G LAB
Guitar System Controller

There is a stroke of fate in the fact that almost on "request" of Readers active on the "Gitarzysta" internet forum it comes to me to test devices and technologies.

INFORMATION

SPECIFICATION
modes: Loop, Switch, MIDI;
MIDI programs: 127;
effect loop: 4;
switchable amp channels: 2;
loop presets: 30 (6 banks with 5 presets each);
supplying power to effects: 9V (max. 160 mA);
other: TUNER output; LINK output;
additional equipment: wah-wah effect sensor-pad
SUPPLIED BY
ELZAB SA, Zabrze, tel. 032-272-26-23,
www.glab.com.pl
PRICE 890 zł

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This time the need is to „civilize" tangle of cables laying on stage, to get rid of a stack of power suppliers or a sack of R9 batteries, and simply to make easier the stage life which for this moment meant crazy dance "kazachok", performed to switch on or off at the same time (well, almost at the same time) few effect boxes. The followers of guitar multieffects rather don't meet with this problem, however considering context of this test, appears quite interesting future for development. The real addressees for this proposal of G LAB brand are owners of arsenal of effect boxes which should be connected one by one during a rehearsal or a concert. As appears for them the solution of their problems exists right here - in Poland and thanks the company which I would never suspect for guitar connotations.

ELZAB S.A., because this company it concerns, are known mainly from production fiscal cash registers for shops, so from where such a musical theme? Hence that under Elzab wings was born G LAB what means Guitar Laboratory) and it happened that music (specially guitar one) is stronger even than fiscal office. Now it's time to look at this device carefully and find out what generally applies do this GSC. Let's imagine that a guitar player is using an amp with two channels (clean and overdriven one) and in front of the amp is placed a chain of effects in form of stomp boxes: compressor, distortion, chorus, delay and reverb. During playing rhythm our player is using compressor, chorus and clean channel of the amp, and during solo playing only overdriven amp channel and delay. It is obvious that to change from "rhythm" to "solo" playing mode this player have to "simultaneously" switch off two stomp boxes, to change the amp channel and to switch on the additional effect. Regardless as you count it there are four operations to perform. Using GSC one is enough. How it is possible? We will see!

STRUCTURE

The GSC module is the construction inside the steel cabinet resembling typical multieffect at the first sight, which of cause it is not, however after connecting effects (not necessarily stomp boxes) it functionally becomes the centre of the tone management. The cabinet is the low profile, not to deep box, occupying not more room on the floor than is necessary. All controlling and signalizing elements have been located on the main panel. The exception is the memory access lock placed on the side panel. It is specially placed there to avoid the incidental switching of this lock. The attention is focused on six white footswitches. Maybe plastic footswitches do not inspire your trust but their function they perform perfectly, mainly thanks that switching them almost do not require pressing for they work almost as touch controlled ones and silently.
Contrastive colouring of the casing and additional (however a bit faint) backlighting of footswitches reasonably improve orientation at the dark stage.

BANKS

Each of six footswitches perform the memory bank switch function. It is enough to hold for a moment footswitch pressed to activate the desired bank. Selection of the bank is indicated by diodes: three first banks continuously lit diodes (in three different colours), and three other ones are indicated by the same blinking diodes. Moreover on the front panel there are diodes over corresponding footswitches indicating active loops. The separate part of this panel is the section of switching modes of working: these are three touch buttons: LOOP (so handling with effects connected to loops), SWITCH (handling with amp channels or with effects built-inside an amp) and MIDI (responsible for transmitting MIDI commands to external devices). All these is completed with the potentiometer which can be used for setting global volume of our programmed preset.

IN MIDI working mode the device can transmit out MIDI commands which allow to change a program in external effects.

