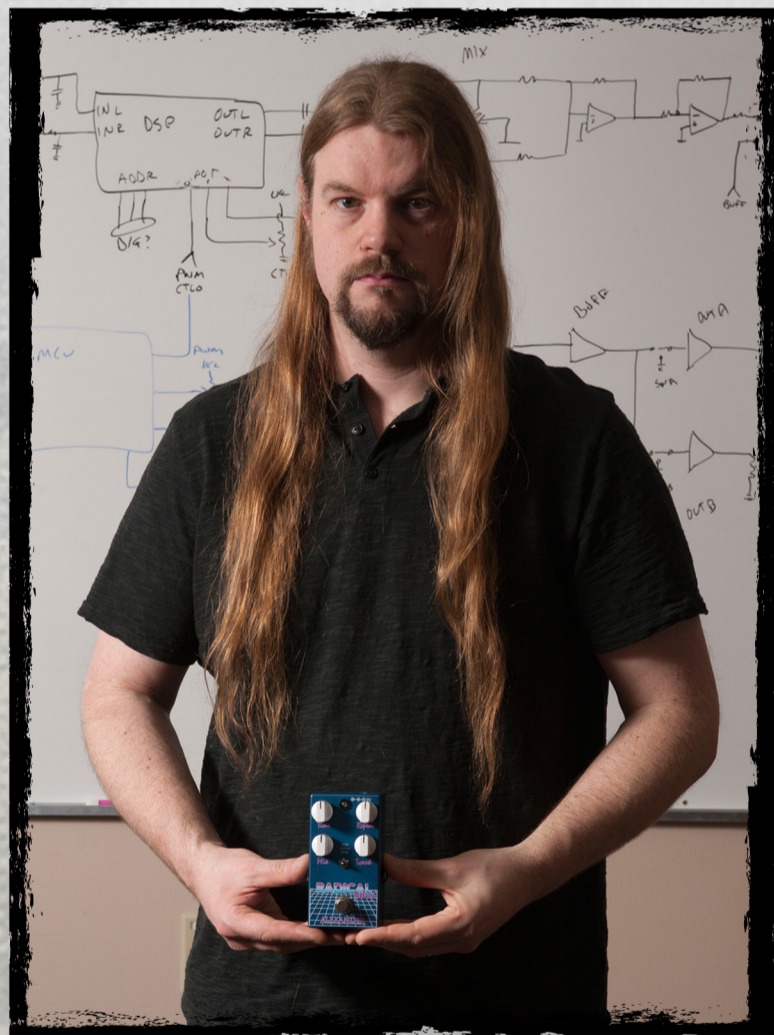




FAMILY OVER EVERYTHING:



MATTHEW FARRROW OF ALEXANDER PEDALS

Matthew Farrow has been in the gear design business since the late '90s—well before the boutique boom that sent the shockwaves of DIY upstarts into motion. Matthew's design philosophy revolves around originality, tonal quality and simplicity of operation. With so many cloners and tone tweakers putting new names on old circuits, it is exciting to get acquainted with a sonic scientist who's cutting edge approach carves out new niches in both the analog and digital realms. Let's pick that brain...

TONE REPORT WEEKLY: *Great to meet you Matthew. You are somewhat of a dark horse in this boutique pedal race, having designed well-known units for the big boys in the past. I know you cannot mention names, but I imagine ideas for Alexander Pedals must have germinated from your commissioned work before*

MATTHEW FARROW: Great to meet you too! I don't know whether "dark horse" is the right label, but it's true that I have designed gear for other builders. Sometimes I come up with an idea that fits with another builder's philosophy or style really well, and other times the designs are too good to let go! I am very careful not to re-use or repurpose code or schematics that I've done for other companies, since it can potentially hurt their business.

