

LOW-DOWN AND DIRTY

Morpheus Droptune pedal



The "musical scale" graphic makes it easy to verify settings.

The center footswitch operates as a toggle switch that produces fast pitch trills.

* BY CHRIS GILL

GUITARISTS HAVE USED drop tunings for ages. Jimi Hendrix consistently tuned down a half step, to D \sharp , the Beatles tuned down a whole step to D on songs like "Yesterday" and "Paperback Writer," and Tony Iommi tuned down one and a half steps, to C \sharp . Modern bands like Slipknot and Mastodon have taken the practice to a new extreme, using a wide variety of drop tunings in their repertoires.

Previously, players who wanted to use or explore a variety of drop tunings needed to employ different string gauges, setups and, occasionally, instruments with longer scale lengths. But thanks to the Droptune pedal from a new company called Morpheus, guitarists can now instantly access a wide variety of drop tunings using a regular, standard-tuned guitar. The pedal drops a guitar's overall pitch to any of seven half-step increments or a full octave down. The pitch shifter is polyphonic, so it allows you to play full chords. And it does it without making you abandon your favorite ax.

FEATURES

THE MORPHEUS DROPTUNE pedal is housed in a sturdy metal case with three heavy-duty footswitches mounted at a stomp-comfortable angle. The switch on the right engages the Effect and hardwired Bypass modes; the center switch lets you scroll up through effect settings (only when the effect is bypassed) or toggle instantly between a pitch-shifted preset and the guitar's unprocessed tone; and the left switch lets you scroll down through the presets. Settings are displayed numerically in half-step increments (1-7, 12 and 12+) on a "musical staff" graphic, with red numerical LEDs. There's a four-segment input level meter, which lets you dial in the ideal input level with the rear panel's trim knob.

The rear panel features the trim knob, a mono 1/4-inch guitar input jack, a mono 1/4-inch line output jack, a 12-volt jack for the included DC power adapter and a mini USB jack to facilitate firmware updates.

PERFORMANCE

UNLIKE MANY PITCH shifters and harmonizers, the Droptune does not require users to have a PhD in music theory in order to use it effectively.

Operation could not be any simpler: you just connect it to your guitar and amp, adjust the trim knob until the yellow bar lights occasionally, and step on the footswitches to select the setting you want. The red LED numbers can be a little hard to distinguish for the visually impaired (and I sure as hell ain't wearing my prescription Dorfman glasses when I'm headbanging onstage), but the "musical staff" graphic is big enough that most users will still be able to tell which setting they've selected without squinting.

The sound quality of the pitch shifting effect is quite convincing. Latency is almost imperceptible, and the tracking is perfect—even the most complex chords won't cause the pitch shifter to glitch. With a clean guitar tone, some bass notes at the lowest settings (6, 7 and 12 half steps) can sound a little artificial to extremely discriminating ears, but the effect sounds very convincing when the overall tone is more distorted. In addition to full octave-down pitch shifting, the Morpheus has a 12+ octave preset that blends the guitar's natural sound with octave-down pitch shifting, creating an effect similar to a 12-string guitar. Combined with a heavily distorted high-gain tone, this preset summons a mammoth wall of sound that is absolutely devastating.

When the effect is engaged, you can only scroll down through the presets (the "up" function is bypassed in favor of a toggle function), but you can use this creatively for "stair step" pitch cascades. Unlike the on/off switch, which requires a separate motion each time you engage or bypass the effect, the toggle switch utilizes a momentary switching function that lets you perform fast trill effects by moving your foot up and down.

THE BOTTOM LINE

THE MORPHEUS DROPTUNE pedal is essential for any performing guitarist who uses dropped tunings. It sounds great, tracks fast and allows you to get through gigs without changing instruments or retuning your guitar. **SC**



SPECS

LIST PRICE: \$259.99
MANUFACTURER: XP Audio, morpheusEFX.com
CONTROLS: On/off switch, up/toggle switch, down switch, trim level knob
JACKS: Input, output, mini USB, power supply
DISPLAY: Numeric red LED
OTHER: 12-volt DC adapter included



•PRO	•CON
SIMPLE OPERATION • FAST AND ACCURATE TRACKING • CONVINCING TONES	UP FUNCTION WORKS ONLY WHEN EFFECT IS OFF • SOME BASS NOTES SOUND ARTIFICIAL