

Z Vex pedals: Nano head, Ringtone and Fuzz probe
Unique FX pedals
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In the avalanche of analog pedals that have hit the market in the last few years we've seen models of all types, but without a doubt the creations of guitar and noise lover Zachary Vex have proven to be among the best built and most original. 10 years ago Zachary decided to create his own brand, Z Vex, in order to build what he loves so dearly: hand-made analog effects pedals, with good classic sounds as well as new sonic possibilities.

It's been a relatively short while since Z Vex has been distributed in Spain, and in this case they have facilitated us with 2 of their most successful pedals: the Fuzz Probe and the Nano Head; as well as one of the most recent incorporations to their catalog, the Ringtone.

If you take a look at Z Vex' catalog, you will quickly notice the design and color of their products.

The colors could have come out of the imagination of a 6 year old, but inside the pedals you will find high technology that satisfies the most demanding noise-mongers. The Fuzz Probe is a good example of this, a pseudo-fuzz pedal based on a simpler model called the Fuzz Factory but incorporating a copper plate to control certain parameters with your foot in real time, theramin-style. Zachary light-heartedly warns us that "this is the weirdest pedal I've made, you must be crazy to use it. Not even I really know how it works". It has pots to control volume, compression, gate, gain and stab, and the rectangular copper tactile plate functions when you move your foot closer or further from it; the results can be very different, from a more or less classic fuzz to a distorted decomposition of your guitar sound, almost as if your amp were on fire; you can even stop playing your guitar and play with the frequencies the pedal emits, like a theramin. An insane pedal that will make many noisologists happy.

Another of the stars in their product line is a pedal-shaped head called the Nano Head, a technological marvel that is the smallest tube-driven head on the market. Zach acquired a large stock of very small American military tubes in the mid 80's, originally intended for use in satellites, extremely rugged and of very high quality. This beauty delivers like a Marshall-style head but at low volumes, it's very useful if you want to achieve good distorted sounds without the need to play at very high volumes (it's especially interesting in the studio). It has a few very efficient controls with self-explanatory drawings: a sun (brightness), clouds (darkness), as well as fat and skinny stick figures (lows and highs)... all very intuitive. It is the only Z Vex pedal that doesn't work with batteries (it must be connected to a socket) and it's truly a little jewel, it even has a small fan and a tiny integrated loudspeaker!

The Ringtone is one of their newer pedals, & consists of 8 ring modulators that allow for sequential use. You can control the sound of each modulator via a small pot and then make it alternate between the 8 sequentially or randomly. It seems difficult to control but in reality it is easy to understand, and to achieve interesting and fun results, both with static or sequential modulation...if you don't believe it, listen to "Nairobi Express" by Scott Henderson.

If you visit the website of the mad genius called Zachary Vex you will find an extensive sample of various pedals with hand-painted finishes and with technology that allows, for example, for some of the pedals to drain so little energy that a battery can last years and years.

Who they are made for: Guitar players that love new sound textures, experimentation, and new technologies applied to the sound of a guitar. For these types of guitar players, they are indispensable.

Pros: For all except the most conventional. Great capacity for controlling parameters and sound coloration.

Cons: Perhaps the price; innovative and creative technology is not cheap to come by.

Points: 5 stars (out of 5)