CONNECTORS

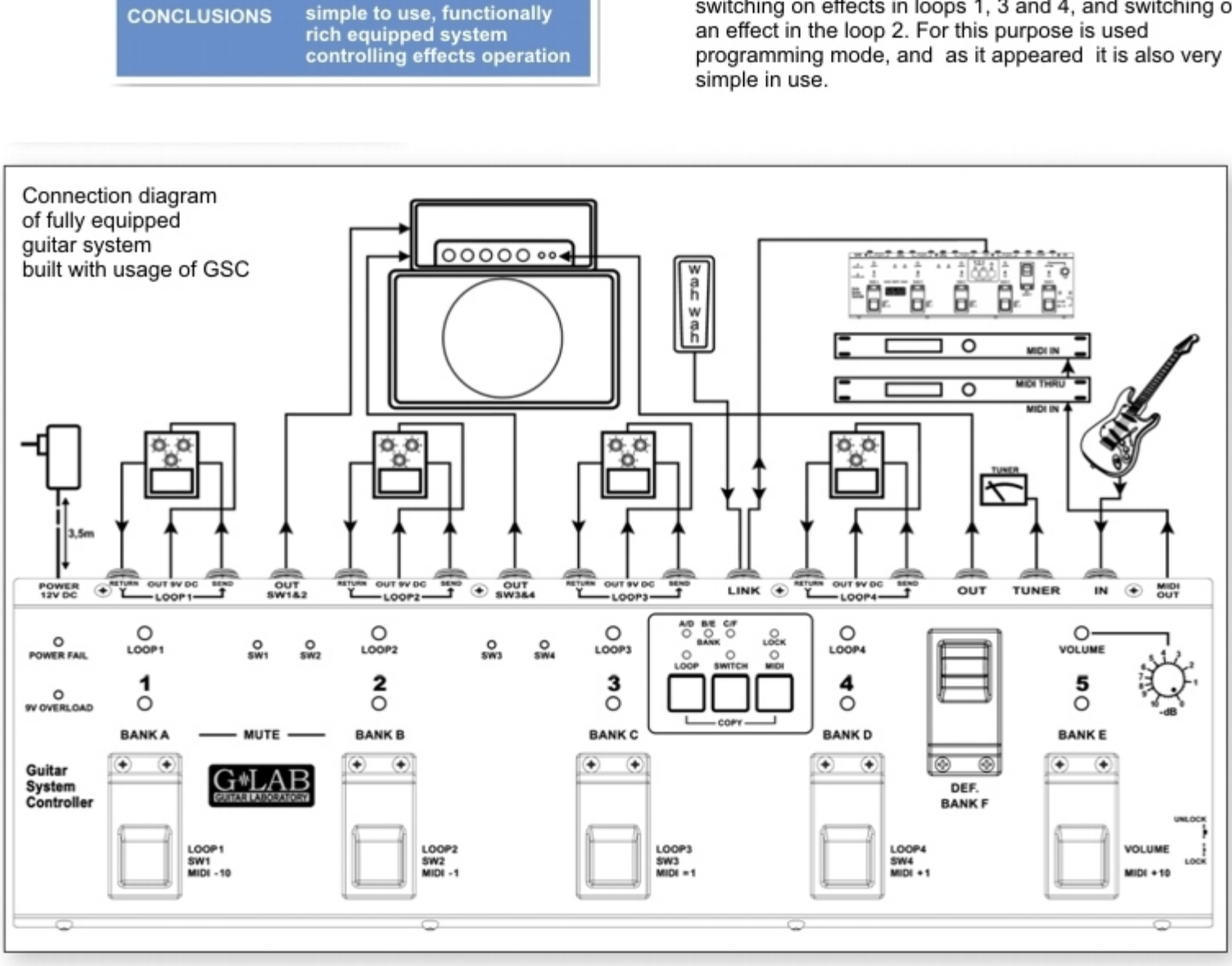
Connectors' panel consists of the set of four outputs (SEND) to effects and the same number of inputs (RETURN) from used by us stomp boxes. Each set of an output and an input called LOOP1, LOOP2, LOOP3 and LOOP4 is serial according to the previous one. In no way it means that any not connected effect in any loop can disconnect the whole chain. The matter is that guitar signal inputted though the main GSC input first is transmitted to the LOOP1, then after passing it (even when the real effect is not connected) it is transmitted to the next loop LOOP2, and so on… It means that placing our stomp boxes in loops we should use the regular rules, so e.g. distortion type effects as first ones, later modulation effects (chorus, flanger), and at the end delaying effects (delay, reverb). You should also realise that you can connect more than one effect in one loop. It is worth to do it when we often use few effects at the same time. Of cause there is nothing against that loops handled by GSC would be preceded by an effect connected pre main input (e.g. noise gate). The same applies to the device output just post it we can use for example a reverb effect. Anyhow you look the possibility to handle with effects are quite large and looking to it from the point of my needs I can not imagine situation that there would be no room for any of used by me effects. GSC is equipped with very useful possibility to supply all used effects with 9V voltage (DC). Each loop is equipped with power supply socket to connect an effect to it, more, we can also find four cables in the package set. The power supply adapter, the GSC is equipped with, is capable to supply 160mA to effects , what is enough for e.g. supplying four Boss stomp boxes. In case in the system appears an effect requiring more power the GSC will indicate overloading by lighted up diode and in such a case we should provide such a "gourmand" a separate power supply. We should also appreciatingly mention that designers have shown big knowledge in the field of supplying energy to the GSC itself flexible power supply cord is 3.5 meter long what assures very convenient installation on stage.
The weakness of this solution is that users of effects with reciprocal polarisation sockets (and still such stomp boxes exist) will have to handle this problem themselves supplying such effects from a separate source of power or preparing the special power supply cable. Remaining GSC connectors are: two outputs for controlling amp channels, output for connecting a tuner, MIDI output and LINK output, designed to connect another GSC module or the special wah-wah pad. This pad, sensitive to pressing, indicates placing a foot on the pedal.

