



John Raymond's setup of effects pedals for trumpet and flugelhorn

# Using Effects Pedals on Your Horn

In the fall of 2014, I was feeling restless to try something new—both as a bandleader and as a player. Up to that point, I had written music for both a quartet and a quintet with trumpet, piano and/or guitar, bass and drums. However, that fall I booked a gig at a venue in New York where I decided to put together a group with an instrumentation that I'd never played with before: flugelhorn, guitar and drums. This was the start of what would eventually become my working band, Real Feels, and after recording four albums and playing hundreds of gigs all around the world together, I think it's safe to say that at least something about that experiment worked.

As I look back on it, it's incredible to think about how much that one decision has transformed the way I now think about and play music. But what's arguably changed the most is my concept of sound and how I sonically fit into

the context of the group. This has happened primarily through incorporating effects pedals into my playing.

I have to admit that when I first started down this road, it was pretty intimidating. This was a whole world that I hadn't the slightest idea of where to start. As I've gotten into conversations with other horn players at gigs or master classes during the past few years, I've found that many feel the same way. The idea is appealing, but the process of deciding which pedals to use and knowing how to use them is completely foreign. As someone who's been using them for a while now, here are some things that I think are helpful to consider, if you're interested in heading down this path.

## What Do You Hear?

When you start thinking about incorporating effects pedals into your playing, the first

question we should ask ourselves is, "What do I hear?" How do you hear your sound being "effected"? In what context do you hear it? How will incorporating pedals affect the music? Answering these questions is an often overlooked yet crucial step in the process. It communicates that you have a concept for what you're hearing, and it will ensure that the novelty of any given pedal doesn't distract you from what you ultimately want to sound like.

Effects pedals, for many people, are like bright, shiny objects. A person hears someone use a pedal and they quickly become enamored with it, convincing themselves that they need to buy the pedal and start using it immediately. Now, there's nothing wrong with getting inspired by other people who use effects pedals. For me personally, I'm always checking out other people's pedal setups. I genuinely want to know how people get the sounds

they play with. But, there's a big difference between being inspired by someone and blatantly copying them. Take the time to really listen to yourself and to the music you're playing, and try to define what you're hearing that isn't there already. Once you do this, you can then begin the process of figuring out what pedals will help you achieve the sound you're going for.

## Know Your Options

From here, you'll want to start doing some research into the kinds of pedals there are, as well as what unique capabilities each individual pedal has to offer. Generally speaking, there are six basic types of effects pedals: reverb, delay, filter/phase, overdrive/distortion, wah and looper. Understanding how each of these kinds of pedals work will help you determine which ones will be best suited for the sound you're going for. Once you do this, you can check out different brands you're interested in and figure out exactly which one is right for you.

For my pedalboard, I use five different effects devices:

- an Arena reverb pedal by TC Electronic
- a Timeline delay pedal by Strymon, which I rotate through a handful of different delay settings, depending on the context
- a Boss Super Shifter harmonizer, which allows to me to add another note at a set interval above or below the note I'm playing
- a Count to Five delay/looper/sampler by Montreal Assembly, which allows me to manipulate anything I play in any manner that I'd like
- a Ditto looper pedal by TC Electronic, which gives me the ability to loop textures on top of each other

(Also seen in the accompanying photo of my effects-pedal setup is the Strymon Ojai power supply.)

The resource that I recommend to every horn player is horn-fx.com. The website is full of product reviews, articles, forums, demo videos and artist pages specifically geared toward horn players looking to use pedals. In particular, a great "Getting Started" guide is available as a free download—an invaluable resource if you're just starting down this path.

However, this process can start as simply as asking other musicians you know (horn players, guitar players, etc.) about what pedals they use, why they chose those pedals and how each of them works. Doing so can open up doors for you to try some of these pedals yourself. This is by far the easiest—and cheapest—route to go when first starting out.

## A New World of Sound

Once you've got some pedals to start playing with, it's time to start using them to see



Effects pedals have expanded Raymond's concept of sound.

what new sounds they can open up for you. These moments of exploration and discovery are often some of the most inspiring, which makes this getting-to-know-you stage one of the most fun parts of the process. While reading a manual can be helpful, I'd recommend diving in without one and learning about what each pedal can do simply through trial and error. You'll develop a much more intuitive sense of using each pedal by doing things in this way, which will help you internalize these new sounds even more personally.

From here, it's all about developing a sense of fluency. Spend time shedding with them just like you do with your own instrument. Learn the ins and outs of each pedal you use, so that you can manipulate them in any way that you want to. As you do this, you'll find that you start to feel much more comfortable and confident using them, with the end result being that they'll gradually become a natural extension of your sound and the way that you play.

Personally, one of the things I enjoy most is finding new ways to use the pedals I have. Most times when this happens, however, these experiments launch me and the music into something totally unexpected and messy. It's in these moments that I'm challenged to embrace the imperfection that using pedals can bring about, and to turn those spontaneous "mistakes" into something beautiful. In this way, effects pedals can become as much a part of our improvisational approach as any musical decision we make, which I find makes the process of using them creatively fulfilling.

## Always in Good Taste

The goal is ultimately for you to develop the flexibility to use effects in whatever way is going to serve the music best. How do we know what exactly will serve the music? Asking yourself the five Ws is a great place to start:

- **Who** are you playing with? Does the instrumentation lend itself to using effects?
- **What** kind of music are you playing? Would the songs you're playing sound better with effects?
- **When** should you use them? Can you use specific sounds so they don't become too redundant or predictable?
- **Where** should you use certain pedals or effects? Does using them at that point in the music sound appropriate based on what's happening in the larger context of the song?
- **Why** are you using effects? Is it simply to look cool, or do you genuinely hear them in your sound and in the context of the band?

Answering these questions can be very important in helping you figure out if using effects pedals will enhance—or take away from—the music at any given moment. This clearly takes a lot of discernment, restraint and maturity. But, then again, making any kind of music at a high level does.

There's no doubt that effects pedals open up a whole new world of possibilities to us horn players. They present a fresh and unique way for us to discover our own voice as artists. While it can be intimidating, all you need to do to start is use your intuition to develop a concept.

Be intentional with the pedals you choose, and spend time learning them like you do your own instrument. Above all, listen deeply to the music. It will tell you exactly what to do and when to do it, if you listen closely enough. **DB**

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With a singular voice on trumpet and flugelhorn, John Raymond is making his mark as an up-and-coming international jazz musician. He has released six albums under his own name, the latest being 2019's *Real Feels Live Vol. 2* (Sunnyside). Raymond has established himself as a sought-after educator, both as the Professor of Jazz Trumpet at Indiana University and as a guest clinician and soloist at schools around the world. Contact him at johnraymondmusic@gmail.com or visit his website, john-raymond.com.