

**Detailed Review of the Celestial Effects
Cancer Wah the Fuzz?
By
Gio Da Silva
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I am not sure if most guitar players are like me. I go through phases where I listen to an influential player or band continuously for days, then switch to another, and so on. In the course of these mildly-obsessive/hyper-focused periods of listening, I tend to gravitate to gear that reflects the player whose tone or approach I am currently into. Some of the changes happen in the guitar that I use, but it is the pedal board that gets the most attention as far as that goes. I must have rewired the stupid thing over 200 times this year alone... Well, one remedy for my sonic dyslexia/obsession has been created, the Celestial Effects Cancer "Wah The Fuzz?" which is comprised of four, yes kids, four pedals into one, fairly compact, built-like-a-tank tone tool.

The WTF is beautifully put together, in the usual zodiac-inspired way Celestial is becoming known for, and in my opinion, it is a visually stunning pedal. There is no overlooking in parts and build quality, and as always the pedal arrives nicely packed, with a sticker, pick, and rubber feet for you to attach to the pedal if you so choose. Right off the bat it is worth mentioning that unlike most drive/fuzz pedals that require very little juice to operate, because the WTF has a real 12AX7 under the chassis, the current draw is much higher. A power supply able to deliver ~200 mA at 9V is recommended. Input and output jacks as always are placed on the top end of the pedal, for pedal board real estate friendliness. There are four sonic flavors in the WTF, which can take you on a really cool sonic journey from 60's psychedelic to today's more pop and eclectic tones. From left to right: a fixed wah, an octave fuzz circuit, a "muscle fuzz" circuit, and last but not least, a real tube-driven overdrive. I love tubes!

It is only fair to start from right to left, so let us begin. The first footswitch controls the fixed wah. With a single knob which acts just like a wah sweep, it is dead simple to operate. The wah circuit is beautifully tuned and even in extreme settings still remains musical. I am a self-proclaimed wah addict, but not in the "wacka wacka" 70's XXX feature sort of cliché funk thing. A lot of times I step on the pedal as a solo boost, not necessarily to boost volume, but to use it as a frequency filter/enhancer; I feel that approach can also yield a more vocal quality to the tone, which I find inspirational. The difficult thing to do on the fly during a gig is to find the sweet spot for this cocked wah approach, keeping in mind that with a regular wah pedal you have to be at full treble to turn the pedal on, and 9/10 the tone I am looking for is elsewhere in the sweep range. The WTF allows instant access to the preset frequency and that is a golden thing to have.

Celestial Effects is not the first company to think about this, but in true form it sounds just great. This is just the entry gate to the WTF and if you dig Michael Schenker, Frank Zappa, or Tom Scholz, you will love this first effect. If you want to nail the Knopfler intro to "Money for Nothing," now you easily can!

Next in line is the octave fuzz. I have owned a couple of these over the years, with mixed results. Noise, tracking, weird frequencies, humbucker and bridge pickup unfriendliness, have plagued a lot of them, but none of these are a problem with the octave fuzz in the WTF. This is a LOUD pedal, with plenty of boost and fuzz on tap. No matter if I used humbuckers or single coils, the tone remained tight, and perfectly EQ'd which is a great achievement for a pedal like this, which may, pardon my French, "fart-out" on low end notes. The usual approach to octave fuzz, is the "Band of Gypsies" test, namely put the neck pickup on and play around the 12th fret. Well it passes that test in spades, but that really is a bit one dimensional, and what I have become very aware of is that Celestial Effects designer Dom Mancini will never put something together that is one dimensional. Bridge pickup settings and playing down low yields faux "trumpet" sounds, and the pedal interacts just wonderfully to playing dynamics and subtle guitar volume tweaking. Dig in and it spits back at you; back off on your attack or volume, it calms down. I love this pedal already, but an added feature in the octave fuzz circuit is the option to bypass the octave portion. This offers a significant boost in volume and headroom, and a surprisingly great solo boost when the gain is a bit lower. Really nice, tight, not overly saturated fuzz, and it reminds a bit of something Tommy Bolin or Jeff Beck may have used, something like a "bender" sound. Very groovy, and yes I mean groovy indeed!