As is expected from the respectable control center, the GSC has been equipped with a reasonable number of connectors, among which we can find also power supply sockets for supplying external effects.

TEST RESULTS	
FUNCTIONALITY	●●●●●●
MANUFACTURING	●●●●
QUALITY/PRICE	●●●●●●
TONE	do not apply
CONCLUSIONS	simple to use, functionally rich equipped system controlling effects operation

HANDLING

Studding deeply the User Manual you can have impression that using the GSC is a bit complicated., however nothing prevents you to approach to this subject in more practical way. So I have taken from the manual only necessary information and I've connected to the first loop the compressor, to the second one multieffect GT-8 (I've used only its overdrives), to the third one I've connected chorus and … I believed my intuition. It have occurred in a very short time that selecting effects in the Loop mode do not require any special knowledge.
Enough is to select by footswitches these loops which we want to activate. It is really very simple and it not really different from the situation when we have to switch each separate effect. The idea of this device is somewhere else it is about switching by using just a single footswitch e.g. switching on effects in loops 1, 3 and 4, and switching off an effect in the loop 2. For this purpose is used programming mode, and as it appeared it is also very simple in use.



G LAB Guitar System Controller (shortcut GSC) is the well-considered, functional and not „overloaded" device, very practical at the stage and in the calm studio.

WE PROGRAM

The memory structure of GSC are six banks from A to F. Each bank has got five cells (presets) what means that we are able to store 30 presets totally, so the combinations of switched on at the same time effects. It is really a lot and completely enough for any stage occasion. To store our own preset is enough to select a bank and a preset in which we save chosen configuration, by footswitches we select loops which should be active and we save it in the memory. Generally it is everything. Then we select another preset (in the same or other bank), we select loops and save. The whole operation to create preset takes few seconds. The saved preset yet we can enrich with equalizing or changing its volume (e.g. solo preset should be lauder). The knob and potentiometer named VOLUME is used for it. Completed preset we save again. Another modification of a preset can be adding to the preset amp channel switching command. For this purpose we select preset (empty or with already programmed loops) , with go to Switch mode and we activate selected SW1-2 or SW3-4 channels by corresponding footswitches. Again saving and done! So we can secure the results of our works pressing the memory access LOCK switch. When while playing a song we recall our preset then GSC will activate desired loops (means switching off not in use effects and switching on those in use ones) together with programmed amp channel.
By way of compensation for those of you whose intuition will not lead to the aim and even the paper manual will not help, I've got good information: at the www.glab.com.pl web site the manufacturer makes accessible the user manual in the form of a video manual. Really praiseworthy!

MIDI

In the MIDI mode the device can transmit MIDI commands. I pay your attention to possibility of using this function for program changing at external effects (effects processors), which accept MIDI commands. Those devices can be also guitar multieffects (what I've described in the "Gitarzysta" 4/2007 and 7/2007 editions) or completely other MIDI devices, e.g. drum automats or keyboard synthesizers. When we switch the GSC into MIDI mode, the footswitches which for this moment switched banks, presets or loops, start to serve MIDI commands transmission. The central footswitch transmits MIDI program No. 1 , its right-hand neighbor increases the program No. by 1 and its left-hand neighbor decreases the program No. by 1. The marginal footswitches increase or decrease program No. by 10. The GSC controller transmits PC commands (Program Change) in the range 1-127, so if anyone would like to control e.g. multieffect Boss GT-8 by this controller, then should take care about placing presets in the first 127 memory cells. The GSC is not able to address higher program numbers, and in fact, it doesn't need for 127 combinations of presets (so also tones) is still a lot.

CONCLUSIONS

Summarizing, we can honestly state, that somebody who doesn't like guitar multieffects for the tone of stomp boxes is "more authentic" as he claims, and at the same time he wants to assure himself comfort while controlling the work of owned effects, now he doesn't need to worry over this we can state that the problem is solved. The GSC will perform this task, and additionally will become the element which organize the redundant cabling. I know personally at least two guitar players who have problem with this and are searching for the solution. Brief visit at the "Gitarzysta" forum will confirm the fact that there are much more persons searching for something like GSC. G LAB Guitar System Controller is the well-considered, highly functional and not „overloaded" device, very practical at the stage and in the calm studio. And offered at very attractive price. Keep it up!