

EBS UniChorus

Originally published in: *Bass Player* no. 12, 1997

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What's the #1 most often-used effect on bass? The Mu-Tro-Octo-Syntho-Whamifizer? Nuh-huh. It would undoubtedly be the humble chorus - a subtle, shimmering effect that simulates several people playing in unison. Chorus can make your tone richer-sounding and more animated; plus, it's great for smoothing over very minor intonation flaws on fretless. The Swedish company EBS, known in the bass world for its high-quality gear (the Fafner head was reviewed in May '97, and the Octabass pedal was reviewed in January '96), has expanded its product line to include the UniChorus, a remarkably quiet analog effect. The UniChorus has the same basic construction as the Octabass pedal: rugged 1/16" steel case, with two rubberized knobs and a sturdy effect-in/bypass switch. A small 3-way mode switch, which lets you choose chorus, pitch modulation, or flanger mode, is located between the two knobs (which handily protect the switch from clumsy feet). Components-wise, this small switch seems to be the pedal's weak point. On our test unit, we had trouble getting the pedal into chorus mode; we had to give the switch a hard push before it would click into place, activating the chorus circuitry. (EBS tells us this problem occurred in some of the first units manufactured but has since been corrected). All of the jacks and other external components are very sturdy. A no-skid pad of black foam-rubber is glued onto the unit's metal base plate.

The UniChorus can be powered by a 9-volt battery or a standard 9-volt AC adapter -or, if you have an EBS amp (such as the Fafner head or the Gorm Bass Combo), you can power the pedal



with the EBS phantom-power system, which sends a current up the line via a three-conductor cable fitted with TRS (tip/ring/sleeve) plugs. When engaged, a LED on the pedal's face gently pulsates in sync with the low-frequency oscillator that drives the effect.

The top-panel Rate knob controls the LFO's frequency, and the depth knob controls the width of the modulation. Chorus and flanging work by splitting the signal, applying a delay (which is significantly shorter for flange effects) and "playing back" the delayed signal while alternately slowing down and speeding up the playback; the Depth knob determines the amount of slowing down and speeding up that occurs. It's important to note that while many pedals and multi-effects perform this delay digitally, the UniChorus is all-analog -and while the most analog delay-style effects are very noisy, the EBS is amazingly quiet. You can therefore take advantage of the warm, big bottom sound of analog circuitry without all of the noise that usually goes along with it.

Indeed, the UniChorus does sound great. The flanging is great for recreating the guitar riff

on Nirvana's "Come as You Are" [Nevermind, Geffen]; chorus is nice for widening and thickening your sound. Pitch modulation is a slightly wider-modulated version of chorus, making it the best choice if you want more extreme, warbly sounds (which you can get by turning up both knobs to the max). The UniChorus approaches the performance of digital effects in terms of noise -there's almost no increase in hiss when you switch the circuit on- and the top end remains rich and clear. In terms of low end, though, a little controversy developed during testing. According to EBS, in order to keep the lows tight and focused, the uniChorus splits the signal and applies effect only to frequencies over 150Hz. (This is a common feature of chorus pedals designed specifically for bass).

However, our ears were telling us otherwise. So we tried cranking all of the controls on the pedal and played low E's through a Music Man StingRay with it's highs rolled off -and we could clearly hear the warble of the effect. Biamping and listening only to frequencies below 150Hz (and even 100Hz) showed the same thing. Finally, we ran a

low-A (55Hz) sine wave from a synth and heard the same warble. Conclusion? If the circuitry is, indeed, designed to modulate only highs, it's not performing the frequency split very well -and this results in a slight loss of focus in the fundamental. Even so, in terms of overall sound and signal-to-noise, the EBS blows away just about every other analog chorus pedal on the market.

At [US]\$299, the UniChorus is by no means cheap. But for the extra dough, you're essentially paying for silence; the very low noise floor of the high-quality electronic components. If warm and quiet is your idea of chorus ecstasy, you may have to spend a few extra bucks -but the UniChorus can get you there in a hurry.

Construction: 4 of 5

Electronics: 4 of 5

Ease of use: 4 of 5

Sound: 5 of 5

Value: 4 of 5

