

## Interview – Tone Freak Effects

### Could you introduce your brand please?

Tone Freak hand builds guitar effects pedals in the United States. Tone Freak started as a vanity web site for displaying my guitar gear and website development skills. I acquired theToneFreak.com domain in 1999, so that name has been associated with me for over 15 years. Tone Freak, LLC dba Tone Freak Effects officially started as a guitar pedal builder in 2007, although I had been doing pedals since about 2005/2006.

### What motivated you to launch yourself in the manufacture of guitar pedal effects?

I had no intention of creating a business out of building effects pedals. I mainly built pedals for myself and some of my friends who also play guitar. Those friends told other friends and all of a sudden, I started getting a steady stream of emails asking me to build pedals from people I didn't even know. I started standardizing my build processes, created a proper logo, updated my website and filed my company with California state.

Things really started growing when I met David Friedman (Friedman Amplification) at the 2009 NAMM show. At least I think it was 2009. Dave had emailed me and asked to meet at the Voodoo Lab booth. He had some designs and ask if I would produce them. Through our collaboration, the Naked OD and Buff Puff were born. All of a sudden I began receiving a lot of emails for dealership inquiries and the orders started flowing in at a really good pace. Soon, I was international selling all over Europe and Asia. I worked hard at growing Tone Freak, but Dave Friedman was the catalyst that launched Tone Freak in the big leagues. I started seeing my products on pedals boards and racks of the pros. Dave just started putting my pedals in his clients board and rack builds. Dave has the golden ears in this industry... and people follow his recommendations regarding guitar tone.

### Could you describe your range of overdrive pedals? Some distortion or fuzz pedals?

The Abunai 2 started it all. It was just before my dog, named Abunai, passed. I had a circuit, but needed the name. Then Abunai passed away and the decision became easy... it would be known as Abunai. The original Abunai was a Japan only piece with different specs. Abunai 2 has changes that up the gain, make the tone control taper more evenly, and offers 3 different clipping variations.

The Naked OD is the "More Marshall" sound. Dave and I tweaked it to drive a 1968/1969 Plexi he had in his old shop. Sweet amp! The Naked OD can drive a Marshall that's already breaking up to one that is fully cranked. Dave was very particular in ensuring that the basic characteristic of the Plexi remained intact, while pushing it over the edge. Not a lot of gain like the Abunai 2 or the Severe, but just enough.

The Severe is my "Alice In Chains" pedal. I wanted to create something heavy, with solid low end. Many times when you up the gain, bottom end gets sloppy. I wanted something I can play "Them Bones" and not need to stack another pedal. The "Brite" switch helps the pedal adapt to different amplifiers. Some amps are darker or brighter than others, so the "Brite" switch has 3 positions a guitarist can choose that match their amp.

The Abunai X is a newer overdrive. I backed off the gain a bit, changed the tone section, put in different clipping options and a number of other things to get it to breathe a more than my other pedals. I know pedals don't "breathe", but it sort of describes how the pedal feels and reacts to my playing. Lots of low end with a dash of mid-range. Pairing the Abunai X with my Peavey Classic 50 2x12 combo really reveals the pedal's ability to sustain a note.

### What your pedals are different from others? What are their characteristics?

Honestly, there exists a lot of builders out there doing great things. We all hear things differently and I believe that's what makes one builder's OD different from another builder's OD. None are better than the other. And

don't forget that it all depends how the guitarist buying your pedal hears things as well. Not everyone is going to like my stuff. Some will buy it one day, and sell it the next. That's the nature of searching of one's personal tone. Others will keep my pedals in their signal chain forever.

### **New projects of pedals to come?**

I have the Valencia, which was originally called the Abunai 808. A friend of mine, Matt Valencia, commissioned me to make a clone of a TS-9 that had died. Well, I didn't make an exact clone and tried to make it my own without losing the characteristics that Matt enjoyed about his TS-9. There are probably 5 Abunai 808's in existence. I even saw a guy dissect an Abunai 808 bashing how it's so close to a TS808... well, no surprise, that's how it was exactly designed. Recently, more people were asking about it, so I renamed it "Valencia" and finally put it in production.

There's the Fuzz Buzz, which is my first fuzz pedal. Fuzz controls the amount of "fuzz" and the Buzz control interacts with the fuzz to give it different characteristics. The Fuzz and Buzz controls interact with each other to achieve some almost OD sounds. 3 way tone switch and Volume complete the package. I have a bunch of projects that I need to find the time to make

### **Your advice to choose a great boutique overdrive pedal?**

Trust your ears. It could be the best reviewed or hyped pedal in the world, but if it doesn't work with your rig, then it just doesn't work

### **The last word for our readers?**

Thanks to you, Joris, for giving me this opportunity! I also want to thank everyone who stuck with me during the good times, but especially the rough times. And to all those who inspired and instructed me.

Jocelyn Tabata (my CFO and amazing wife), Dave Friedman (Friedman Amplification), Rob Navaratte (Tone Merchants), Scott Eric Olivier, Matt Valencia, Chris Nix, Jeff Schroeder, Peter Thorn, Matt Voltin (Mad Ape), Brian Oaks, Shawn Tubbs, Steve Mattucci, John Ou, Flint Mavis, Chris Ptacek, Aaron Allen, Mike Kobayashi, Moby Pomerance (Guitar shissit), pedalGEEK, Tone Freaks District, Looper's Paradise, Guitar Shop Axel, Joe Morgan (Morgan Amps), Staff at Nobel Pedals, Lyle Caldwell (Psionic Audio), Brian Wampler (Wampler Pedals), Keith Vonderhulls (BYOC), R.G. Keen, Jack Orman, Aron Nelson, Mike Tabata (no relation).

To those I missed... thanks!

Dereck Tabata