

CHICAGO IRON PARACHUTE & OCTAVIAN



THE RETURN OF SOME WELL-LOVED EFFECTS GIVES **PAUL SALTER** THE CHANCE TO SPRINKLE AUTHENTIC SPARKLE ON A CLASSIC RIFF OR TEN

Think late '60s/early '70s rock guitar... Satin flares, god-awful clumpy shoes and the theme from Shaft, right?

There was certainly a distinctive and flamboyant vibe around guitar-based music at that time, but more importantly it was also a time of diverse influences and changing expectations of what you could coax from an instrument. Many guitarists sought further inspiration and means of expression from electronic effects such as those built by Tycobrahe.

The company has long ceased manufacturing and those original boxes are now collector's items, but USA-based company Chicago Iron has painstakingly re-engineered two of those classic pedals and given them a rebirth as the Parachute and the Octavian, respectively.

RIPCORD REPRO

The Parachute is based upon the Tycobrahe Parapedal – a rare beast indeed – so a direct comparison is difficult, to say the least. Chicago Iron has captured the unmistakable '70s feel here, however. It's constructed from heavy grade sheet metal that makes for a more imposing pedal than a mere conventional wah. The increased size

may be an issue if you're considering adding this bulky unit to a pedalboard, also there's no power adaptor socket and access to the 9V battery is by the old-fashioned method of unscrewing the base plate. Faithful reproductions have their downside it seems, but on the other hand you shouldn't have any worries as far as durability goes.

There's a larger than usual amount of travel available from the rocker – for a good reason, as the Parapedal is renowned for its huge tonal sweep, and this is well reflected here, but there's more going on than just an extended frequency range. The clue lies in the double-ganged pot that's at the heart of the Parachute, but beyond that the intricacies of the circuitry are elusive because there's a kind of second effect apparent during most of the sweep – almost a phaser.

Add to this the fact that because the frequency drops so deeply at the heel-down position you can get a volume pedal effect, it's easy to see why the original gained a reputation for being enigmatic as well as versatile.

WAH WITH WOW

For those who find a traditional wah just too obvious, the Parachute has a few surprises lurking inside its chassis. For a start the sweep is vast, and because the filter configuration is completely different from a conventional wah, the whole of the range has a surprising clarity. It also holds some rather cheesy mock banjo and nylon-string acoustic tones at certain points. Granted they're banjo and acoustic tones from an old 78 record played through a cardboard speaker cab, but they're fun nonetheless.

The trick to understanding how the Parachute operates is in realising that the sweep is more related to a phaser than a simple band-pass filter. You can mimic a phaser if you use an incredibly disciplined ankle movement, but more dramatic and interesting results are achieved by using each section of the rocker's travel for an effect in its own right – a very vocal vowel-like wah at the toe-down area for example, a subtle tonal shift around the middle and a

GBINFO

CHICAGO IRON PARACHUTE

PRICE: £205.61

BUILT IN: USA

TYPE: Wah wah variant

POWER: 9V battery

DIMENSIONS: 110(h) x 104(w) x 280(d) mm

CONTACT: Killer Pedals

PHONE: 0115 947 0011

WEB: www.killerpedals.com

GBINFO

CHICAGO IRON OCTAVIAN

PRICE: £205.61

BUILT IN: USA

TYPE: Octave/fuzz stompbox

FEATURES: Volume, boost

POWER: 9V battery or adaptor (not supplied)

DIMENSIONS: 80(h) x 80(w) x 135(d) mm

CONTACT: Killer Pedals

PHONE: 0115 947 0011

WEB: www.killerpedals.com





■ The Chicago Iron name says American, and industrial to us

"IT'S ALL VERY ORGANIC-FEELING AND COMPLETELY AT ODDS WITH THE MODERN DIGITAL APPROACH"

volume pedal-type of surge from a pleasant sub-bass rumble into a penetrating honk.

DOUBLING UP

Chicago Iron's Octavian is also based on a Tycobrahe pedal – the Octavia. It probably produces a more instantly recognisable sound, too. Rather than the clean and tidy octave effect we're more familiar with these days, this is the evocative Hendrix and Stevie Ray Vaughan-style of fuzz-plus that sounds like there's a ring-modulator involved somewhere – Jimmy's solo from 'Purple Haze' is a good example.

The construction follows similar lines to the Parachute, but obviously in a more compact package. This time around there is a 9V adaptor socket which saves disassembling the unit to replace the battery, and two controls are included for volume and boost. The function of the volume knob is obvious enough, but if you're used to

modern multi-parameter formats of effects processors, just having one control to access the wide range of sounds of this pedal could prove somewhat surprising. However, this is the key to why this style of pedal is so well loved; certain settings respond very differently depending on which pickup you use and what part of the neck you're playing. It's all very organic-feeling and completely at odds with the modern – and some might say sterile – digital approach.

SHIFTING UP

Having the Octavian in your signal chain is a bit like playing tennis with one of those trick off-centre weighted balls at first. It seems that you can't really predict what it's going to do to your tone. The fuzz part of the effect is variable with the boost control and would behave pretty much as you would expect; if it wasn't for the octave part of the equation that is...



■ Redwood box included, as per the original Tycobrahe pedals

Using a bridge pickup with the boost control set high enables the fuzz to dominate each note immediately, with the octave-up effect fading-in a little later. Just to confuse things though, the higher up the neck you play, the sooner the octave creeps in. Switch to the neck pickup and hit the strings lighter and the effect is more like a ring modulator – weird stuff indeed. It does all start to make sense after a period of experimentation however, and when it does, it's quite amazing the amount of textures you can get just by varying the strength of your pick stroke. Set the boost at around the three-o'clock mark for instance, and you can have a thick heavily compressed lead fuzz if you play with a heavy hand, but stroke the strings and tease out the notes of a Hungarian minor scale and the result is some kind of bizarre Eastern instrument that's part oboe and part sitar.

CONCLUSION

I genuinely had a whole slab of fun with these pedals; inspirational – if somewhat unpredictable – tones that remind you what guitar playing is really all about: great sounds.

With the Iron Parachute, this really is all marvellous stuff, and makes my old wah pedal sound positively boring. The Octavian meanwhile definitely needs an initiation period, but there are some wonderful rewards on offer if you stick with it.

As you can see, we're talking boutique money here, but those with an eye and ear for tone won't blink twice at the price when you consider the build quality, the true-bypass switching and the sheer uniqueness on offer. **GB**



CÉSAR SAYS

THE TONE FIEND THAT LURKS BENEATH

■ Chicago Iron painstakingly researched the original Tycobrahe Octavia circuit and optimized it with the help of the late César Diaz.

Diaz is best known for his tech support for Stevie Ray Vaughan and indeed is said to have selected many original Tycobrahe Octavia pedals for major artists including SRV. According to the Chicago Iron website, César was adamant about using exactly the right components, which is

why all Chicago Iron pedals are made with hand-selected components, matched to 'known tolerances'.

In fact, a visit to the site is thoroughly recommended as it sheds some light on what Octavia pedal Jimi Hendrix may, or may not have used and what has happened in the market since...

And check out the pedal's box! You even get a California redwood 'stash box' with each pedal!

GBOPINION

CHICAGO IRON PARACHUTE & OCTAVIAN GOLD STARS

★ Very individual and expressive effects

BLACK MARKS

● Difficult battery access

GBRATING

