ALEXANDER PEDALS
SYNTAX ERROR

The genesis of the Syntax Error was with a pedal I made a couple of years ago called "Robots." The idea was to do some gnarly mangling and modulation stuff to make your guitar sound more like a computer or video game. Robots was a pretty cool pedal but then a couple of other companies came out with pedals in the same vein and I shelved it. Earlier this year I was working on some Atari-themed art for an advertisement and I did a quick mockup of the Syntax Error graphics. I didn't have a pedal, just the art! I went to the shop the following day and built the pedal with one of our DSP boards, then I sat down to program the thing. It's kind of like coming up with a song when you only have the title—some of my best work has happened that way.

I initially messed around with a few concepts, but the sample-crushing

algorithm seemed like a great place to start. I added a bunch of other things to that basic idea, just to see what would sound good, and I narrowed it down to the Stretch, Cube, and Ring modes. I did a lot of tweaking to make each mode balanced and musical, but there was still something missing. We had a fully-working prototype in the shop and it was super fun to play with but it didn't have the kind of real-time control that I wanted.

I debated using one of our Super series boards for the final implementation but I wanted something more compact and easier to use (keep in mind that this decision happened three weeks before NAMM). I pulled an all-nighter to get the first board layout done, then we built up one—and of course, it didn't work. At all. Like, stuff getting hot and breaking; that kind of not working. I traced the problem

down to a pin of one of the chips going to the wrong place and then we had something. Sort of. Once the pedal was "alive," and able to respond to the USB port, I had a long job of writing all of the modules to read the knobs, watch the footswitch, control the LEDs and the DSP, all that stuff.

By the time we left for NAMM we had four working prototype units to show, and they all worked pretty well. We set up a couple on the boards in the booth and basically let people go nuts on them, mostly to see what would break! After the first day, we were hanging out in Nashville and I got inspired to add a fourth mode (Freq) to the pedal. It had a few bugs at the show but we've got it working great now and it might be my favorite mode on the whole pedal.

The Syntax Error really was a labor of love—I spent dozens of hours cramming all these cool features into a tiny box, because it was something I wanted for myself. When it was all finished, lots of other people seemed to like it, too, so I'll call that a win.

—*Matthew Farrow*