

SCULPTING SOUNDSCAPES

WITH THE EARTHQUAKER DEVICES **AVALANCHE RUN**



WORDS BY
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One of my first great artistic passions before music was film. I never really got into directing or shooting my own films, (aside from shoestring spy films with my brothers), but I have always loved and appreciated film. Since beginning on my path as a musician, I have paid much more attention to the aspects of the film beyond the visual, namely the acoustic and psychoacoustic. Lately, my focus has been on the Foley effects (the “practical” sound effects; footsteps, dishes clanking, punches, etc.), but even more so on the sounds under the practical that can’t be placed; the sounds that evoke emotional responses. These sounds go beyond just “scared,” “happy” and “sad,” and have the ability to create moods and arouse feelings more powerful than words can describe. They can drop you into neon soaked cities of the future, or the dusty towns of the Old West, with just a well-

placed sound, musical or not.

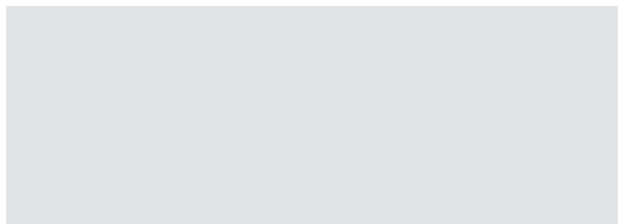
When *Tone Report Weekly* asked me to create one of my signature sonic articles for EarthQuaker’s latest pedal, the Avalanche Run, I couldn’t refuse. Due to my latest film proclivities, I decided to do something a little off the beaten path with this pedal. Instead of opting for the standard fare of trying this unit out in a bunch of musical situations, I decided to flex its muscles in a different way, by doing a bit of film-inspired soundscaping. Since it is a combination reverb and delay with a host of cool control features, I thought it would be perfect for this specific task.

For this demo, I went straight into my DAW, with the help of the Effectrode Blackbird preamp to both add some tube warmth and distortion. The Avalanche Run came after the Blackbird, and I used an expression pedal to control some of the parameters on this pedal. Hope you enjoy!



SECTION I: FLANGE

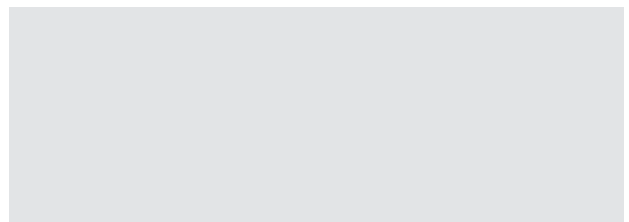
I stumbled on this little hidden feature on accident with the Avalanche Run, thanks to the expression pedal. Most delays will perform faux flanging when turned to a very high speed, and the Avalanche's handling of it is nothing short of haunting. The sound is essentially a comb filtering effect, and sounds very close to one of my favorite pedals of all time, the Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Electric Mistress, on the Filter Matrix setting. With the addition of the reverb on the Avalanche Run, this setting can be very useful for dark space ballads or reflective moments. To achieve this sound, plug an expression pedal into the unit, and set the EXP to control the delay time. Turn the expression pedal to the max setting, and mix in reverb to taste.



SECTION II: CLOCK DELAY

Getting strange clock noises out of my guitar is something I'm no stranger to. I am of the breed of heretics that wear their watch on their right hand, so whenever I am wearing my watch I always hear

ticking coming from my amp. Pickups are transducers (a device which converts sound or vibration into an electrical signal), so naturally, the sound of my watch is picked up and amplified, due to the proximity of my right hand to the pickups whenever I play. I have experimented before with this sound by syncing a delay up to the second hand, and mangling the sound with phasers, distortions, and filters, creating many a nightmarish cacophony of ticking noises, all from my humble little analog watch (come on, you wouldn't expect me to wear a digital one now would you?). To get this tone, make sure you have—in addition to the Avalanche Run—an analog watch and a booster/distortion of some kind. The sound of the ticking is fairly faint, so it will need a bit of boosting to be at a healthy volume. Take off your watch and put it up against the selected pickup, and listen for the ticking. Once you hear it, set the tap tempo on your Avalanche Run on the downbeat from your watch, so the delays fill up the empty space between the seconds. Set your EXP again to control delay time, and go for it.



