



STEPPIN' OUT

BBE Sound Crusher, Green Screamer and Freq Boost pedals

By **EMILE MENASCHÉ**

AMONG MAKERS OF sound-processing gear, BBE may be the most iconoclastic. Think about it: The company's trademark product is the Sonic Maximizer, a specialized form of signal processing that optimizes the phase relationship between frequencies. Not quite the stuff of low-tech stomp boxes.

And yet BBE has also been making guitar and bass rack units over the years, and that experience led them to develop a collection of stomp boxes that allude to classic fuzz tones, boosters and green Screamers of yore. BBE's new sextet of effects includes three distortion units, two clean boosters and a compressor. The idea: get vintage tones and features into reliable, affordable packaging. For this review, I'll focus on three: the Crusher, a distortion with EQ; the Green Screamer, a vintage-style overdrive; and the Freq Boost, a treble booster. Other new models include the Free Fuzz, the Orange Squash compressor and the Boosta Grande clean booster.

All six units are solidly built and resemble BBE's already released Sonic Stomp and Opto Stomp. Each can be powered by a nine-volt battery or with its included power supply, and the pedals also work well with a third-party multi-unit power supply. What's more, all feature true bypass, so they don't suck away your tone.

The pedals' construction is solid; in fact, it's on par with the toughest pedals I've tested. The old-style button footswitches give a solid click when engaged, and the metal knobs are easy to grip and firm to turn. Other features common to all pedals include on/off status LEDs and nonskid bottoms. And while the BBes aren't fancy, they certainly look good on a pedal board.

THE CRUSHER

THE CRUSHER distortion pedal is the most elaborately outfitted of the new effects, with controls for gain and volume and a three-band passive EQ. Despite its name, the Crusher is capable of smooth and rich tones. It sounded good even when pushing an already overdriven tube amp, adding punch and roundness to the tone without sounding mushy. Its gain curve is progressive, which makes it easy to find the sweet spot between your guitar



and amp. At minimal gain, the Crusher works well as an EQ/booster that can alter your amp's distortion without fuzzing it out. At maximum gain, the pedal produces teeth-melting tone.

The EQ proved to be an extremely useful and powerful asset. Scooping the midrange produced excellent thrash and grunge sounds, while boosting the mids and cutting highs served up Clapton's warm Cream-era tone. Overall, the Crusher's best feature is its ability to dynamically enhance and expand on the amp and guitar's existing tone without destroying it. Using it is like having an extra channel.

GREEN SCREAMER

THE GREEN SCREAMER is a dual op-amp overdrive pedal that pays homage to the great TS9 Tube Screamer. But while it may have a similar profile, the BBE is not an imitation of that classic Ibanez stomp box. The Green Screamer is a little brighter and delivers a more tubelike "spit" than my old TS9 (yes, I A/B'd them), though it also has a little less overall gain. Controls include the classic trio of level, tone and gain. Like the Crusher, it can be used as a clean-ish boost, and riding the treble with the gain backed off added some kick to my tube amp. But the pedal's mission is to deliver midlevel gain and overdrive, and it does so capably. The sound is tight, compressed and smooth, making the Green Screamer an excellent choice for blues, country and classic rock.

FREQ BOOST

IN THE DAYS before purpose-built high-gain amps, players used



BBE SOUND CRUSHER, GREEN SCREAMER AND FREQ BOOST PEDALS

LIST PRICES:
\$129.99; Green Screamer, \$149.00; Freq Boost, \$149.00

MANUFACTURER:
BBE Sound, BBESound.com

SOUND CRUSHER
CONTROLS: Bass, Mid, Treble, Gain, Volume

INPUT: One

OUTPUT: One

GREEN SCREAMER
CONTROLS: Level, Tone, Gain

INPUT: One

OUTPUT: One

FREQ BOOST
CONTROL: Volume

INPUT: One

OUTPUT: One

ALL PEDALS
feature heavy-duty footswitch, LED status indicator, nonslip rubber bottom, easy-access nine-volt battery compartment and external power supply

boosters to drive their tubes harder. The single op-amp Freq Boost is patterned after treble boosters of yore and is effective at pushing the front end of a tube amp. Unlike the Clean Boost, the Freq Boost adds presence to the tone by pushing the highs. This was evident when I used the pedal in front of a tube amp on the brink of distortion. With the Freq Boost's volume control set at 12 o'clock, the pedal produced minimal gain but delivered more detail and punch from the guitar, giving the tone a nice, bluesy edge. Pushing the pedal harder produced a dark, driven crunch sound that was great for lead playing. No matter where I set its volume control, the Freq Boost brought my tone out front without making it too harsh. If you have a good tube amp and want to kick it harder, this pedal is a must.

THE BOTTOM LINE

EACH BBE PEDAL I tested was designed for a specific type of distortion, and in every instance, I think the results are both well executed and extremely musical. Distortion connoisseurs will appreciate the nuances of tone and articulation possible with the BBes and the ease with which they can create powerful and usable sounds. ■

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EXCELLENT CONSTRUCTION, RESPONSIVE TONE, LOW NOISE, POWER SUPPLY INCLUDED	NONE