

Mac PC What is it? A hybrid synth from sound designer Rob Papen **PRICE: £99**

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OSCILLATOR
The heart of any synth is its oscillator. Predator actually has three – these are stuffed with both waveforms and features

FM/RING AMOUNT
Clanging, metallic timbres are easy to create with Predator's frequency and ring modulation. Tweak 'em here!

FILTER
If the oscillator is the heart, the filter is the soul. Predator's dual filters are ideal for sculpting your sonic masterpieces

FILTER LFO
The filter has its very own LFO. It can, of course, be synchronised to the host's tempo and you can choose from loads of waveforms

FILTER ENVELOPE
Predator's filter can be modulated with a dedicated five-stage envelope generator. Attack, Decay, Sustain, Fade and Release are offered

FREE MODULATION
In addition to all of Predator's dedicated LFOs and envelopes, you'll find a pair each of envelopes and LFOs in the Free Mod section

FX
Lots of synths have effects these days, but few have quite as many as Predator

PLAY MODE
How do you want to play back your patches? Mono? Poly? Or maybe you'd like to use the arpeggiator? Give this knob a twirl!

PRESETS
With so many presets onboard, it's a good thing they're sensibly categorised. Predator's built-in preset browser makes finding the right sound a snap

ROB PAPEN Predator

On the DVD

AUDIO DEMOS
Hear bass, lead and psytrance sounds from Predator in the Audio demos folder

Once again, synth wizard Rob Papen teams up with a talented developer to deliver a monster synth. Will Predator chew up the competition?

SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS
PC: 1GHz CPU, Windows XP, VST/RTAS host
Mac: 1GHz CPU, Mac OS X 10.2.8, AU/VST/RTAS host

TEST SYSTEM
Mac: iMac Core 2 Duo 2.16GHz, 1GB RAM, OS X 10.4.9, M-Audio FireWire Solo, Steinberg Cubase 4, Apple GarageBand

As a long-time patch designer for some of the most popular synths on the planet, Rob Papen knows how to squeeze amazing sounds from any synth he touches. More than that, he knows exactly what he needs from a synthesizer in order to create his much sought-after tones.

Rob previously worked with LinPlug to bring us the wildly popular Albino. Now he's releasing his second collaboration with Jon Ayres of ConcreteFX fame (the pair previously conspired to bring us Blue). The freshly minted Predator is a three-oscillator

hybrid synth that runs on both Mac and PC. It comes in VST, RTAS and AU flavours and costs a very reasonable £99. This starts to seem like chicken feed when you consider the big, ballsy sound this instrument offers.

Ravin' about waves

On the surface, Predator's feature set looks very familiar: three oscillators are pumped through a multimode filter and a handful of modulation sources. These functions are augmented by an assortment of effects and the now-obligatory arpeggiator.

Given this rather pedestrian signal

path, it's not terribly challenging to put Predator through its paces with a minimum head-scratching. However, you shouldn't be fooled by this apparent simplicity: the devil, as they say, is in the details, and it's only when you start poking the parameters that Predator's powerful punch really becomes apparent.

Let's look again at those oscillators. No mere virtual wannabes, these pack a whopping 128 waveforms. Naturally, some are based on the standard saw, square and sine waves we know and love, but the majority draw on additive or spectral synthesis to produce a

sizzling sonic palette that sounds decidedly modern. But it doesn't end with the waveforms. Predator offers pulse width modulation (with a dedicated LFO, no less), frequency and ring modulation and a sub oscillator to boot. What's more, you can control the symmetry of each wave. Oscillators have a free-running mode and the second and third oscillators can be synced to the first. Oh, and you get noise generators, too.

Q times two

Turn your attention to the main filter and you're transported back to Retroville. This is a multimode affair that offers 6dB, 12dB, 18dB and 24dB low- and high-pass filtering, and 12dB and 24dB band-pass, notch and comb filters. Cutoff and Q knobs are provided, as is a dedicated five-stage envelope generator. A dedicated filter LFO with all the trimmings is tucked in there, as is a pre-filter distortion that offers convincing, edgy crunch. Another nice touch is the dedicated control for determining how much effect the mod

"NEEDLESS TO SAY, PREDATOR COMES PACKED WITH A PLETHORA OF PRESETS FROM PAPAN HIMSELF"

wheel has on the filter.

