

DIGITECH VOCALIST LIVE 2 £279

EFFECTS

DigiTech Vocalist Live 2 £279

Create instant backing vocals by triggering harmonies from your guitar by Trev Curwen



PHOTOGRAPHY AMANDA THOMAS

Now here's something: a stompbox that you plug your guitar into that does absolutely nothing to its sound! The DigiTech Vocalist Live 2 is in fact a voice processor whose main function is to add two-part harmonies to a vocal part – the guitar's role is purely to dictate what those harmonies, based on the chords you're playing, should be. The guitar and a vocal microphone are plugged in; the unit 'listens' to the guitar and applies pitch shifting to the vocal, adding the right harmony notes for the song.

The rationale behind the Vocalist Live 2 is that some other vocal harmonisers, which are programmed to respond to a specific scale or key, can often put out an inappropriate harmony when confronted by a song that doesn't work with a single key/scale setting. DigiTech quotes the case of a song that has the same note sung over two different chords – perhaps a C sung in the melody over a C maj/F maj chord sequence. Something like that would confound a conventional harmoniser. By contrast the Vocalist Live 2 harmoniser will follow the guitar chords. If you're singing an A over the chords that are generally found in the key of G, it will generate a C as harmony. But, if you then play an A major, it will shift to the C#.

Vocalist Live uses DigiTech's patent-pending musIQ technology to directly analyse the output of any electric or preamplified acoustic guitar that is plugged into it – no MIDI guitars or

Vocalist Live takes guitar chords into account as well as vocals



hexaphonic pickups are required. DigiTech says that the musIQ detection section can analyse complex guitar waveforms and determine which notes in each chord are critical to accurate harmony. This information is then fed to an advanced harmony engine that creates harmonies consistent with both the singer's melody and the guitar accompaniment, staying true to not only the overall key and song scale but also to localised variations due to chords not part of the global key.

The Vocalist Live 2 is powered by a 9V adaptor and is designed as a floor pedal that comes first in the signal chain after the guitar but before any other pedals as it needs a pure guitar signal to function correctly. The guitar

input and output are hard-wired so that there is no degradation of the guitar signal as it passes through. The vocal is fed into the unit directly from a microphone into an XLR input or through a line input which can take the signal from a mixer or an audio interface, allowing previously recorded vocals to be used. There are both mono (XLR) and stereo (6.4mm jacks) options for outputting the effected vocal signal and both can be used simultaneously in such instances as feeding a powered monitor as well as the main PA. A front panel 'harmony mix' knob sets the blend of the original vocal and the generated harmonies and runs the whole range from vocal only to harmonies only.

DIGITECH VOCALIST LIVE 2

PRICE: £279

TYPE: Guitar-driven vocal harmony processor

ORIGIN: China

SAMPLING

FREQUENCY: 44.1kHz

A/D CONVERSION: 24-bit high performance audio

SIMULTANEOUS HARMONIES: 2

CONNECTIONS: XLR mic input, XLR mono out, jack line in, guitar in, guitar thru, line out (L&R)

DIMENSIONS: 224 (w) x 170 (d) x 88mm (h)

WEIGHT (kg/lb): 1.0/2.3

PHANTOM POWER: Yes

POWER REQUIREMENTS: 9V AC adaptor (supplied)

OPTIONS: None

RANGE OPTIONS:

Vocalist Live 4 £349

Sound Technology UK

01462 480000

www.digitech.com



The rivals

TC Helicon Harmony Control Guitar £151
DigiTech Vocalist Live 4 £349

TC Helicon has a large range of vocal harmony processors with models such as VoiceLive and VoiceWorks, and at the recent music show in Frankfurt released the Harmony Control Guitar, a new product that allows those processors to respond to guitar chords. The Vocalist Live 4 is the big brother unit that provides three or four-part harmonies plus a slew of other features including pitch correction and some guitar effects. It is a programmable unit featuring 50 factory and 50 user presets.

Besides the harmony generation the unit has other processing, controlled by three more front panel knobs, that can be applied to the vocal. Firstly, compression can be applied to smooth out the vocal signal, then a touch of reverb can be added with a choice of studio, room or hall sounds. The 'enhance' knob brings in EQ in three different flavours – resonance (low and mid boost), clarity (mid-range cut) and shine (high end boost).

One or two harmonies can be selected from six buttons giving plenty of possible combinations. There are two unison settings, high harmonies of a third and a fifth above and low harmonies of a third and a fifth below.

Two footswitches turn the whole thing on and off. The harmony footswitch switches the harmony generation in and out while the effects switch is used to bypass the rest of the effects processing but has a dual function in that it can be held down to engage the onboard chromatic guitar

With the correct blend set and a touch of reverb, the harmonies can sound quite sublime and very close to the real thing

tuner. The unit will be confused as to what harmonies to generate when confronted with an out of tune guitar so this facility is crucial.

SOUNDS/IN USE: Setting up the Live 2 is dead simple – the front panel knobs and buttons are appropriately named and very intuitive and the red LEDs on each button let you know exactly what effect is active. The compressor works very well in keeping the voice consistent and upfront while the three different 'enhance' settings can subtly tweak the voice to bring out more of the desired character. The smooth sounding reverbs have been picked to suit vocals and can add a definite sense of space around the voice, if needed, or at higher knob settings be switched in with the footswitch as a special effect.

The harmoniser itself works just fine, adding in some extra sympathetic voices with careful setting of the mix knob allowing them to blend in

VOCALIST LIVE 2	TEST RESULTS
Build quality	★★★★★
Features	★★★★★
Sound	★★★★★
Performance	★★★★★

WE LIKED Very easy to use – no programming needed; tracks guitar chords for sympathetic harmonies every time; footswitchable; small but effective range of harmonies

WE DISLIKED Studio and room reverb too similar

naturally without dominating the main vocal. As is the case with other harmonisers in a similar price range, the pitch-shifted harmonies are not pristine copies of the main vocal – they can sound a little 'swimmy' and a touch metallic but you really don't hear that unless you crank them up way beyond the level of the lead vocal, which really defeats the point of what this unit is all about anyway. With the correct blend set and a touch of reverb they can sound quite sublime and very close to the real thing. The thirds and fifths above and below plus the two unison combinations that give plenty of scope for finding something that will both suit your voice and the particular song. And if you don't want shifted harmonies in a particular song the Unison settings add doubling effects and can thicken the vocal up nicely regardless of what the guitar is playing.

We tried to catch it out with different strumming styles and obscure chord voicings but, as long as your voice is singing the right notes to fit the song's chords, it seems to have an innate ability to always come up with notes that fit in musically. That works both live and when we fed a recorded vocal and recorded rhythm guitar into it.

Verdict

This type of thing could get very complicated but DigiTech has made it as simple as possible – the real selling point here. There are plenty of harmonisers on the market but it can take plenty of effort to set them up – picking a key for a song or even a section of a song and having to hit a footswitch to change key when the song modulates. With this you just sing and play and are rewarded with complementary harmonies that fit the tune. Of course this isn't the sort of thing that would fit every situation, but if you play rhythm guitar and sing (or play rhythm guitar behind a singer) and want to expand your onstage sound without too much hassle, make a beeline for Vocalist Live 2. **A**

Digitech Vocalist Live 2

Guitarist RATING ★★★★★