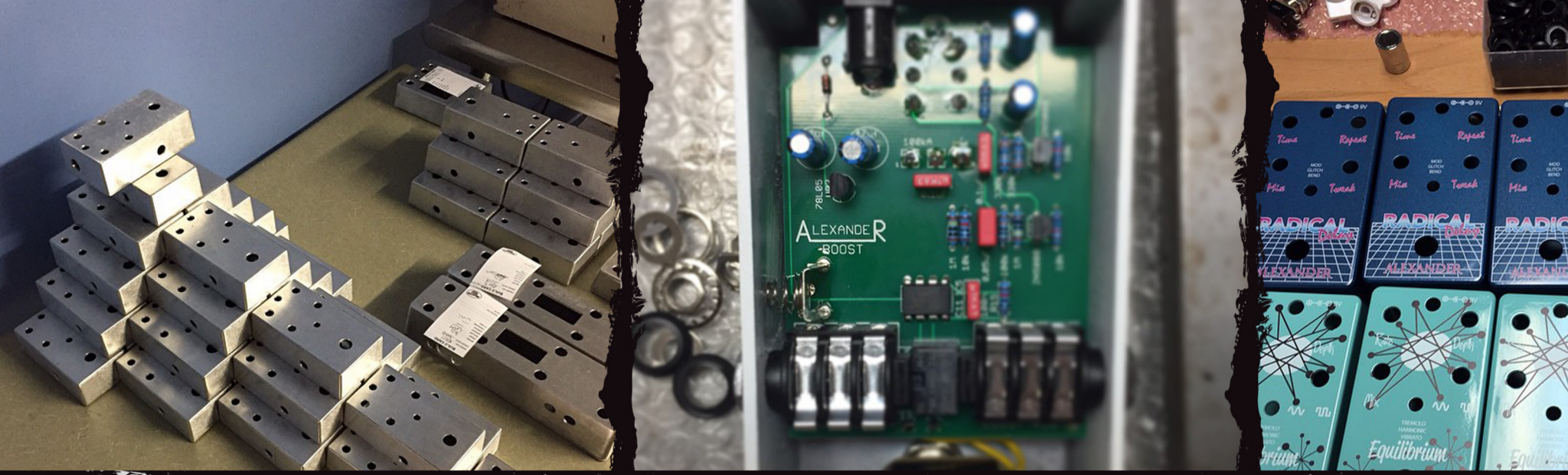
TRW: *I love your design philosophy of creating "sounds that are both*

instantly familiar yet completely unique." Elaborate, if you will, on how you achieve this delicate balance...

MF: Lots and lots of tweaking (laughs.) I start with a general outline or plan, a list of things I want the pedal to do. With our DSP (Digital Signal Processing)-based pedals I have a lot of flexibility since I can make the controls do more than one thing at a time, but I'm also limited because I can't add more pots or switches, etc. It's a careful process of addition and subtraction, and I also have to juggle the different modes available on the pedal to make sure that they all relate to each other. It's a bad surprise if the player flips that switch and the whole thing goes to hell!

TRW: *Admittedly, I am a delay junkie and this is a great time to be one with so many options on the market. Your Amnesia hits the nail everyone else seems to miss by emulating the most*





coveted bucket brigade chips, instead of the lazy “analog” blanket setting. Do you have a horde of vintage analog delay pedals that you referenced? Is this a sonic or circuit type of modeling? Are these algorithms tweaked by the gears, ears, or a bit of both?

MF: Oh, man... I love analog delay units, so I wanted to create something that would let you really hear the differences in sound between the various BBD (Bucket Brigade Delay) chips. I started off by really listening to every analog delay in the shop (we have seven right now). Once I picked the three that I wanted to represent, I did a lot of measurement to accurately recreate their filtering and frequency response curves. This involved feeding sweeps into their inputs and then plotting their output response—my digital oscilloscope got quite a workout on that project! Then I had to mimic the self-oscillation and distortion character of the BBD chips, which was tough. If you have too much signal going into DSP you can over-range its registers—basically you run out of numbers and it just shuts

down. To compensate for that, I had to come up with a way to keep the oscillation under the threshold but still get that great spaceship sound.

TRW: *On the other end of the repeat spectrum, we have your brazenly beautiful Radical Delay. There is so much going on in this little stomper. How did you manage to cram pristine delays, comprehensive chorusing, ringmod robo-speak and cascading octave descent and ascension into one box without menu diving? Also, was the glitch setting a happy accident that you ran with, or planned from the beginning?*

MF: Each mode on the pedal is really a completely separate delay algorithm. They all share the basic “bones” of the 900-millisecond digital delay with feedback, but that Tweak knob is different for each. I mentioned before that I can use one control for several parameters, and that’s what’s happening here. In Bend mode, the Tweak controls the pitch shift amount, so it’s zero in the middle and up or down an octave at the ends. Glitch mode was developed first, because I wanted a low bit-rate digital



delay. I went a little too far, so if you crank that Tweak knob it sounds like an Atari 2600! It's cool, though.

TRW: *Let's talk modulation. Your Equilibrium covers the waveform gamut from stutter to flutter and warble warmth emissions. I have seldom heard this palatable chewiness from a digital device, is this pure DSP magic we are hearing?*

MF: Yeah, all DSP. Tremolo isn't hard to do, but it is hard to do well. We're so used to hearing great trem from tubes in our amps that cramming that into a pedal format can be challenging. The big issue is that in your amp, the tremolo is usually situated in the perfect spot in the signal chain, whereas with a pedal it always goes up front. Add to that the volume loss you get from most tremos and you have a recipe for mediocre tremolo. We do some neat tricks with the Equilibrium—we add in some boost as you turn the Depth control up and we have a mix control which is great for bass or acoustic guitar folks. The Harmonic mode is my favorite; check out the slick video Mike Hermans did for us to really hear that one.

