



## Addicted To Effects?

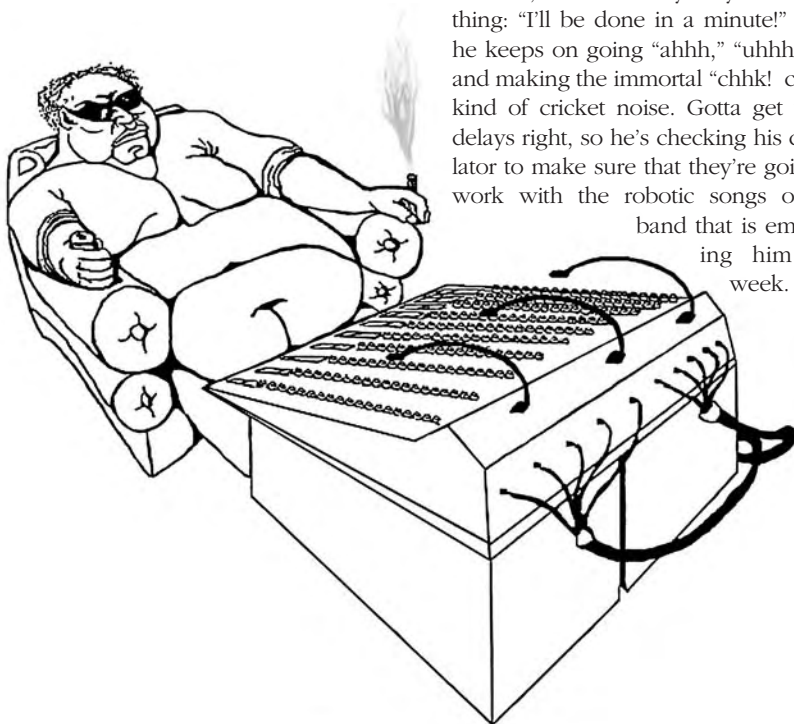
Sometimes a little goes a long way

By *The Old Soundman*

**Y**ou know who I really hate? Front-of-house Fader Boy, who never met an EFX box he didn't like. You've seen him – he's out at the mix position fixing his hair, wearing a collar shirt with a logo from one speaker company and a jacket from another.

The mixer for the support act has to stand around and wait because Fader Boy won't get out of his way when the headliner's soundcheck is over. He's still crouching by the rack with headphones on, oblivious to the world, muttering into a SM58, and tinkering with parameters, PFL-ing his returns, toggling between them and the dry signal

"Hey, Fader Boy – time's up," you tell him, and he always says the same thing: "I'll be done in a minute!" Then he keeps on going "ahhh," "uhhhmm," and making the immortal "chhk! chhk!" kind of cricket noise. Gotta get those delays right, so he's checking his calculator to make sure that they're going to work with the robotic songs of the band that is employing him this week.



I'd like to drop that frigging calculator in his Diet Coke or whatever trendy low-cal beverage Fader Boy is drinking this summer! Have a couple of brewskis, buddy! Enjoy a "freedom smoke"! Bring the EFX in on the fly, take a wild guess which number is going to mesh with the rhythms! VFR – Visual Flight Rules, my young friend!

If you guess wrong, the plane isn't going to crash, the passengers won't die, and an FAA inspector won't yank your license! Lighten up, Fader Boy! See how the audience is laughing and dancing? Give your obsessive-compulsive disorder a rest for just one second – dare to experiment in real time!

### JUST RESONATE

But no. Fader Boy is the kind of guy who has to have one reverb for the snare and another one for the toms. God forbid someone actually set up in a "real" physical room, where the drums just resonate in one space, rather than in his virtual simulacra. Oh yeah, I forgot – Fader Boy also requires one reverb for the lead vocal, and another for the background vocals.

If he ever walked into a situation where he was told that there was only one reverb for all the drums and the vocals too, a viscous green goo would start emerging from his mouth and ears, while his eyes rolled back in his head and he slowly collapsed in a boneless, horrified, heap.