Moving down the line comes the muscle fuzz circuit. With two settings to choose from, the only words I can use here to describe what happens when you play through the muscle fuzz are: sonic-glorious-beef-sustain-doom-singing-swells-joy. A three-knob fuzz pedal that is super easy to dial in, as the circuit is quite dynamic and you find a bunch of sounds in just seconds. With the selector knob to the right, there is a tighter more compressed sound that is Eric Johnson and David Gilmour approved. Good note definition, singing sustain and in moderate settings almost sounds like a fuzz-overdrive; very cool! Now, if you want to unleash the sonic equivalent of Cerberus... Flip the toggle switch to the left. WOW! Huge volume boost, and the WTF muscle fuzz becomes a real hairy beast. Totally delightful sounds happened when bending two notes with that oh so pleasing note bloom that leads to harmonic feedback. I am sold! I spent 30 minutes alone just bending notes, one and two at a time, with all the pickup positions, on all fret board positions, and just having a great old time. Again the typical attention to sonic detail is there and all knobs are interactive, and usable through their full range; in more moderate settings you can get plenty of gain, yet still maintain note clarity. If you are a fan of Jack White or Dan Auerbach, heck even Billy Gibbons' tone on Rhythmeen , this section of the WTF really does deliver the goods.

Last, but not least comes the icing on the cake: a real 12AX7 tube driven overdrive for the win! I love tube overdrives. I have owned and used several through the years and there are good things and bad things about designs of the past. Mainly having to do with the amount of fuzziness and flat out loss of articulation at higher gain settings and crappy EQing. None of these are a problem in the tube overdrive section of the WTF. Even at the highest gain settings, the low end remains tight, with a great sag characteristic of tube amplifiers. Instead of a tone knob, the WTF employs a Celestial Effects trademark “Edge” knob, which to me sounds more like a “presence” control, because to my ears it affects not only frequency position but also a bit of the gain structure so it interacts with the gain knob to really shape the drive character. Insert your well known tube overdrive pedal user’s name here “_____” and you will get that tone. I will say that from Gilmour to Shawn Lane, of course depending on your rig, you will find the tones in this circuit.

As if the literal tonal sweep of the WTF was not enough, with each of the four circuits delivering the goods, the fun and experimentation really starts when you realize that all of the pedals can be used together in different combinations. It would take literally an entire booklet to detail exactly what each combination can yield, but that really is up to the end user methinks. It suffices to say that the pedals stack up together just perfectly, and nothing gets lost even when all four circuits are cooking at the same time. Sonic mayhem? Perhaps, but damn it makes me smile.

Now, all of these observations were done at home or studio by myself, which only gives a player a limited understanding of what gear, can do. So, I did the very “obvious” thing and took the WTF as my sole drive pedal to a high profile country music gig. Yep, you read it right! I figured, the obvious thing would be to play rock through the WTF, but who cares about the obvious?! Old Gretsch Roc Jet, into an Orange R30 and a 1x15 cab, with a bit of delay on the south side and off to the races. The tube drive circuit stayed on for the whole gig and allowed me to attain a whole bunch of different playing dynamics by using just pick attack. I am a big fan of volume knob noodling, but it was really unnecessary. The solos were a sheer joy to play and I used the other three circuits throughout the set. You know you are doing something right when the whole band and more importantly, the crowd is smiling and dancing! Several players and audience members were taken by surprise with the approach, and I even got to sign a few autographs!

I have reviewed several pedals in the Celestial Effects line and each has been a great sonic tool. The WTF takes things to the moon in terms of tones and versatility. It is a literal swiss army knife of drive pedals, which can take you from Yardbirds and early Rolling Stones, to Oz Noy approved jazzy funky experiments, to Eric Johnson and Gilmour soulfulness, to the sonic assault and grinding sounds of Jack White. A true moment of genius in effects pedals design.