



✓ VG APPROVED GEAR

BOX OF ROCK Fractal Audio Systems AX8

Thanks to the digital revolution, guitarists can plug into a small box and access a world of sounds unimaginable a generation ago. And the digital bar keeps rising, with outfits like Fractal Audio pushing the pace with serious sonic tools. Evidence their powerful AX8 amp modeler and multi-effects floor unit.

Unlike consumer-grade boxes that cost a few hundred bucks and contain a good variety of sounds, the AX8 purports to offer *pro*-grade audio and flexibility, which accounts for its price tag (it's also built like a tank).

The AX8 offers 512 presets, each an entire virtual guitar rig – amp, speaker cab, and effects. Fractal Audio particularly prides itself on its Quantum amp models and Ultra-Res speaker cab sims, and for good reason; many of these presets sound great out of the box with no tweaking.

The sounds are accessed with eight footswitches and three Function switches. Each amp, cab, and effect can be edited within any preset, so if a Recto-type amp yields the monster crunch desired but not quite the right

delay, dive into the menu via the screen and buttons. There's also an onscreen editor—plug the AX8 into a computer via USB and edit to the heart's content. Ultimately, the AX8 can be as simple or as complex as desired.

Once a certain preset is loaded, the eight main footswitches turn into individual effect on/off's, controlling goodies like overdrive, chorus, reverb, delay, compression, rotary, tremolo, flanger, phaser, gate, EQ, looper, scenes, and more. The sounds can be put in the desired order for gigs and many of the sounds can be manipulated with an external expression pedal. Other units have similar effects and features, but again, the name of the game is the supreme richness of these sounds. This is *not* a unit with thin digital models, frying-bacon distortion, or cheap housing and hardware.

The AX8 impressed with its beefy sounds, including super-fat simulations of vintage Fender and Vox, numerous Marshall amps, and saturated Mesa/Boogie and Friedman crunch. Specifically, Fractal Audio's pre-

sets have that big low-end and midrange response, which are the X factors in any great tube amp. Most players want to *feel* that chunk, that speaker moving air, which can be achieved by plugging the AX8 into a PA system or an acoustic-guitar amplifier. Sure, it can be used for effects only through a traditional guitar amplifier, but half the fun is hearing the AX8's killer amp and cab sims through full-range speakers and making the room shake like a big tube stack. Better yet, hook up both systems simultaneously—a PA for full-range roar and an amp for kickass stage volume.

Some users will point out that the AX8 doesn't have as many digital ins/outs as other units (is an AES/EBU jack really necessary on a floor unit?). Others might fret that the AX8 isn't a full-on digital interface for recording, but again, that's not the endgame (the company positions the AX8 below its flagship Axe-Fx).

This floor unit contains some fantastic sounds. It's not inexpensive, but boxes at more than half the price aren't anywhere close to this good. No doubt someone could play a stadium gig with only a six-string and the AX8, plugging straight into the PA and blowing fans away with great sound. With that kind of firepower under the hood, think what it could deliver at your next gig. — **Pete Prown VG**



Price: \$1,399.95 (list)
Info: fractalaudio.com