

WAY HUGE RING WORM

BY CHARLES SAUFLEY

Let's get something straight right off the bat: Ring modulators are not for the faint of heart. Some of the first musical applications of ring modulation were undertaken by mad-scientist synth pioneers Don Buchla and Robert Moog, who—needless to say—were quite comfortable with unorthodox musical expressions.

It's hard to not think about Moog or his musical legacy when you play the new Way Huge Ring Worm ring modulator. The twisted harmonic output is unmistakably synth like. It rarely does exactly what you expect, and at times it can feel like the musical equivalent of wrestling a greased pig. But if you're interested in more than the same old buttery-perfect blues-rock tone and traditional technique, or if you make music that walks on the wild side, the Ring Worm can expand your vocabulary drastically.

Radio Tardis

If you're not a synth-music devotee, ring modulator sounds may be most likely to


remind you of the metallic voice heard in a thousand B-movie sci-fi computers—most famously Dr. Who's arch nemeses, the Daleks, who would scream "Exterminate!" in a ring-modulated rage before zapping some pitiful human. Ring modulators achieve their characteristic metalloid voice by multiplying a fundamental and modulated signal. The sum is a waveform made up of both perfect and irregular harmonic intervals, and the sonic result can be robotic, random, and evocative of everything from chimes to a deep-space nightmare.

The Ring Worm has five controls for steering the harmonic mayhem back to the playpen—or wildly out of control. Blend mixes the dry and modulated signals. Freq selects the frequency of the carrier wave. Width controls how deeply the LFO affects the frequency (at minimum, the LFO is basically off). And Rate governs the speed at which the LFO oscillates. A 5-position Mode knob selects waveforms, including sine and square waves, a random waveform generator, and step-down or descending waves. In theory, it's sort of like a tremolo. In practice, however, it's a different beast.

Space Invader

With its orange enclosure and purple graphics that suggest a mild state of psychosis, the Ring Worm doesn't really invite caution. So I began my experiments with little or no dry signal to hear the essence of the effect. With Rate, Width, and Freq at noon the soft, undulating sine wave has the springy, oscillating qualities of a flying-saucer engine. Crank Freq another quarter turn, and the high end

Rating:




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you're looking for genuinely out-there sounds or you want to tick off blues-rockin' tone purists.

Skip If...
you are a blues-rockin' tone purist.

Way Huge Electronics
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(and the more menacing aspects of the impending saucer landing) are emphasized. The same settings on the step-down waveform sound like a drunk robot or a primitive, overworked computer, but when you twist Rate you'll nail the sound of a dot-engorged Pac Man in pursuit of blinking ghosts. If you're more likely to feed your quarters to the Galaga machine at the arcade, the descending wave, a Freq setting that favors the high end, and a Rate set to three-quarters full will have you seeing space bugs dive-bombing for the kill.

Getting sounds for more traditional musical contexts is really just a matter of using the Blend knob. Settings that use just a touch of effected signal can sound full and synth, especially with more subtle Rate and Freq settings. Such settings also sound fantastic with a fat and bassy fuzz out front. And even the oddest modulations can create very cool, double-take-inspiring textures behind an ordinary Tony Iommi-style solo.

The Verdict

Patience is of the essence when you use the Ring Worm. If you don't take the time to explore how the pedal relates to other effects, tone settings, and dry-to-wet blends are likely to let this thing collect dust. But even in fairly run-of-the-mill heavy rock and indie-pop settings, the Ring Worm can add color that'll change the landscape of an entire tune.