Fader Boy's baby brother does monitors for some wealthy folk-rockers, and he'll calmly inform you that for their wireless ear mixes, it's necessary to have a rack with multiple reverbs. It would be unthinkable for little Johnny to have to hear the "tails" from Joey and Billy's vocals. When informed that



many bands happily traipse around with a single reverb, or none at all, he'll sink to his knees and start methodically gnawing on the edge of the console to blot out such heresy.

### WORDS TO LIVE BY

Contrast the spoiled antics of Fader Boy and his brother to the lean, mean stylings of the legendary Dave Rat when he mixes the Red Hot Chili Peppers. I was about to have a myocardial infarction because I was getting so mad about Fader Boy, so I asked Mr. Rat to step in and lend a little sanity to the topic.

"I use a 20-or-so-year-old Lexicon PCM 60 that has a massive selection of two different reverb sounds, including both plate and hall. Combining those with the four decay rates and four sizes,

I am able to get 32 different sounds, though I only use three or four. This power-packed piece of gear is able to achieve this with a special low light non-character readout that involves four different LED colors and push buttons.

"This covers my drum reverbs, and I also put backing vocals in there on occasion – oh, and sometimes guitar for end of show space jams. It also sounds awesome when seriously overloaded on the input with the reverb bypassed, so I use it for a vocal distortion effect to add some fuzz. It seems all the fancy digi-units that have distortion presets don't work nearly as well."

Dave also carries an Eventide H3500, a Klark Teknik reverb, and a Roland SDE 3000 delay "... that I don't need, but use sometimes if I want to give the H3500 a rest. I'm not a 'vin-

tage guy' nor do I choose last decade's finest for cost reasons. I just like simple, clear units that I can control when it's pitch black or bright sunlight, that have good sounds."

See, kids! You too can travel the world and mix a platinum band without having all of the latest boxes. It's just going to make a sound company owner mad if you request a certain one and then call him up during the first week of the tour, whining about not knowing how to work it and asking for the freakin' manual!

Grow up! Don't be like Fader Boy – be a samurai!

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*The Old Soundman hangs out at ProSoundWeb, dispensing his wisdom to anyone who has the nerve to ask. Check out OSM files at [www.prosoundweb.com/live/oldsoundman](http://www.prosoundweb.com/live/oldsoundman).*

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**Editor's Note:** *Some of the following units have been discontinued, but can still be easily acquired. In fact, I recently found several available up for bid on E-Bay. Used price listings are approximate, compiled via various discussions and research.*

## Eventide H3000 & H3500

[www.eventide.com](http://www.eventide.com)

Price, used: \$600 – \$1,300

**Overview:** 21 algorithms, 572 presets: reverbs, pitch shifting, chorus, delays, telephone voice, wah-wah, and of course #357, "Traffic Report," which simulates the sound of someone talking on a CB radio while sitting in a helicopter. Although these units are discontinued, Eventide will still sell you upgrade kits, including the "Steve Vai" presets or the sampling option, which has up to 95 seconds, mono, or 47.5, stereo.

**Old Soundman Take:** They won't go away. Why is that? Primarily, I believe, because of gorgeously wide bandwidth and sumptuous sounds. Either that, or people really like that big jog wheel! One of the other ways that ras-

cal Fader Boy and his buddies waste time after the soundcheck is by laboriously storing and naming all their personal patches, on every single Harmonizer, in every single venue they visit. Jeez, I hate coming through after those guys.





## TC Electronic M1, D2 & M300

[www.tcelectronic.com](http://www.tcelectronic.com)

U.S. List Price: \$295 (M300)

**Overview:** The M1 has dual engines, much like the motorcycle dragsters of the '50s. Halls, rooms, plates, plus 1/4-inch balanced I/O, or S/PDIF digital I/O. The M300 has the standard reverbs plus Cathedral, Club, Living Room, and believe it or not, one that's a Spring!

The D2 is a 24-bit device, and offers the ability to tap in a tempo for the delays, plus you can add in extra zesty effects such as chorus, filter, spatial, reverse delay, dynamic and ping-pong!

