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**MUSIC IN CONTEXT – MPP1**

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# Table of Contents

<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION:</b> .....	<b>4</b>
1.1 The Origin of WAH-WAH Effect .....	4
1.2 HISTORY.....	4
<b>2 WAH-WAH TO CRY BABY</b> .....	<b>7</b>
2.1 CRY BABY AND THE ARTISTS.....	8
2.2 1960 to 2000.....	9
2.3 When effect affected the technology .....	10
<b>3 BIBLIOGRAPHY:</b> .....	<b>13</b>

## List of Figures

Figure 1: Clyde McCoy named as their first pedal .....	5
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# 1 Introduction:

## 1.1 The Origin of WAH-WAH Effect

Having had experience in the music field, we as artists are aware of how essential the tones play in our musical life as every genre has its own special tonality which expresses everything about that specific genre. If we begin to count the number of tones and effects available for the artists in the present time, it will take eternity to establish the exact number, however, things were not similar in the early 60's. Most of the bands and musicians were looking for something distinct after the invention of the electric guitar, though that invention is a whole history. So, 60's was the era of many famous artists and bands like The Beatles, Jimi Hendrix etc. It was the time when musicians, specially guitar players, were looking for different tones to modify their sound. Subsequently, during the same phase, one effect took birth and changed the whole music prospect. Gradually, that effect was regarded as the 'Wah – Wah' Effect and at present, it is referred to as the 'Cry Baby'. The man who invented this effect was Mr. Bradley J Plunkett in 1966.



**Brad Plunkett**  
**New U.R.E.I.**  
**Director of Engineering**

## 1.2 HISTORY

As the sound of this effect or so called 'wacka-wacka' sound, the history of this pedal was a chaos. Mr. Plunkett worked for Thomas Organ Co. also known as Warwick Electronics

Inc. as an engineer. He created this sound by changing the mid-range-boost (MRB) of the Vox organ pedal after attaining the sound he required, he realized that this is not new in late 1950's, as it has already been used previously. The famous Jazz Guitarist Mr. Peter Van Wood also operated this sound by using his Hammond organ expression pedal in 1955. Upon realizing that his sound was being used earlier, Plunkett decided to do some more research to find the exact sound he was working on. Whilst researching, he created something accidentally, after which, many people considered the wah-wah pedal as an accidental invention. There was a famous Vox amplifier named Vox AC100, which became famous after The Beatles U.S Tour which consisted of different tones. However, Mr. Plunkett, who was working under Stan Cuttler as a junior electronic engineer, tried to implement the same style with that Vox AC100. He tried to change the MRB and made some alterations with the frequencies. When he first heard this sound, he was astonished as this type of effect had never been heard or used before. Plunkett said it is the collaboration of Thomas Organ Co. and Vox because all the equipment that he operated was by Thomas Organ Co. and the equipment he tried on was Vox amplifier. It was so sensational and unbelievable, that everyone seemed puzzled on how to use this affect and through which instruments. On the other hand, there was a famous American Jazz trumpet player of the same era, Mr. Clyde Lee McCoy. They requested him to try this new effect that they invented, for which they organized a whole orchestral night with McCoy. Due to his popularity, they were certain that a huge number of people would attend, which would be considered beneficial as it would've been their first time using the Trumpet.



*Figure 1: Clyde McCoy named as their first pedal*



## 2 WAH-WAH to CRY BABY

After this innovation, everything had changed. It took a lot of time for musicians to comprehend this tone. As time passed by, this effect became very popular due to which everyone grew immune to it and began listening to this effect in many commercials, porn movies etc. However, it took ages for many musicians to get used to it and to figure out what experiments they could try with it. After using wah-wah pedal with trumpet, Plunkett changed some circuits and approached his friend with the pedal, who was a guitarist. The moment he plugged in his guitar with the pedal, the result they received was tremendous. It seemed a little difficult for Plunkett because he had to make regular changes in the frequency, but nevertheless, he managed it and worked it out eventually. In the early 50's, guitarists were attracted by the Tape Delay effect, by switching their volume control on and off. When wah-wah pedal collaborated with the guitar, the whole music scene changed abruptly. Big Jim Sullivan was the first guy who recorded wah-wah effect in 1961. He was a known session player of that generation and an incredible teacher. He taught famous guitarist like Ritchie Blackmore of Deep Purple. After gaining popularity, this effect began to make an impact amongst others, which led other companies to create this effect. However, except VOX, many electronic companies like JIM DUNLOP began producing a better version of wah pedals and designed a new name to this effect known as CRY BABY. After recording in 1961, the pedal was first available to the other musicians in 1966. It took them 5 years to patent the pedal to get a license to produce in countries like U.K.

Mr. Jim Dunlop also produced under the license of VOX, after which, many companies began imitating the pedals but no one could still compete with Dunlop. Musicians were so happy after having one more thing to experiment with, after the effects like Tremolo, Spring Reverb, Fuzz, Tape Delay etc. It was time for Cry Baby to rule the music industry and at present, it still holds the same importance as it consists of amazing effects. Cry Baby is an effect that one can never get bored of and every time you use it, it assures to produce something new.



## 2.1 CRY BABY AND THE ARTISTS

After the manufacturing of the Cry Baby pedal, there were still a lot of musicians who did not have an idea regarding the usage of cry baby. Many famous artists were involved in making cry baby more popular after experimenting with the pedal in their albums. For instance, Frank Zappa played an important role in making the cry baby popular by recording many songs like Flower Punk in 1968, he was the guy who introduced wah-wah pedal to the legend Jimi Hendrix. After listening to Zappa using cry baby pedal, it seemed like the era of wah-wah pedal. Cry Baby opened the door for so many genres in 1970, that the audience were blown away after listening to the tone. It was said that the wah-wah legacy was started by Jimi Hendrix in 1970 by giving songs like Voodoo Child and The Burning of The Midnight Lamp.