Harking back to Roland's classic Juno series, Predator also throws a second filter into the signal path. This, too, is a multimode model, but includes just a lone cutoff knob.

As you'll see from the screenshots, Predator sports heaps of modulation sources. As well as the expected amp envelope (five stages) and the aforementioned dedicated LFOs and

The arpeggiator

Once a rare treat, arpeggiators are now practically obligatory – you might even call them passé. In the past, they were simple devices that played back a series of notes based on the chord that was triggered. At most, you got a handful of playback directions (up, down, up/down, and, if you were very, very lucky, random) that spanned a few octaves.

Modern arpeggiators often bear a closer resemblance to the flexible step sequencers found on modular synthesizers. Predator's falls into this category: it has a mere 16 steps, but as well as being able to control the pitch of the notes played, you can also add

envelope generators, a selection of 'Free Modulation' sources are available too. These include dual five-stage envelopes and another pair of LFOs, each of which can be routed to any of the 44 modulation destinations.

When we saw that Predator was a joint venture with ConcreteFX, we

slide, swing, velocity and ties. The pattern can span between one and four octaves, and be played back in ten different modes, including up/down and the like, along with ordered playback or modulation modes. You can set the playback at 1/4, 1/3, 1/2, 2/3, 1, 3/2, 2, 3 and 4 times the tempo, and this can be latched with Predator's Latch control or a MIDI sustain pedal.

When you have something you like, you can save the pattern for use with any Predator patch. In fact, the only real complaint we have about the factory patches is that some of the arp patterns are overused.

As we've already suggested, the

evident when you consider its built-in effects processing. This goes far beyond the normal smattering of delays and choruses: you can choose from a total of 21 effects, each of which has its own specific set of controls. Waveshaping, ensemble, filtering and more are to be found within, and there's plenty more besides. We're delighted (and slightly surprised) to be able to report that all of the effects are actually pretty good.

Papen trail

Superficially, Predator offers nothing you might consider new or innovative. Sometimes, though, the whole is far greater than the sum of its parts. This is definitely the case here: by presenting the user with so many tasty waveforms and ways in which to modulate them, Papen and Ayres have managed to create something that's simultaneously familiar, friendly, complex and flexible. It's easy to forge sounds of real depth and sophistication without getting sidetracked by arcane algorithms and impenetrable parameters.

Needless to say, Predator comes packed with a plethora of presets from Papen himself. Thoughtfully categorised, the factory set focuses squarely on modern styles, though it's quite easy to find sounds that fit in with any genre you like. Even the effects processing is tastefully applied – something of a rarity in a soft synth!

So obviously, we dig Predator. It's powerful, easy to get into and sounds awesome. Given that sub-£100 price tag, we'd say it's a no-brainer for dance musicians and a must-try synth for anyone else. **cm**



▲ Up and down, to and fro: take any direction you like with Predator's awesome arpeggiator

arpeggiator can be employed as a modulation source. This is cool, but again, we can't help but wish that the oscillator waveform knob was among the destinations on offer. Even so, this is still an awesome arpy!

▶ ALTERNATIVELY

Rob Papen Albino
cm104 » 8/10 » £133
Funnily enough, Rob's collaboration with LinPlug is probably his new synth's biggest rival

reFX Nexus
cm110 » 8/10 » £200
While Nexus is built on ROM rather than a deep synthesis architecture, it caters ably to the modern dance musician



▲ Predator packs a passel of potent waveforms that go far beyond the usual saws and sines

VERDICT

FOR

- + Excellent sound quality
- + Monster modulation possibilities
- + All those waveforms
- + Cool arpeggiator
- + Papen's patches are great

AGAINST

- We'd love to modulate the waveform selection!
- Some arp patterns are overused in the presets

This third Papen-branded synth is a fine instrument indeed. The great presets will draw you in, but there's plenty here to keep you interested for many months to come

RATING