**OSM Take:** Who would have thought that high-end TC would knock one out of the low-end-of-the-budget ballpark

like these puppies? Plus, as the zillions of users attest, they sound great. If you're providing for a big festival somewhere, rest assured that no touring engineer will turn his/her nose up at a D2. On the contrary, they'll immediately start setting up their sounds on them – they'll know how to, because they run into so many of these units.



## Yamaha SPX90/900/990/1000/2000

[www.yamaha.com/proaudio](http://www.yamaha.com/proaudio)

U.S. List Price: \$1,249 (SPX2000)

**Overview:** The new SPX2000 is not only 96 kHz, but it has the mysterious "REV-X" reverb algorithm! You can change between five different back colors on the LCD window, just like faceplates on your cell phone! Presets

can be edited from a laptop. Surprisingly, a "Classic" bank of patches is included that are reminiscent of the old SPX90 presets. Wow! Arigato!

**OSM Take:** Every so often, there is a product that is perfectly timed and priced, and goes through the roof – the

EAW KF850 was one, and more recently the Apple iPod. That's what the original SPX was – suddenly they were everywhere. You kids wouldn't remember! Mr. Yamaha has spent the years since then lowering the noise floor, adding balanced ins and outs, a card reader, and additional programs.



## Deltalab Effectron

No web site but do a Google search and you'll find plenty

Price, used: \$80 – \$175

**Overview:** There was a I, a II, a III, and an Echotron. Vibrato, chorus, flange, variable length delay, plus envelope-following detuning! In other words, in

addition to your normal kind of rock/dance/R&B delays that politely relate to the vocal, there is the ability to completely torque stuff out into some very psychedelic realms. Danger, Will Robinson!

**OSM Take:** The legendary little blue box that started it all. Audio school techno-weenies will probably not be able to perceive that this is in fact a more powerful tool than their fashionable whatever's that require you to pitty-patter through a bunch of screens in order to change a parameter.

With the Effectron, you just grab a knob – in this thing called real time, kiddies, ever heard of it? – and GO! Life doesn't get much sweeter than to radically sweep down through the delay time multiplier's numbers as a vocalist or saxophonist extends a note. It's like the whole world is being taken on a magic carpet ride!





## AMS RMX-16 Reverb

[www.ams-neve.com](http://www.ams-neve.com)

Price, used: up to \$3,500

**Overview:** Sporting a 22 MHz custom designed pipelined processor (can someone please tell me what that

means?) the RMX-16 has a 90 dB dynamic range and 18 kHz bandwidth. It can do up to a 1.5 second delay, at full bandwidth. Optional remote terminal and the very esoteric

bar code wand for loading new programs. You won't be ordering one of those from your Markertek catalog!

**OSM Take:** This was the mark of a high-end touring system in the '80s – these separated your serious “engineers” from your weekend hippies. Loaders would watch respectfully from a few feet away in the afternoon, as fashionably fatigued British gentlemen would put up the fader and reveal that aggressively metallic return, with the patented hissy edge on the long settings, for the mystical section being sung by whatever vocalist was onstage, teetering on the edge of passing out. Still seen in major Hollywood studios.



## Alesis QuadraVerb

[www.alesis.com](http://www.alesis.com)

Price, used: \$150 – \$175

**Overview:** The original QuadraVerb was superseded by the QuadraVerb Plus –

an old one could be made into a new one by plugging in a replacement EPROM. In addition to the original's reverbs, EQ, delays, chorus and pitch shifting, the Plus upgrade added auto-panning, brief (1.55 second) sampling, ring modulation, and tremolo modulation. There

was also the QuadraVerb II and the QuadraVerb GT.

**OSM Take:** You can still find these in showrooms all over America. People got used to them when they were just starting out in their audio pilgrimage, and the QuadraVerb is like a safety blanket that they hold onto, even when they add some pricier “things” to their racks.