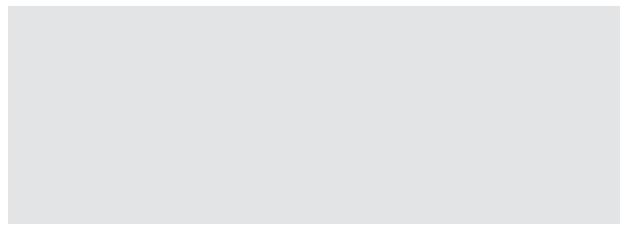


SECTION III: LOST IN SPACE

I'm a sucker for a good sci-fi story, but I'm an even bigger sucker for good a sci-fi soundtrack. The sound design for sci-fi movies since the '70s has been the sonic playground and forefront for the most talented sound designers and musicians. From the cheesy wobbly Theremin tones to all the various bleep-bloops heard in films like *The Day the Earth Stood Still* and TV shows like *Flash Gordon* or *Doctor Who*, science fiction always gave forward-thinking experimental musicians a free pass and blank slate

to do whatever weird sounds they could come up with. This led to some incredible innovations in musical spaces and studios such as the BBC Radiophonic Workshop and Skywalker Sound, to name a few. While we may not have expensive ARP synthesizers or thousands of dollars' worth of tape with all the time in the world, we live in a time where we can have access to great sounds in the comfort of our own homes. This next sonic experiment takes full advantage of the Avalanche Run's reverb algorithm, and leaves us with a feeling of wandering in the vastness of space. To achieve this sound, set the EXP to control the reverb's Mix parameter.

Set the delay to the flange setting we discussed above, and mix it down to where it's barely noticeable (this adds movement to the tone). Max out the expression pedal, and be wary of timing. Since it's a fully-wet signal, it is slightly delayed, so keep that in mind. The sound has its own swell to it, making it awesome for spacier interludes.



SECTION III(B): SET THE CONTROLS FOR THE HEART OF THE SUN

We saw how the fully-wet reverb setting sounds clean, so let's throw in a little distortion, and knock our

little space cadets off course. Use all the same settings as before, but add distortion and "pinch" or pluck all the strings together in chord. It will swell up and sound positively massive, like a solar flare lighting up the cold expanse.

SECTION IV: WAHSCAPES

This final maneuver is a trick I learned from my friend, Bjørn Riis, lead guitarist of the Norwegian prog band Airbag. He has used this sonic device on almost every album with Airbag, and I think it is an ingenious little contrivance for creating space and ambiance. He utilizes it during quieter, more meandering moments in the music, and pans it either left or right to really create this feeling of isolation or alienation, a theme that is very prevalent in Airbag's music. In order to do this, there are a few requirements. First, you must





Time Repeats Tone Mix

Decay Mix

EXP

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Activate Avalanche Run EarthQuaker Devices Tap

BASS

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BASS REVERB

have a wah pedal. Any will do, but usually the rule of thumb is, the wider the sweep the better, since you can get a bigger range of tones. Put the wah first in your signal chain, followed by any boosts, overdrives, and distortions. Place the Avalanche Run last in the chain, so we can get the desired sound heard here. Now, when it comes time to play, mute the strings with your fretting hand and strum percussively across the strings, matching your tempo on the off-beat of the delay. Rock the wah pedal back and forth while doing this to create this cool effect. The reverb and delay on the Avalanche Run work hand-in-hand here, adding all the necessary ambient space to the vocal tone. I

really don't do it justice here, so if you want to hear a true master at work, check out Bjørn's work with Airbag.

There you have it friends, a bit of my foray into the strange and uncharted territory of the EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run. If you love ambience, weird noises, expansive soundscapes, and huge tones, this pedal is most definitely for you. You can see it has its uses beyond just the pedalboard, and it could just be the tool you need for your next budding film score. Until next time friends!

