CE-1 Chorus Ensemble for around £200. Unluckily, it's impossible to find an original Tri-Stereo Chorus but it seems like there'll soon be a copy of it on the market.

As regarding the detune approach, you can try the Boss PS-5 or the more expensive Eventide Harmonizer rack unit.