Every guitarist dreams to play like Hendrix and wish to use the wah-wah pedal like he did. After the year 1970, the demand for cry baby pedal reached the heights and by luck, the permit to produce cry baby in UK was acceptable after 5 years. After all the hassle, it became easily available in many countries and many artists became famous by doing something



different with cry baby. After being a part of genres like Blues, cry baby was ready for rock n roll and dance. Music artists like Temptation produced couple of famous songs by using cry baby. In the 1980's, the pedal was used for Rock music and nobody imagined that it would give birth to numerous upcoming great guitarists. Black Sabbath was one of the first band who used cry baby pedal in Rock history, after which, Led Zeppelin recorded some songs with this amazing cry baby pedal. After Rock music, cry baby traveled to the world of genres. In 1976, artists like Wah-Wah Watson tried to play some Jazz music with cry baby. Gradually, cry baby stepped into the world of Pop Music by the very well-known artist Prince. Besides the bands and artists, even music composers and music directors began using cry baby effect in their music scores and background. Wah-Wah pedal was introduced in the Reggae genre by Bob Marley, Punk genre by RHPC (Red Hot Chili Pepper). Nonetheless, cry baby took a big turn towards Metal music due to which many heavy guitar solos and riffs were composed in the history of Metal by using cry baby. Famous music composers like Michael Jackson and James Brown used wah-wah effect in their songs that enhanced the ability of cry baby. The researcher found that wah-wah pedal started as an effect used by blues artists and now, after exploring the world music, it is still alive and as loud as it was in 1960.

## **2.2 1960 to 2000**

The investigation proves the whole life of the wah-wah pedal and how it originated as the cry baby. In 1982, when Thomas Organ Company was shut down, Jim Dunlop was the only one company who were producing the cry baby pedals and there were still some other companies who were copying the idea of Dunlop but they were not successful in doing so. While travelling the world music, many suggestions and complaints were made against the company regarding the cry baby pedal. Many artists desired to customize their pedal according to the use of cry baby pedal. Dunlop took upon all the challenges and worked hard to satisfy the needs of the company's customers. They improved the Jack of the pedal because normally, the old jack tends to rust easily and quite quickly. They also improved the switch foot of the pedal by increasing the cycles by 500,000.



Some artists who don't use the wah-wah effect in the whole song were slightly confused whether the pedal was switched on or off. Therefore, Dunlop came up with the idea of attaching a Red and Green light which indicates if the pedal is on or off to eliminate any confusion thereafter. These improvements changed the world of wah-wah pedal. As years passed by, technology came into existence and hit the music culture by providing easy methods and solutions for problems that most of the artists usually go through.

### **2.3 When effect affected the technology**

When it was hard to obtain a wah-wah pedal in the 1960's, musicians were strained to observe everything on their own. That was the time when artists required technology to find for solutions. Everyone were familiar with this term 'Technology' as it was highly used in every field, be it science or music. It is known to make our work easier and save our time. Similar was the situation for cry baby because when the tone was discovered, no one was sure of how it would affect the music world, but as time passed by, many improvements took place and many new things were determined which made a huge impact in the world of music.



The history always stood as an example for people, for instance, if we must compare with time, the present scenario of the music has totally changed and is different from its own history. Musicians have many options now as compared to the past. Every country produces remarkable music with extraordinary tones and effects. There are now hundred forms of wah-wah pedal and each one is unique. Plug-ins like guitar Rig provides you with wide variety of guitar tones and effects and it offers so many options in tones. As per the research the Wah effect available on such DAW's is not much effective than the other effects like Fuzz, Overdrive etc. Auto Wah is the term used in these DAW's because there is no specific expression pedal so the software allows you to play with auto wah effect but there is an option for changing the time and the speed. Even customized tones of famous artists are available. Software like Logic Pro X and Ableton permits musicians to compose music in their own way while technology can open doors for genres like EDM, which is highly popular and ruling the music scene in present time. During earlier times, tones used to express the artists but now, artists must choose their own tone. Young generation are very much influenced by the latest music technology because it is so easy to transfer your ideas into softwares and get what you constitute. It is very convenient to edit or make any changes you wish for. Also, there is a huge range of options available for every effect you wish to add. As per research, wah-wah is more than just a pedal with a unique effect, it also gives you many options to experiment with. By changing frequencies along with some experiments, cry baby was a spectacular invention for the music history. There are variety of effects and tones available today, but nothing changes in the demand of cry baby.

Sweet Spot is the place in the cry baby pedal which gives the perfect amount of attack artists want. Every artist has different sweet spot which makes them different from other artists who use wah-wah pedal or cry baby pedal. Everything in technology happens unhurriedly but its influence remains permanently, some examples for such technology is Effect Units or some call them Effect Processor and Stomp boxes. Such processors are the hub of thousands of effects at one place, not only effects they have pre-amps and many other important effects like delay, reverb, chorus etc. One can customize or use presets in these stomp boxes, these are same as software like Guitar Rig but more real and portable.

The questions researcher answered in this essay was - How was Wah-Wah Pedal invented? How hard was it in the early time to have cry baby? How easy is it now for present artists? How did it become popular? Is it only a tone or an artist who made wah-wah different from other tones?

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