

Mac PC What is it? A synth with a formant filter and loads of control PRICE: €139
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SUGAR BYTES Unique

The creators of Vogue serve up a surprise in the form of an unusual virtual synthesizer. We sample the sweet delights of Unique...



▲ Speak your mind with Unique's fabulous formant-filtered phenomes

► SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

PC: 1.6GHz CPU, 512MB RAM
Mac: 1.8GHz PPC CPU/1.6GHz Intel CPU, 512MB RAM

► TEST SYSTEMS

Mac: 2.16GHz Intel Core 2 Duo iMac, 1GB RAM, OS X 10.4.9, Cubase 4, GarageBand

On the DVD
AUDIO DEMOS
 You'll find three examples of Unique's talents in the Audio Demos folder

► ALTERNATIVELY
MHC Voxynth
 N/A » N/A » \$89 in bundle
 MHC's cross-platform Voxynth offers lots of vowel formants and comes as part of a generous bundle. Less controllable than Unique

ConcreteFX Vocal
 N/A » N/A » \$46
 Vocal is dirt cheap and has lots of control over its formants, though it's Windows-only

We love being taken by surprise. Here at cm, we're the first to admit that we sometimes get our fill of the seemingly endless buffet of virtual analogue synths and run-of-the-mill ROMplers. It's nice when a developer delivers something with a slightly exotic flavour.

We have to confess that Sugar Bytes' new cross-platform Unique didn't have our mouths watering when we installed it – it looks a bit bland. However, like some cream-filled confection, Unique hides something tasty beneath that plain exterior.

Unique is a dual-oscillator synthesizer plug-in available in VST and AU formats. Each oscillator offers a selection of five waveforms. The obligatory sawtooth and pulse waves are here, along with noise, triple saw and triple FM waves. The latter pair offer extra fodder for your filters. The triple saw is a sort of stacked sawtooth generator with a spread control, which is useful for those ever-popular trance stabs. The triple FM waveform gives you the ability to craft metallic, frequency-modulated timbres.

Each oscillator section has an independent ADSR-style envelope for

independent control over the level, and there's a mix section where you can blend the oscillators and perform some nifty polyphonic panning tricks. There's also an additional sub-oscillator strapped into the master section for added oomph.

Don't talk back

While the oscillators aren't terribly exciting when taken on their own, the sound of the instrument springs to life when it hits the filter section. Needless to say, analogue high-pass, low-pass and band-pass varieties are in place, along with a comb filter. These all sound fairly convincing and ensure that you won't run out of classic analogue sounds any time soon.

This is all well and good but, again, nothing we haven't heard before. It's only when you activate the Vowel Filter mode that Unique begins to earn the right to its name. The Vowel Filter allows you to string together two or four vowel formants and play them back in a multitude of ways. You can use an envelope, LFO or mod wheel to scan through them, or the dedicated four-step sequencer. Such acrobatics are great fun and often inspiring.

Beyond the filter, Unique offers a couple of effects processors with the usual phaser, delay, reverb, lo-fi processor and another filter. Oddly, the filter is only available in the first slot, while a chorus takes its place in the second effects generator. The delay offers a built-in filter with cutoff and resonance controls for those old-school echoes. In addition to these effects, you'll find a dedicated vibrato function with controls for rate and fade time in the Master section.

Unique is a bit of a sleeper. It didn't blow us away out of the box, and the included presets make far too much use of the filter's overdrive function. Yet once we started diving into the controllers and Vowel Filter, we found new and interesting timbres, some of which inspired some serious jamming. And that gets it the thumbs-up. **cm**

Voice control

All of Unique's basic functions are accessible from the main page of the GUI. However, tucked away behind the oscillators you'll find a wealth of Controllers, which is Unique's term for its advanced modulation sources. Like the innovative Vowel Filter, these help separate Unique from the typical drive-thru analogue clone. Mind you, there's still a four-stage envelope generator in tow, as well as an LFO to serve requisite retro duties. Yet even the LFO breaks away from the pack with a fairly flexible, user-definable waveform, further marking Unique out as, well, unique.

In addition to a powerful arpeggiator, Sugar Bytes have super-charged Unique with a cool eight-stage sequencer with glide and range functions. You can choose playback direction and select how the sequence should be retrigged from a list of options. Most of Unique's Controllers share this versatile triggering.

Finally, there's a nifty X/Y 'motion recorder' that allows for up to one minute of real-time recording. This is useful for creating complex, evolving textures. Throw in unison and polyphonic playback modes, glide



▲ Put your modulation where your mouth is! You can sequence your syllables with Unique's powerful controller options

and some advanced MIDI options and even the most demanding control freak should be suitably satiated.

VERDICT

- FOR**
- + Unusual Vowel Filter
 - + Cool sequencer
 - + Loads of modulation control
 - + Better-than-average arpeggiator
 - + Definable LFO waveforms

- AGAINST**
- Many presets are buried by overdrive
 - A bit pricey

It's not the flashiest synth around, but once you get a taste for it, Unique is highly usable and can even be inspiring.

RATING

