Mac PC **What is it?** Filter plug-in with flexible modulation options **PRICE: €79**

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SUGAR BYTES WOW

computer music PERFORMANCE

Is it still possible to be blown away by a filter plug-in? Sugar Bytes reckon their latest effort speaks for itself...

▸ SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS

Mac: 1GHz processor, 128MB RAM, OS X 10.4.0

PC: 1GHz processor, 128MB RAM, Windows XP

▸ TEST SYSTEM

Mac: 2.16GHz Core 2 Duo iMac, OS X 10.4.11, 1GB RAM, Cubase 4, GarageBand, MOTU 828mkII and M-Audio FireWire Solo interfaces

▸ ALTERNATIVELY

Audio Damage Ronin
N/A » **N/A** » $69
Ronin is a multi-effects plug that combines a pair of multimode filters, delays, LFOs, flexible modulation matrix and a whole lot more

Basement Arts Frantic
cm90 » **8/10** » €130
Inspired by some of the most famous models of the past, Frantic offers flexible modulation and over forty different filter modes

On the DVD

AUDIO DEMOS
You can hear WOW at work on the disc, in the **Audio Demos** folder

While Sugar Bytes may not be as well known as, say, Waves, or as individualistic as Audio Damage, they quietly toil away, crafting plug-ins of consistently high calibre, such as their innovative Artillery 2 'effects keyboard', which we awarded a 7/10 score in last month's issue. Yet even with so many notches on their collective belt, it may be hard to convince a jaded public to cough up for a filter plug-in, even if it does kick several tons of serious backside. Luckily for Sugar Bytes, while filter plug-ins aren't exactly thin on the ground, there are few out there that sound as good as theirs…

WOW is a cross-platform plug-in available in VST and AU formats, and it'll set you back a modest €79. It's available as a download, and copy protection consists solely of a serial number. Most of WOW's features are immediately apparent on first glance. The GUI is dominated by the immense Cutoff knob, which, in turn, is flanked by Resonance and Overdrive knobs. Nothing terribly surprising, then.

These controls are shared by the currently selected filter mode, of which there are no less than ten variations from which to choose. Filter modes are selected from a drop-down menu, and range from typical low- and high-pass models to the more esoteric likes of the Comb Filter and Band Crusher modes.

▲ WOW is talking our language! The Vowel Mode is a powerful formant filter that enables you to sweep through a pair of vowels

From the source

Once you've settled upon your filter of choice, you have all sorts of options for tweaking its parameters. WOW sports a minimal but wildly versatile selection of modulation sources. You can call upon an envelope follower, an LFO and a step sequencer. All of these are available simultaneously and can modulate one another as well as the usual filter parameters.

The LFO and step sequencer are fairly ordinary in design and can be synchronised to the host tempo. The LFO offers Rate and Sensitivity controls and enables you to select any of seven different wave shapes. Interestingly, it can also be retriggered by the incoming audio signal.

The step sequencer boasts a smoothing function and a handful of playback styles. One of the more intriguing techniques we stumbled upon was using another mod source to modulate the sequencer's Smooth parameter while the sequencer was used to tweak some other function.

Finally, the envelope follower can be used to track the dynamics of the incoming signal and use it as a mod source. You can determine the frequency range, attack and release times, as well as the overall gain. It can be used for all manner of effects, from auto-wah to pumping, filtered dynamics.

We have to admit that we were initially a bit nonplussed at the prospect of reviewing yet another filter plug-in. However, Sugar Bytes have delivered one that's inspiring to use and sounds fantastic, with excellent, wide-ranging presets. The cost is easily offset by the quality of the filter algorithm, which is one of the most authentic we've ever heard. **cm**

Voices from beyond

Clicking the Vowel Mode button will transport you away from the familiar analogue-style filtering and into the realm of the formant filter. Once an exotic rarity, it's becoming a more common tool these days, enabling your filter bank to 'speak' by imparting the character of the human voice. Since your mouth and throat are really just resonant cavities, by pushing air through them and changing the shape and size, you're altering the resonant frequency of the cavity through which that air moves.

This is easily replicated using formant filters, such as the one found on WOW. Using the Vowel Mode, users can sweep through a pair of selected vowel shapes. U, UE, O, OE, A, A:, AE, E and I are all on the menu. This is cool stuff, though we can't help but wish that it was possible to use more than two vowels at a time.

VERDICT

FOR
+ Brilliantly authentic filters
+ Modulations galore
+ Envelope follower is great fun
+ Step sequencer rocks
+ Good selection of useful presets

AGAINST
– We'd like to buy more vowels, please!
– Some might not pay this much for a filter

We thought we'd seen and heard it all as far as filters go, but WOW really wowed us with its great sounds and funky features. Filter freaks, this one's for you!

RATING 9

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