



In this first installment of our EFX Pedal Insider series, Ken Volpe spends some time with Brian Mena of Menatone Pedals. They discuss the definitions of the main guitar effects pedal categories. Brian also gives some excellent advice on purchasing your first effects pedal(s).

Brian Mena has been making hand built custom guitar effects pedals since 1996. He is known for having great ears, an amazing creative work ethic, and a broad sense of humor. Many of his pedals re-create the sounds of some of the most classic amps of our time with the utmost realism. For many guitar players that covet their boutique amps, his pedals are the only thing that they would consider putting in the signal path. His pedals contain all analog circuitry comprised of the finest components and true bypass switching

For more info and great sound clips, check out Menatone.com

Ken Volpe, GJD: Brian, what are the various general categories of guitar effects pedals?

Brian Mena: Distortion, Overdrive, Compression, Time-Based Effects and Modulation Effects.

KV: Can you give us a description of each of these categories?

BM: Distortion Pedal is a pedal that alters the signal from the pedal itself. In other words, you are not trying to push the amp to distort; you are getting all of your distortion from the pedal.

Overdrive Pedal is a little bit different. You are getting some coloration from the pedal but at the same time, you are pushing the front end of the amp to achieve your overdriven tone.

Compressor Pedal is essentially an overdrive that is being limited on how much it can distort. You have a side chain that is basically killing back your initial attack so it doesn't actually overdrive. So even though the overdrive is still there, you don't hear the dirt from it; but you still get the boost and sustain.

Time-Based Pedal is a pedal that delays the initial signal and spits it back out.

A Reverb Pedal is the shorter length of delay and a traditional delay pedal has a longer delay period.

Modulation Pedal is still a form of delay but adds in modulation after the initial signal. This modulation can alter the pitch as well. These pedals would include: Chorus, Flanger, Phaser, etc. There is one more type of pedal that fits in with this category. It's a Tremelo Pedal that

actually does not use delay you are just chopping in and out the signal with an oscillator.

KV: What is the first pedal a novice should consider buying?

BM: Wow, that's kind of a loaded question. I'd say if someone has a pretty decent tube amp then an Overdrive Pedal is a great place to start. As I alluded to earlier, with the Overdrive you can still hear the sound of your amp as well. So, I think it's important for someone starting out to be able to get familiar with how their guitar reacts with their amp. If they are using some other pedal that alters the sound too much then they are never really going to know or appreciate the traditional sounds. I'd also say to deal with the Time-Based effects last because people have a tendency to use those as a crutch.

KV: What are some of the primary factors in determining the purchase of a pedal?

BM: Price is obviously one of the main factors. Space on the pedal board can be a factor as well. How much they want to retain their original tone is also a huge factor. Let me expound a little more on the price factor. Obviously someone starting out who doesn't have a lot of money to spend is not going to drop a lot of money on a pedal. I mean if they have a \$200 guitar and a \$99 amp then it would be insane for them to buy a \$250 boutique pedal. However, if the person has a \$4,000 amp and a \$3,000 guitar then it does make sense for them to invest the money in a higher end pedal. You get what you pay for and why limit your tone with a weak link in the chain when or if you can afford it. In my opinion, pedals should enhance your tone and not be a band-aid to try and fix poor quality tone.

KV: What was the first Effects Pedal that you ever bought?

BM: The first pedal that I ever obtained was an old Ibanez compressor pedal. I believe I won it at a guitar clinic when I was in high school. The pedal was not very useful for me. At the time, most of us were using rack gear and the vintage and boutique pedal thing was not really happening. So trying to interface this Ibanez pedal with my rack gear was not a good proposition.