

INCLUDES AUDIO

WHAT IS IT?

New virtual synth that aims to make additive synthesis more tasty for the 21st century

CONTACT

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HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Deep sound design possibilities
- 2 Superb performance aspects
- 3 Onboard arpeggiator, effects and programmability



Rob Papen Blade | £99



Another, er, cutting edge virtual synth from one of the leaders in the field. **JoE Silva** gets to the point...

Hatched just in time for a big unveil at NAMM 2012, Blade is the latest of instrument maker Rob

Papen's synth progeny. The rest of his line (Predator, Punch and the much-loved Albino) are all highly regarded pieces of virtual kit, and this latest plug is an ambitious attempt to straddle both the creative and musically relevant aspects of additive synthesis at a reasonable price.

A cut above

If you've never bothered to try to grasp what the term 'additive synthesis' means, it simply refers to a stack of harmonic frequencies (also referred to as partials) 'added' to the fundamental frequency to produce the timbre of a

sound. What Blade brings to the table is a way to control these partials (or the 'harmonic content' of the waveform) via an oscillator that Papen has dubbed the 'Harmolator'.

Any one of the Harmolator's nine controls can be manipulated with an XY Controller, which greatly increases the amount of expression that you can bring to Blade's sounds.

Blade offers a healthy number of potential tweaks to its sonic output but Papen has made sure that the design doesn't intimidate users who haven't had a great deal of experience with complex virtual synths.

You can toggle back and forth between the main interface and an Easy screen by clicking on the Easy button just to the right of the Manager button.

In Easy mode, you can strip Blade's interface of some of its visual clutter to get to a more familiar set of controls.

Browsing through Blade's sound banks and presets is relatively painless and if you click on the arrows near the top of the interface you can move back and forth through what's on offer. The Quick Browser makes things even simpler, giving you access to everything with the click of a preset.

You can navigate back through your previous eight sounds in case you change your mind and temporary favorites can be bookmarked on the fly.

The Manager switch beneath the preset display gives you an overview of everything and offers other convenient browsing functions such as previewing and searching for sounds, and copy/paste functions for renaming patches once you've tweaked them.

Slice and dice

The Harmolator is made up of nine principle controls: Base alters which of the partials is heard loudest; Range lets you hear more or less harmonics; Sym changes the balance/volume between harmonics that are higher or lower than the base partial; Timbre controls the mix between regular harmonics and Blade's timbres presets; Even/Odd adjusts the relative volume of even and odd harmonics; Ripple creates volume peaks within the

spectrum for vocal-like sounds; Ripple Width does what it says on the tin; Harm creates a ghost-like copy of your additive spectrum to produce additional overtones; Harm Vol does what you'd imagine; Octave controls the first partial's fundamental frequency plus or minus two octaves; Spread fattens up sound by adding two additional Harmolators; and Sub manages the volume of the Harmolator's sub-oscillator.

To add to that laundry list of options, there are drop-down menus below the knobs to further adjust Timbre Type, Ripple Type, Ripple Wave, Sub Shift and Spread Type.

All these options might not mean much until you download the demo and begin to experiment, but once you're moving through presets and twisting dials, activating the Spectrum switch can give you a detailed look at your manipulations in real-time and it makes coming to grips with some of these operations much simpler.

Sharpen your skills

Reminiscent of the retro green matrix in Moog Music's recent Animoog app,

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More than just a visual representation of what's going on with the Harmolator, the XY Controller is meant to act as a more direct way to fine-tune a performance from your Blade patch.

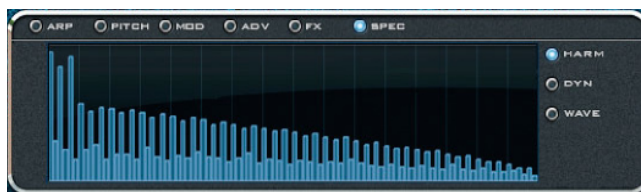
All of the controls directly surrounding the XY Controller's dark

Shifts in Spectrum

It wasn't part of the initial demo release but the addition of the Spectrum ('Spec') switch at the bottom of Blade's interface is tremendously useful in terms of understanding and

improving your manipulation of a sound's harmonic partials. As you tweak the Harmolator's controls you can view the shifts in the spectrum and gain an appreciation of how Blade's output is

being affected. You can also display your sound as a waveform or dynamically over time by selecting either 'Wave' or 'Dyn' on the right of the spectrum display. Very handy. Very instructive.



blue patch mimic those found on the Harmolator panel – the knobs at the top and the bottom affect the X axis, while the knobs to the left and right of the space affect the Y axis. There are also Filter, Q and Filter Volume options here as well. Double-clicking a knob returns it to zero, while clicking on its label bypasses its impact on the sound entirely.

bi-directional loops. You can manually set the speed of the movements with the Speed knob or tweak it on the fly by assigning Speed to a physical control ('Pitch Bend' for instance) and performing it in real-time. Very nice.

Final stab

In the short time since its initial release, the software has already seen

updates in the form of new presets, and additional menu options to the XY Controller that allow you to latch either axis to MIDI. Pape

also recently revealed that Blade may soon see some GUI changes designed to offer other interface options that are a touch less busy.

All this is just the tip of the, er, sword, however. With a solid arpeggiator, plus an array of pitch, modulation and effects parameters to explore, Blade offers a rich palate of possibilities for both sound design and performance. **FM**

SPECS

System Requirements:
PC: 32 & 64-bit VST for Windows XP/Vista/7
Mac: 32 & 64-bit AU and VST and 32-bit RTAS for OS X 10.5 or higher

ALTERNATIVES



Camel Audio Alchemy

£179

Formerly the Camel 5000. Pricier, but full-feature additive synth engine popular amongst the soundtrack set. Sampling features onboard, and touch-based remote for iPad/iPhone also available.

www.camelaudio.com



Native Instruments Razor

69 euros

Modern build, plus imaginative filter options and vocoding built in. Graphics provide a clear, succinct way of putting together sounds, and the price is hard to beat.

www.native-instruments.com



The arrows at the top of the interface make it easy to browse through Blade's banks and presets

FutureMusic

VERDICT

STABILITY

VALUE

EASE OF USE

VERSATILITY

RESULTS

Blade is another worthy addition to Rob Pape's impressive line of virtual instruments.