TRW: *The Litho Boost is your classic Pharaoh Amps Class-A Boost pedal rehoused with awesome new graphics. Was this your first ever circuit design? Did anything inspire it (such as the fabled Electronic Projects for Musicians by Craig Anderton?)*

MF: Oh, I read my copy of *EPFM* until the covers fell off. My first design was the Sweet Cheetah, a faux-fur covered fuzz pedal. It was pretty good but took a lot of time to cover with fabric. I designed the Class-A Boost back in 2000, the goal was to create a design I could build and sell for \$99. It was inspired by the Electro-Harmonix LBP-1, which is about as simple a circuit as you could find. The Class-A Boost evolved with customer feedback, and eventually turned in to the Class-A Boost Pro around 2003. That's the version that the Litho Boost is based on, with Tone and Contour controls as well as the output line driver stage. It sounds very cool, and it's really nice to be making those pedals again.

TRW: *Your line seems slanted towards the digital realm. Do you prefer working with DSP over analog?*



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MF: Honestly I love analog circuits, but these days pedalboard space is really at a premium and there's only so much you can cram into an analog box. There are definitely some analog innovators like Joel at Chase Bliss and the dudes at Subdecay, but even those guys have to leverage digital control to interface with the analog side. Digital done right can be musical and inspiring, just like the best analog boxes. That's what we're going for.

TRW: *You started out your line with four pedals, that's quite a lot! Do you have plans for anything new on the horizon, or are you going to wait a while before introducing more pedals?*

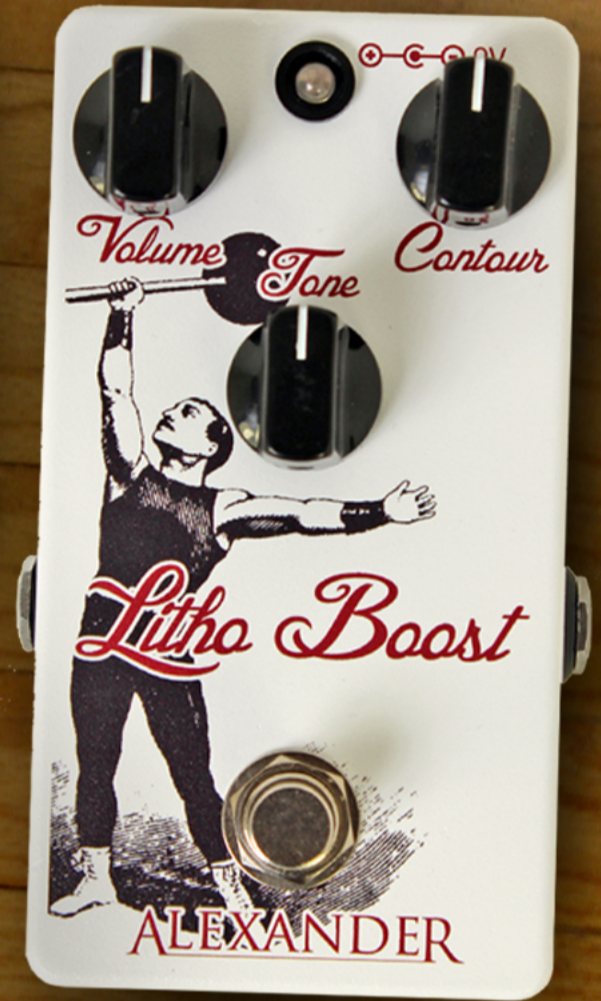
MF: I never sit still! I have a whole bunch of amazing prototype units here on my desk, some are ready to go. If we do decide to release anything else this year, I'll probably wait until Summer NAMM to announce. Follow @alexanderpedals on Instagram or Facebook for the most up-to-date info.

TRW: *Thank you for the time and the tones Matthew. In closing, tell the Tone Report consortium how buying an Alexander pedal not only benefits their ears, but humankind altogether.*

MF: Thanks for having me! People might be wondering why we called the company Alexander Pedals, since that's not my name. Alexander Farrow was my little brother, who passed away in 1987 from a form of cancer called neuroblastoma. Even though he was only seven years old he had the heart of a lion, and I miss him every day. Alexander Pedals is my way of honoring his memory, and we're donating a portion of every single pedal we sell to childhood cancer research. Please check out the About page on our website for more details. Rock on.

"I READ MY COPY OF EPFM UNTIL THE COVERS FELL OFF. MY FIRST DESIGN WAS THE SWEET CHEETAH, A FAUX-FUR COVERED FUZZ PEDAL. IT WAS PRETTY GOOD BUT TOOK A LOT OF TIME TO COVER WITH FABRIC."

A PORTION OF EVERY PURCHASE GOES TOWARD ENDING CHILDHOOD CANCER



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