## Lexicon 224/300/480L/960L

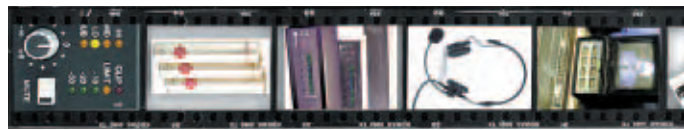
[www.lexiconpro.com](http://www.lexiconpro.com)

U.S. List Price: \$21,699.95 (960L)

**Overview:** The 960L multi-channel digital effects system controls eight channels going in and out, you can do four stereo effects, Mom! Or it can be configured for surround sound using the remote's joystick, which I can guarantee will not be taking place in my presence anytime soon. AES/EBU digital or balanced analog. 3D Perceptual Modeling (3DPM) is supposed to be the greatest thing since sliced bread. CD-ROM drive for updates.

**OSM Take:** The higher-priced spread, seen only on the biggest tours, with the immediately recognizable LARC remote sitting on the console or a nearby rack. You practically need to swear allegiance to a secret society to be taught the intricacies of that remote. Fun to fiddle with the bounce-back of a virtual room's walls until you get the slap going in time to the music. Produces movie soundtrack quality audio, good for both thunderous explosions and tiny whispers.





## TC Electronic 2290

[www.tcelectronic.com](http://www.tcelectronic.com)

U.S. List Price: \$2,195

**Overview:** Four seconds of memory, eight seconds in "Double" mode. Delays can be sampled and looped. (I did not know that!) Patch memories can include

up to five external effects. They call the tap button "Learn." Programmable chorus, ducking, gating, and panning. They call it the "industry standard," and that's not far off the mark.

**OSM Take:** A device that actually justifies its price tag. Super-clean delays, and easily adjustable. Sturdy and usable, much like such fellow Scandinavian designs as the Krag-Jorgensen military rifle, the Saab, and the Volvo. Vroom, vroom!



## Lexicon PCM 70/80/90/81/91

[www.lexiconpro.com](http://www.lexiconpro.com)

U.S. List Price: \$3,121.95 (PCM91)

**Overview:** The PCM81 digital effects processor contains 300 presets, including all the reverb algorithms from the

PCM70. Analog XLR and 1/4-inch and S/PDIF digital ins and outs. Over 21 seconds of delay time, and you can do tap tempo. Pitch shifting up or down over three octaves. PCMCIA card capa-

bility, to bring extra factory patches, or store your own modified ones. Hey, when did the CIA get involved in all this, anyway?

**OSM Take:** Non-intuitive organization of pages and parameters. A shame, really, because when it was released, the PCM-70 brought rich, velvety tones to the masses when most of the competition was still rackety-sounding.



## Special Favorites Of The Old Soundman

### ROLAND SDE 2000/2500/3000/330

[www.roland.com](http://www.roland.com)

Price, used: \$350

**OSM Take:** I'll chop the WORLD up with one of these! To me this is what a delay sounds like. You know, kind of in the same way that the sound of a human voice through a SM58 is what our ears have been programmed for decades now to identify as being the "normal" frequency response. As far as I know, no one has ever copied the wonderful "x2" feature that lets you double the length of the delay, with one stab of a fingertip! So cool!

### YAMAHA REV 5 AND REV 7

[www.yamaha.com/proaudio](http://www.yamaha.com/proaudio)

Price, used: \$350 - 500

**OSM Take:** Classics. Give me a couple of these, one set on "Percussion Plate," the other on "Vocal Plate," and a delay or two, and I'm ready to do a show, bro! The cute little

built-in EQ section is a lifesaver when you are forced to come back into EFX returns instead of channel strips. To be properly heard and appreciated, these need to be used with a correctly grounded system. When they are, they're decent-sounding units, but they can be unfairly blamed for noise that is globally present in a system.

### ROLAND SPACE ECHO 501

[www.roland.com](http://www.roland.com)

Price, used: \$300 - \$500

**OSM Take:** Along with the original Echoplex, these were boxes that could be seen both next to '70s mixing boards, and atop the guitarist's Marshall stack. Popularized by the mad looping of Fripp and Eno. There are actually user groups on the Internet where you can get replacement tapes for them. I'm going to see what I can do about getting some legislation passed to outlaw that kind of activity.