



Rob Papen Blade 2

€99



A mere nine years after the original Blade, Blade 2 is here and there's not a Wesley Snipes in sight. That'll be because this one's a synth...

> It says a lot about the increasingly long history of computer music making - and indeed this magazine - that some soft synths have been with us for more years than we realise. Only the other day we were discussing how NI's Massive is 14 years old! (How the winter nights fly by here.) The original Blade is not quite as old, but at close to nine years since its release, it has done the rounds and helped establish its developer, the mighty Rob Papen, as one of the biggest names in this business.

A Marvel?

The truth is that the original does look a little old when we load up our review from **cm** 178, although we did note that "Rob Papen's take on additive synthesis has some clever tricks up its sleeve and does the business". Another first for Papen with Blade was the recordable X-Y pad that sat slap bang in the middle of the UI. It connected to the synth's 'Harmolator' allowing you to change (record and edit) the synth's waveform harmonic content in real time.

This concept has been expanded with Blade 2, not least with the addition of an Additive mode which lets you mix between four additive waveforms using the X-Y pad that really does let you get deep quickly and very easily. The X-Y pad can also control a whole host of other parameters in Blade 2, an obvious feature you might think, but very well implemented with a

simple drop-down menu allowing you to select your controlled destinations with ease.

Other new additions include an analogue-style oscillator, noise oscillator, an expanded 32 filter types, extra effects (Blade 2 has three multi-effects processors) and a souped up arpeggiator with more linkage with the X-Y pad.

Of course all of these extra features demand a completely redesigned UI, and while Blade 2 is very obviously related to the original - it's blue, has the X-Y pad in the middle and various synth modules scattered around the outside - it's much sleeker, more gun-metal 2021 and the blade graphics have shifted from winged slicers to a more subtle circular affair. It's more *Saw* than *Blade*, but let's hope not quite so bloody.

Blade running

With Additive Mode plus an extra analogue and noise oscillator, Blade 2 really does deliver a wide range of sounds and textures. On a very basic level, the extra oscillators add weight, punch and grit to the Blade sound which might have been a tad lacking in analogue warmth for some. Indeed these extras shouldn't be understated as they are really the keys to the extra sonic flexibility that v2 has over the original. Yes, you get additional additives(!) but the oscillators complete the set, as it were. With exploration and time, there's very little, sound wise, that Blade 2 can't conjure up.

Conclusion

For less than a ton in at least two currencies, Blade 2 offers a huge wealth of sonic options for your Earth credits. You could - and very probably should - spend an age exploring its nooks and crannies, unearthing routing and arpeggiation options that will take your sounds to unexpected, and mostly great places. It's a vast improvement over v1 - of course it is, after all this time - and will pay back any time you invest in it many times over. **cm**

Web timespace.com, robpapen.com

Alternatively

Air Music Technology Loom II cm252 » 8/10 » €99

Same price, slightly complex looking but lovely additive sound

Native Instruments Razor cm165 » 9/10 » \$99

One of the original additive synths, it still packs a punch and with, arguably, a leaner set of controls

Verdict

For Refreshing new update

Lots of extra features

Sonically rich and varied

Fantastic effects

Goes as deep as you want, then deeper

Great value considering the power

Against The additive options demand some time spent learning

Blade 2 is very much a synth for 2021 in terms of its varied sound and looks, and at this price is worth a punt. Just be prepared to work with it to achieve amazing results

9/10

Additive to love

At its core, Blade 2, like its predecessor, is an additive synth - albeit one with extra bells (digital ones) and whistles - which uses sine waves of different frequencies to synthesise different timbres. Also like Blade, v2's additive heart is the Harmolator, an additive oscillator with 96 partials and general controls for things like Range, Symmetry, Timbre and Timbre Type to shape the sound so you don't have to get your hands too dirty (or, really, know too much about what you are

doing - experimentation is both encouraged and fun). The slightly confusingly titled Additive Mode - we thought we were already in Additive Mode - is perhaps best explained as an alternate use of the Harmolator in that it allows you to mix and match between four 'Wave-sets' (16 partials), altering things like pitch, volume, wave and phase. Honestly it's one of those synths where words don't do it justice; you'll be better off throwing yourself in there for that 'oh I get it' moment.