

# PREMIER Guitar

## Visual Sound V3 H2O Review

Joe Charupakorn

July 24, 2014



The guys at Visual Sound have built some pretty cool dual-mode pedals in their time, the most famous being the Jekyll & Hyde Overdrive/Distortion and Route 66 Overdrive/Compressor. The success of these designs is due to practicality, not gimmickry—they co-package cool-sounding, commonly used effects to save gigging players headaches and hassle. On the surface, the new V3 H2O Echo/Chorus might seem a little less practical than an overdrive/compressor, but the beauty of the third version of the H2O is that the two effects work together in a cohesive manner that makes the echo/chorus effect feel like a natural—even essential—addition to your effect array.

### A New Form for Sonic Evolution

Visual Sound has scrapped the old shield-shaped enclosure used for the first incarnation of the H2O in

favor of a roughly 5" x 4.5" x 2" rectangular housing that's about as wide as two conventional Boss pedals. And because the V3 has top-mounted jacks, it actually takes up less space than two Bosses wired together.

The control set is a fairly busy affair, though it's mostly very intuitive and easy to navigate. The six topmost knobs are familiar enough: The chorus section has speed, width, and depth knobs, while the delay section has delay, repeats, and level knobs, as well as a short/long switch for toggling between 10–225 ms or 225–450 ms delay ranges. The newest additions are two smaller knobs—tone and “chor-vib,” the latter of which lets you select either chorus (a mix of your dry and wet signal) or vibrato (the wet signal exclusively)—or a blend of the two.

There's also a new switch for choosing three levels of modulation intensity, and a detune switch that adds a crazed pitch-shifting texture to the modulations. Underneath the hood you'll find two on/off switches for each effect's “Pure Tone” signal buffer. Visual Sound recommends leaving these switches in the on position, but if you prefer true-bypass, the option is there.

Gear freaks love the ability to control every aspect of their rig, and the H2O's separate in and out jacks for each effect means you can route your signal in any of the same configurations as you would with individual pedals: Put chorus before delay, delay before chorus—or patch pedals in between the two.

### **Captivatingly Delicious**

To test the V3, I used an Ernie Ball Music Man Silhouette and a Fender Stratocaster, both running through a Mesa/Boogie Lonestar Special, with a Fulltone GT-500 pedal out front for a little dirt. I started with chorus alone, tone all the way up, speed and depth just shy of noon, detune off, intensity high, and depth jacked. The result was a lush, '80s-flavored chorus—the most immediate association that came to mind was Crowded House's hit “Don't Dream It's Over.” The sound was discernibly rich and warm, excellent for suspended chord voicings and arpeggiated textures.

Increasing the speed and width, backing the depth back to noon, and moving intensity to the middle setting generated a thick Leslie-type sound that was fun for comping quartal chords. And when I engaged the distortion pedal, I got a groovy Scofield-type tone for single-note runs—it was very trippy and cool to hear the continual warble on a sustained and screaming bend. Moving the speed and depth back a little, and turning the tone knob fully counterclockwise delivered a much less subtle and peak-heavy jazz sound similar to the clean sounds popularized by Pat Metheny and Mike Stern.

Meanwhile, the basic voice of the digital delay section is a very nice blend of warmth and digital clarity. Setting the short/long switch to short delivered great slapback tones, while flicking it to long enabled me to tap into everything from cascading Edge-type repeats to a haunting, subtle shimmer for chords—a use that was effective and rich even at lower levels.

### **Two-in-One Equals Twice the Fun**

As simple, conventional delay and chorus pedals, the two sections of V3 H2O excel—especially when used together. I had a blast engaging the chorus and delay for arena-rock-style solos, but there are also a ton of out-of-this-world sounds available by exploring extreme settings and uncommon combinations of the effects.

With the chorus' width cranked, intensity high, detune on, and chor-vib maxed for vibrato only, I got wacky, surfing-on-acid effects for chords, and Vai-like sounds for single note solos. Cranking the delay pedal's repeats induces self-oscillation and sounds like a security alarm gone haywire. Combining the textures created sonic chaos that wasn't just fun—it led to genuinely creative moments of unexpected inspiration.

### **The Verdict**

Visual Sound consistently turns out quality pedals at very reasonable prices, and at just under 200 bucks, the V3 H2O is an impressive value for two effects that play so well together. Independently, the rich sounds from the delay and chorus/vibrato sections rival or best a lot of units in the \$100 range, and

the fact that you get both in a compact package is the icing on a delicious cake. Given the thoughtful design, vast sonic possibilities, and the cool way in which these effects work together, the V3 H2O is a very impressive bargain.

## Ratings

### Pros:

Great sound quality. Formidable sonic possibilities at a great price.

### Cons:

No tap tempo or stereo outputs for the delay.

### Tones:



### Ease of Use:



### Build/Design:



### Value:

