



Softube Mutronics Mutator

\$263

PC MAC

The original Mutator is regarded as one of the finest filters ever made – can this software emulation do it justice?

> Softube's latest plugin emulates a modern classic: the Mutronics Mutator. First conceived and manufactured in the 90s and discontinued in 2007, this superb dual channel filter provides awesome-sounding processing of mono or stereo tracks, with onboard LFO and envelope modulation opening up real creative potential.

Each of the two channels consists of a 24dB/octave resonant low-pass filter with dedicated envelope follower, LFO and output amplifier (VCA). The envelope controls comprise Attack, Release and input signal Sensitivity, while the LFOs offer adjustment of Rate, Depth and Waveform (Triangle, Square, Ramp Up, Ramp Down). The Filter section itself houses knobs for Cutoff frequency, Resonance and Envelope Sweep amount (positive or negative).

The Envelope Follower controls both the VCA and filter Cutoff via the Envelope Sweep control. It can be set to follow the amplitude of the main input or an external sidechain keying signal, or switched entirely to a simpler on/off Gate mode, with the Sensitivity control setting the threshold.

Each LFO includes a three-way switch for assigning it to the filter, amplifier or both, while the top LFO can be made to work on both channels with a click of the Link switch. To the right of the Filter section is a switch that completely bypasses the VCA, sending the post-VCF signal straight to the output.

Feature-wise, Softube's emulation is totally true to the original, with the exception of the extra panel at the bottom that adds LFO Tempo Sync (from 1/16 to 4 bars), dry/wet Mix, output Volume and the mid/side-balancing Width control. Also, knob parameters are displayed in the bottom left corner, giving precise values for Envelope Attack (1-500ms), Release (1-2000ms), LFO Rate (0.03-30Hz) and filter Cutoff (42Hz-22kHz), while holding down the Shift key gangs both channels – albeit without retaining their relative offsets, alas.

Mutant strain

The Mutator filter is renowned for its silky-smooth sound and responsive envelope, both of which are perfectly captured here. On rhythmic guitar or bass parts, for example, it can add subtle emphasis. The same trick can be applied to drum and percussion loops, synths and electric pianos, along with the inverted panning tricks discussed in *The missing link*. Combine this with the tempo-synced LFO, Mix blend and Width controls, and you have a classy processor that adds subtle tonal and spatial enhancement not easily achieved any other way.

However, it can also totally transform sounds at deeper envelope settings and higher filter resonance. Indeed, the resonance is noteworthy in that it has real bite but never feels out of control, even when self-oscillating. There's

also plenty of mileage to be had using one sound as an external envelope source for filtering another.

On the downside, we feel that Softube could have added further enhancements such as serial filter operation and more complex signal routing, and functional extras such as retaining that aforementioned offset when ganging controls. Nevertheless, this is still a fantastic, highly successful emulation of a hardware classic. **cm**

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cm129 » 9/10 » £84

Four multimode filters and a huge modulation system

Cytomic The Drop
cm214 » 10/10 » \$99

Top-class emulation of seven classic filters with modulation

Verdict

For Creamy, smooth sound

Faithful, endorsed emulation of original
Great for creating stereo effects
Adds subtle colour to many sounds
Edgy filter resonance

Against No ganged knob offset

Featureset could have been expanded further

A spot-on software version of a hardware legend, Mutator does everything its inspiration does... but not a lot more

9/10

The missing link

One of the Mutator's best features is its channel Link option, which bypasses the right channel LFO, using just the left one for both sides of the signal. While that might not sound like anything to write home about, the left channel includes an Invert switch, which flips the LFO waveform for the right channel. This opens up some powerful creative options, turning Mutator into a stereo panning filter and volume-based auto-panner.

For the first effect, the filter cutoff of one channel rises as the other falls, generating an interesting sense of left/right movement at a speed based on the LFO rate. For auto-panning, the output VCA creates side-to-side movement by the same mechanism, with adjustment of the two LFOs depths' making the panning more or less obvious.

Both effects work particularly well with Mutator placed on an auxiliary channel, loaded as a mono in/stereo out plugin.