

EARTHQUAKER DEVICES

INTERSTELLAR ORBITER

REVIEW BY **DAVID A. EVANS**

STREET PRICE **\$225**



In what might be a historic first, turntablist Kid Koala and EarthQuaker Devices have teamed up to create the Interstellar Orbiter, an effect that's sure to intrigue collectors. The pedal, which was originally constructed for Koala's audiences to use during his Satellite Concerts, can produce classic resonant filter and oscillation effects. Leslie- and tremolo-like sounds, sci-fi burbling, and what definitely seems like a man's whistling are just some of these sounds. Its tones bring to mind P-funk, psychedelic solos,

and, of course, the music of Kid Koala himself.

The Interstellar Orbiter features two resonant filters, each with their own Intensity and Resonance controls. Furthermore, a Low Frequency Oscillator (LFO) "sweeps each filter in opposite directions," according to EarthQuaker Devices. The LFO features its own Rate and Frequency controls, and the pedal also gives the user three mixing knobs: one for the overall Dry/Wet ratio, and two Mix knobs that control the level of the individual

filters in the mix. Even better, the pedal features two expression pedal inputs for external control of both the LFO Rate and Frequency. Playing while sitting down might come back into style, because two pedals will require two feet for ideal operation.

In the simplest, "default" setting (all knobs set to noon), the Interstellar Orbiter sounded like a funky wah that tended not to sweep too far into the higher frequencies. A quick turn of the Intensity knobs boosted the amplitude of the filters

and, in turn, created a more nasal sound. Another turn of the Resonance knobs lent the effect a more distinct auto-wah quality whose sweeps could be adjusted with the Rate knob. The auto wah suited both funky, sixteenth-note strumming and muted, single-note picking. At the extremes, the Interstellar Orbiter would provide an interesting alternative to staid EQ pedals, especially for solos that must cut through the mix.

Adjustments of the pedal's "universal" controls pleased the ears once again. Setting the Frequency knob to around 8 o'clock changed the auto wah sound to something more like a funky heart-beat. In turn, the heart beat transformed into a sci-fi warble as the Rate increased, and beyond 3 o'clock, the warble morphed into a pitter-patter. Vocal formants—the sounds that seem almost human

because of their vowel-like qualities—became apparent when Filter A's Mix was increased and Filter B's was decreased. These were some pretty extreme examples of filtering, and the effect tended to overshadow the tonality of the inputted signal. Still, it's easy to keep the character of the effect by adjusting the Dry/Wet Direct knob or by mixing down a little of the filters.

The EarthQuaker Devices and Kid Koala collaboration points to a promising development in the world of boutique effects. Perhaps Koala's involvement with the company will draw the attention of non-guitarists to the many good things that pedal makers have accomplished in the last few years. Greater numbers of turntablists and electronic musicians might discover the cool, analog tones of boutique pedals that guitarists have long since discovered. Now, if only EarthQuaker

could find a way to get DJ Shadow on board with its next pedal, the company might be able to make history once again.

WHAT WE LIKE

Fairly wide range of filtration effects and the possibility to control two of the pedal's "universal" parameters with expression pedals.

CONCERNS

Although it made some difference, the Direct knob's contribution to the overall dry and wet ratio did not seem as dramatic as it could have been.

