

MUSICIAN SOUND DESIGN EQ-1 EarthQuake

BY TOM MULHERN

Whatever you think of wah-wah pedals, the unusual sonic capabilities of the Musician Sound Design EQ-1 EarthQuake Bass Wah may have you rethinking the whole concept. Designed to offer a host of classic wah sounds as well as synth-like filter tones, this interesting German contraption may surprise both wah exponents and wah detractors.

Built Like A Tank

The EarthQuake's designers took the word "indestructible" seriously when they built this beast. Built of 14-gauge stainless steel, it's unlikely to be destroyed by anything but the most violent impacts. The two knobs and mode selector are about the only things that could possibly sustain damage, and they're rugged. It helps to have a small screwdriver or pick to open the bottom-located battery compartment. Inside, you won't see a wimpy connector with puny wires; the battery fits snugly against the contacts and is held tightly by the compartment walls and cover. Rubber feet give the pedal good traction and keep the bottom from scratching the floor. I liked the pre-drilled metal tabs at each corner for screwing the EQ-1 to a pedalboard. Nice touch.

A 3-way selector labeled EARTH, a 4-way selector labeled QUAKE, and a CLASSIC/MODERN mode selector are cute, but I prefer knobs that tell what each setting actually does. The easiest control to understand is the CLASSIC/MODERN switch: CLASSIC mode sends your full signal through the wah's circuitry, while MODERN mixes the wah's output with your straight sound, solving the age-old bottom-dropout problem that can happen with some effects. In MODERN mode a trim pot inside the EQ-1 lets you set the dry/effect mix using a tiny screwdriver. Since this is largely a set-and-forget control, it's a good location for it. EARTH and QUAKE select the wah's peak frequency and bandwidth, respectively.

I tried five different basses with the EQ-1: a Gibson EB-3, a Gibson EB-6 (tuned guitar-like, not bass-like), a Pedulla EMS, a Fender



Stomp here to turn on the EQ-1's unique "Auto-Magic" mode, which turns off the wah effect whenever you remove your foot from the pedal.

Precision, and a Zon 6-string, and I found the results to be pretty similar with all of them. The EarthQuake has an extraordinarily wide range of sounds, and with 12 filter settings, it's definitely a matter of taste. The sound I found most useful was with EARTH at 2 and QUAKE at 1, but your mileage will probably vary. One staffer dug the static-filter tone when the pedal was about halfway depressed, making for a nasal, midrange sound. Another liked the EarthQuake's diversity but found it hard to dial in a straightforward wah sound.

The Mystery Switch

Auto-magic is my favorite feature. Activated with a big stomp button, it sends straight, unaffected tone to the output when you take your foot off the treadle. Conversely, in standard mode, the wah remains engaged, even when you take your foot off the pedal. An LED glows brighter (indicating the wah is active) in auto-magic mode, but the difference is subtle. I'd welcome better on-indication, like a second LED or a red/green LED.

If you like effects, it's hard not to like the novel tones that come from the EarthQuake. It's well made, dead quiet, and has a unique sound. With so much power, even those who don't like wah-wahs ought to try this one.

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TECH SPECS

A wah pedal is a variable band-pass or lowpass filter with a resonant peak at the filter's cutoff frequency. Rocking the pedal (treadle) sweeps the cutoff frequency, emphasizing different parts of the spectrum and giving the wah its characteristic vocal-like quality. Most wahs have a preset center frequency and bandwidth, but the EarthQuake allows you to select from three peak frequencies and four bandwidths.

Input jack: 1/4" instrument in
Output jacks: Two parallel 1/4" instrument outs

Controls: STANDARD/AUTO-MAGIC footswitch, CLASSIC/MODERN mode selector switch, 3-position EARTH (peak frequency) selector, 4-position QUAKE (frequency band) selector, direct/wet signal-blend trim pot

Power source: 9-volt battery or AC adapter (included)

Dimensions: 9 1/2" x 5 1/4" x 2 1/2"
Weight: 3 lbs, 12 oz

Made in: Germany

List price: \$310

Warranty: Lifetime limited

U.S. distributor: Godlyke
866-246-3595

www.godlyke.com

www.silvermachine.de

Musician Sound Design Earthquake

List price: \$310

Score: 1 2 3 4 5

Construction: ●●●●●●●●

Electronics: ●●●●●●●●

Ease of Use: ●●●●

Sound: ●●●●●●●●

Value: ●●●●●●●●

Pros: Solidly built; unique tones.

Cons: Hard to tell when it's on; confusing controls.