

B. With Mode A selected, any Instrument you enable will respond in true mono mode (i.e., one note per channel) to information coming in on all six guitar channels (one for each string). Single-note-per-channel response is important for the most guitar-like feel, because you can't play more than one note at a time on a guitar string. With Mono Mode B, each Instrument responds to one channel, which works well when you want each string to make its own sound; otherwise Mode B is very similar to Mono Mode A.

Layers. The secret to truly responsive MIDI guitar is to set each Layer for the new Minimode option. This lets notes change pitch without retriggering. In other words, if you trill between two notes (or slide from one note to another, or do a hammer-on) without re-plucking, there will be a pitch change but the note will not retrigger. This is absolutely vital to getting a good guitar "feel" out of any MIDI guitar/synth combination. The Legato Layer option, which I figured would work well because that's the name of the note assignment mode that makes the TX802 and TX81Z work so well with MIDI guitar, does not work as well as Minimode.

Patches. Tweaking patches is important. Try setting the amplitude envelope sustain to zero and select a very short release time (if any). Of course, you may not always want to have your synth respond like a guitar; for pads and other sounds, lengthen the release and sustain.

Pitch bend. Some MIDI guitars, like the Quantar, work best if the pitch bend range extends to plus and minus 12 semitones. Fortunately, the EPS-16 Plus can handle this. In addition to the per-patch pitch bend setting, it's also possible to set a Global pitch bend range. The main idea here is to set a pitch bend range that's compatible with what your MIDI guitar wants (although you can do

mismatches for special effects, such as having small physical string bends produce unusually large pitch variations).

In terms of tracking and responsiveness, the difference between a sound tweaked for MIDI guitar and a stock disk is night and day. Even if you don't adjust the envelope parameters, at least make sure you set the MIDI Mode and Layer options as specified above. I'd also advise creating a boot disk where you save the Global parameters for your MIDI guitar needs.

The only real drawback is that once the EPS goes into Mono Mode A, you can't do cool multi-timbral stuff with a sequencer — all MIDI channels are routed to the selected Instrument (although Mono Mode B leaves two instruments unused, their single-note response limits their usefulness with sequencers). The upshot is that with MIDI guitar, the EPS-16 Plus becomes like the synths of old, dedicated to a single function.

Well, considering the results, I can live with that. I'm glad I didn't get discouraged with MIDI guitar somewhere along the way; the payoff has been worth it. The price of admission remains relatively high and there's always a lot of effort involved in getting a system together from a programming standpoint. Still, I enjoy playing synths from a controller that's "guitarist friendly." If you're a MIDI guitar player with an EPS-16 Plus, try these tips and get ready to play MIDI guitar instead of work on it. ■ RC030821

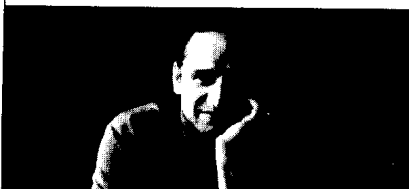
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