



## REVIEWS

GUITAR PLAYER   GUITAR WORLD   GUITAR ONE   ELECTRONIC MUSICIAN

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### **GUITAR PLAYER - "Stompbox Fever" issue - June, 1995**

"Bixonic Expandora - This massive-sounding mystery fuzz is slightly larger than a can of Skoal, and has gain, tone, and level knobs, plus two internal DIP switches that claim to provide four combinations of fuzz and overdrive. These combinations all sounded the same to us, but fortunately they're thick, toothy, and pretty dang wicked."

### **GUITAR WORLD - "Mind Expanding Meltdown" By Chris Gill - May, 1996**

"Guitarists have been captivated by distortion ever since Link Wray punctured the tweeters on his Premier amp with a pen. Since then countless companies have capitalized on overdrive obsession, developing devices that promise to make your guitar sound more wicked than Joan Collins with menstrual cramps and ruder than Dom DeLuise commandeering a porta-potty at a chili cookoff.

Whereas many companies have adopted a flavor-of-the-month fuzztone philosophy by repackaging their products to exploit current musical trends, the mysterious Bixonic company has come out of nowhere (well, Japan actually) with a device that's unlike anything else out there. The Expandora pedal comes in a round polished aluminum case that looks like a tuna tin. Creating a variety of sounds ranging from subtle overdrive to melt-down fuzz, this can should have been labeled "chunk style."

The Expandora has the usual complement of controls - gain, tone, and level - as well as a bypass footswitch, input and output jacks and a 9-volt adapter jack - nothing out of the ordinary. The gain control provides textures ranging from the slightest amount of breakup to fully saturated distortion that retains excellent note-to-note definition on chords. Best of all the tone cleans up when you turn down the guitar's volume control, even at the most extreme settings. The tone control also covers a wide range, allowing you to dial in anything from razor-sharp Dimebag dirt to muddy Mudhoney midrange to chubby Clapton woman tone. If you like to use your distortion box to slam your amp's input for solos, the Expandora's level control provides a generous amount of boost.

By unscrewing the back cover you're given access to a Pandora's box of tonal options. Two DIP (on/off) switches let you customize the tone and gain circuit to your liking. The back cover depicts three options - distortion, overdrive and crunch. The differences between overdrive and crunch are subtle at best (is there really a difference, anyway?), but the distortion setting yields a higher amount of gain and boosted midrange.

However, there's a fourth, unpictured setting that the instruction sheet warns you not to use. This "forbidden" setting (both DIP switches off) makes your amp sound like its about to explode in a glorious purple haze of clipping, fuzz, and feedback. Notes swell unpredictably (sometimes they cut out all together) and chords create wild oscillations. This setting may not be for everybody, but if you're looking for a new way to annoy your vocalist, this is the ticket.

According to the Expandora's U.S. distributor, the pedal has fallen into the approving hands of Billy Gibbons (look for it in the "She's Killing Me" video), Adrian Belew, Ritchie

Sambora and John Scofield. Because this versatile box - make that can - offers a wide array of useful and unique tones, it's easy to see why such disparate players dig it."

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### ***GUITAR ONE - "Twin Terrors Of Tone" By Pete Prown - December, 1999***

"One of the hot "cult" fuzz boxes of the 90's, the Bixonic Expandora won much of its reputation via an endorsement from ZZ Top's Billy Gibbons, a guitarist considered by many to be "Mr. Tone." The box itself is a cool chrome disk, measuring about 1" tall from the ground and fitted with a heavy-duty footswitch. The controls are basic - gain, tone, and level - but it's what's inside that counts. There you will find the Expandora's fabled DIP switches, which allow many sound solutions. Let's pop it open and see what makes this thing really tick.

Once you unscrew the bottom of the Expandora (a minor aggravation, to be sure), you will find a PC board, nine-volt battery, and very tiny DIP switches. Here you can alter the sound of the box, turning it from an overdrive unit to a super-saturated distortion pedal. In one of the overdrive settings, the Expandora replicates the sound of an old, overdriven Marshall - the tone is warm, bluesy and expressive. Using a Telecaster and vintage-style tube amp, I inexplicably found myself playing old Hendrix and Joe Walsh riffs (think of James Gang's "Funk #49"). The Expandora is such a natural fit to this kind of good ol' rock n roll. Turn the tone knob down, and you'll get a nice, Claptonesque "woman tone," too.

Then I switched the DIP switches to the high-gain position, Ka-boom! The box tuned into a screaming distortion machine, more like an old germanium-fueled Fuzz Face than a soft overdrive pedal. There was a ton of sustain, harmonics, and dynamics - think Hendrix or Stevie Ray. Better still, the tone wasn't too brassy; there's a warmth to this box that is rare for a transistor pedal. The best part of the Expandora is that - unlike many overdrive pedals - it didn't mask the dynamics of my playing in gobs of distorted goo. Sure, there was a rich crunch, but I could really hear the nuances in my licks, which is rare when using an external, tone-sucking pedal.

My guess is that guitarists who get hooked on the Expandora won't be satisfied with just one. You'll want one for your screaming solos and another for softer rhythm parts. Yes, in this case, the hype is actually true - the Expandora is one of the best fuzzboxes of the decade, hands down."

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### ***ELECTRONIC MUSICIAN - From an upcoming article on boutique distortion boxes. - By Mike Levine***

"The Bixonic Expandora has been around for several years, and has been very well received, primarily in Japan and England. Its diminutive size is not immediately apparent in advertisements (like sea monkeys advertised on the backs of comic books), so we were a little surprised when it arrived. The Expandora is an extremely compact puck-shaped silver unit with knobs for gain, tone, and level. Its bottom plate is held on by a single screw (ingeniously attached to the plate so it won't fall out). Inside there are two DIP gain structure switches that combine for crunch, overdrive, and distortion settings, making it the equivalent of three pedals in one. In case you forgot which settings are which, a handy graphic illustration is provided on the bottom of the case. The Expandora has a unique and interesting tone generally, with lots of gain and sustain. With the Gain control cranked in the distortion mode the Expandora produces a very clean and clear singing sound, with sustain for days. Our only complaint is that it lacks low end and is a tad brittle on some settings. Despite its diminutive size the Expandora has a big sound, which ironically, even sounds great with bass."

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