



TC Electronic G-SYSTEM

MusicTech
RECOMMENDED
★★★★★★★

It might lack one fundamental guitar effect, but TC Electronic's new G-System delivers the very best of the rest. **Huw Price** plugs in.

KEY FEATURES

- Two 1/4-inch instrument inputs, pseudo-balanced
- Impedance: 1MΩ
- Four analogue effects loops
- Max output: 12dBu
- Two analogue outputs (L/R)
- Sample rate: 44.1kHz (24-bit)
- MIDI In/Out
- USB 1.1
- 100 factory presets
- 200 user presets

G-SYSTEM

Manufacturer **TC Electronic**

Price **£1,174**

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Most of us associate Scandinavian audio equipment with innovative design and superb build quality. Brands such as Bang & Olufsen, Dynaudio and Genelec have always seemed to offer just a little more refinement than you would expect from similar Far Eastern products. TC Electronic is no exception, and the company has developed some classic gear over the years, including the 2290 digital delay and the ground-breaking Finalizer, that so dismayed all those 'mastering' engineers.

As well as studio processors, TC Electronic has always maintained an interest in guitar effects. But there are two noticeable absences that make this particular product a departure from typical multi-effects boxes: both digital amplifier modelling and a distortion effect are missing.

The new G-System looks fantastic and the build quality of the brushed metal chassis is outstanding. It feels armour-plated, which for a piece of kit that's destined to spend its life being jumped on, is no bad thing. Rather than the clutter of vague push pedals or hard-to-hit metal footswitches that blight most processors and pedals, the G-System has bright chrome switches with a diameter roughly equivalent to a

Each preset has a combination of up to six effects, including filter, compression, modulation, pitch, delay and reverb. If the effect is active the corresponding switch lights up; if you want to switch it off, just press the footswitch.

The integral tuner and the Boost button are very guitarist-friendly features. You can program the desired level of boost for individual presets, giving you a clean volume lift for solos.

TC ELECTRONIC HAS DEVELOPED A VERY PROFESSIONAL PRODUCT FOR PRACTICE, GIGGING OR STUDIO WORK.

ten-pence coin. As well as being easy to switch, they are surrounded by bright red light when active.

The G-System's layout is simple and ergonomic and there are no breakable plastic knobs to tweak before you get started – we had this thing up and running in next to no time. There are 100 factory presets in banks A0–B9, plus you can store 200 of your own. The Up/Down switches select the banks and there are five sounds in each, selected from footswitches 1–5.

Middle management

Connecting a distortion unit (or other effect) to the G-System is simply a matter of patching to one of four analogue loops. You can set send and return levels and you can activate three of them using the Loop footswitches on the G-System. Another trick the G-System has up its sleeve is that the processor box can be removed from underneath the unit and rackmounted. Since it also supplies 9V DC power for up to four effects pedals, both the

Measuring Up

Little compares to the G-System except, perhaps, the Vox Tonelab SE (£399). But that's a dedicated digital modelling preamp and it doesn't have control capabilities for analogue effects. It's perhaps more meaningful to compare the G-System with individual stompboxes of a similar calibre. So, what about a Fulltone Choralflange (£299), a T-Rex Replica (£269), an Electro Harmonix Holy Grail (£105) an EMMA DiscumBOBulator (£110) and a Keeley Compressor (£185)? That adds up to £968, but you'd have to buy a power supply and you'd still lack a tuner, programmability, MIDI control, speaker simulation, amp switching and digital output.

METHOD SPOT

Because the G-System spoils you with such convenient and clutter-free effects management, the last thing you want is one of those annoying amplifier channel-switching boxes messing things up. Happily, the G System can handle that for you, too. It has two 1/4-inch stereo jack outputs for channel-switching duties. Simply run cables from these switch outputs to the switch inputs on your amps. 16 relay combinations are possible and they can be stored with your presets. As well as alternating between amps, you can channel-switch individual amps for multiple combinations and sounds – and it's all pre-programmable.

G-System and all your analogue effects can be controlled remotely using the floorboard. Three of the switches along the top are also encoder knobs. When you are editing effects, simply turn the Loop knob that corresponds to the parameters.

In addition to the usual analogue inputs and outputs you'll find MIDI In and Out, so you can select G-System presets from your sequencer. There's a USB socket to connect the G-System to your computer for software upgrades, plus an S/PDIF socket for feeding straight into a digital recorder. There are also two pedal inputs for controlling wah and volume from expression pedals.

Hitting the spot

Sadly, guitar multi-effects units are often like adventure playgrounds for inexperienced players – packed with unusable sounds, excessive effects and bewildering interfaces. The G-System is the total opposite: it's simple to use and the presets are mostly practical tones that can be used without prior editing. Having said that, there is some more 'out-there' stuff, too, including backwards delays, pitch shifting, dynamic filtering and dramatic modulations. The big difference is that these sound as though they were carefully engineered in a recording studio rather than cobbled together by a lab technician taking a day off from designing cheap synthesizers.

The G-System's processor box can be separated from the floorboard and rackmounted. Note the four 9V power sockets for powering external effects boxes.



The G-System is sturdily built, clearly laid out and extremely easy to operate.

Some of the preset names – Message In A Bottle, Right On The Edge and Gilmour's Delays – provide clues about what to expect, but others are more enigmatic. But rather than spending time figuring out how to switch things off, we enjoyed switching things on! Editing is simple thanks to the standard layout, but everyone has a preferred way of doing things. To this end you can customise the G-System's switch functions to your preferred way of working and adhesive labels are provided for your new configuration.

Many guitarists use amps with channel switching, while others use two amps. The G-System enables you to route presets to different outputs so channel or amp switching is handled for you – no more Rudolf Nureyev routines as you try to stomp on several switches simultaneously. You can use up to three amplifiers, too, either individually or together.

With a guitar plugged in and all the effects bypassed, the G-System has very little impact – if any – on the natural sound of the guitar, but it seemed a little quieter. A quick nose through the manual revealed that the Boost function is actually an attenuation lift. Since this is a digital processor, there's a digital ceiling to worry about. Rather than risk overload, TC Electronic decided to attenuate the regular signal so the Boost button brings things back up to a normal level – although you can apply a boost, too.

With the G-System there's none of the insipid and sterile quality that digital processing often brings to guitar sounds. We believe this product will

appeal to guitar traditionalists as well as the more sonically adventurous. It's a wonderful-sounding, real-world product that's based on reality rather than fantasy, designed to work with guitars, amps and, most importantly, players.

No compromise

At first we were surprised by the absence of distortion effects, but we now think TC Electronic has pulled off a masterstroke. Most guitarists acknowledge that amplifier valves and specialist analogue stompboxes produce the best distortion. Digital distortion is never convincing and by playing to the strengths of digital technology with studio-quality reverb, delays, modulation and filtering, TC Electronic has successfully avoided having to make any compromises. Factor in the low noise levels and the option to separate the system – thereby keeping analogue pedals out of harm's way – and it seems that TC Electronic has developed a very professional product for home practice, serious gigging or studio work. **MTM**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Fantastic sounds
- Gorgeous styling
- Ergonomic design
- Multi-functional
- No wall-wart power supply

WALK ON BY

- No integral wah/expression pedal
- 44.1K sample rate only
- Boost is actually attenuation lift
- Expensive

VERDICT

By seamlessly integrating the best of DSP technology with analogue pedal management, TC's G-System certainly hits the spot.



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