

Vintage Guitar® magazine Gear Reviews

Opposite Ends

The MXR M234 Analog Chorus and M87 Bass Compressor

For decades, players in virtually every musical genre have been familiar with MXR pedals; the name connotes a solid road-warrior stompbox associated with great tones from '70s through today.

The Analog Chorus M234 is designed to capture the properties of a classic chorus pedal with a few perks. It has the Rate and Depth knobs found on most chorus pedals, but there's also a Level control, and separate Low and High controls, which is markedly different in that both go from a significant cut of frequency when rolled completely off to an actual "flat" frequency response when both are turned all up all the way. Players who like to experiment will dig this, since chorus pedals tend to be harsh in either EQ curve. And single-coil guitars can be brittle-sounding with the wrong chorus, so rolling off high-end helps tame them. The opposite holds true in low-end response with hollowbody instruments and basses, which can turn to mush in a heartbeat with certain chorus effects.

Keeping the Analog Chorus straightforward and simple, MXR gave the pedal a small housing, used standard 1/4" input and output jacks, along with an additional through output for dry signal.

With a few strums, the Analog Chorus offered the classic sonic signature for which MXR is known, most notably in terms of lushness. It's hard to beat an analog chorus for warmth and tone shaping, whether you're playing guitar, bass, or even a vintage synthesizer. From subtle to warble, the Analog Chorus will appeal to chorus junkies.

The Bass Compressor M87 offers a new approach to bass compressors in that it uses MXR's Constant Headroom Technology (CHT), which incorporates the concept of a high-quality studio compressor in a compact box. Starting with a transparent signal – not always the case with some compressors, which significantly color tone – you have a five-knob setup with controls for Input, Output, Attack, Release, and Compression Ratio. It's rare to have this much control in a compressor pedal. Even more impressive in this true-bypass gem are 10 gain-reduction-status LEDs that give an immediate warm-and-fuzzy visual to monitor the compressor's function.

Plugged into a variety of instruments ranging from vintage basses to exotic active instruments and even an upright, the M87 did not color the tonal properties in any shape or form. Studio-grade compressors should only do the job they're designed to do – even-out notes and add articulation and attack when needed. The Bass Compressor did just that without sounding squashed or unnatural, no matter the bass instrument.

Experimenting further with the M87's claims of being studio-worthy, we put it through the paces with a variety of guitars and synthesizers. Again, the results fortified MXR's mission; guitars smoothed out nicely while retaining their character and the ability to completely dial in the effect due to the five-knob layout is a knob-tweaker's delight. Consider that it's the size of a Phase 90, and it's a package tough to beat. – ***Sean O'Bryan Smith*** VG



MXR M87 BASS COMP, M234 ANALOG CHORUS
Price: $318 (M87 Bass Compressor), $170 (M234 Analog Chorus)
Info: mxr.com.