

# Waldorf Blofeld | £299

Packed with juicy features and with loads of new additions thrown in at a ridiculously cheap price, does the Blofeld live up to the high expectation? **Dan 'JD73' Goldman** grabs his white fluffy moggie and gets testing



ON THE DVD

## WHAT IS IT?

The first in a new line of synths from the resurrected Waldorf Music Company. Incorporating Virtual Analogue and Wavetable synthesis plus a dizzying selection of sound-shaping options in a compact desktop module

## CONTACT

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## HIGHLIGHTS

- 1 Very compact with solid build and intuitive interface
- 2 Larger-than-life sound
- 3 A staggering array of sound shaping/making options

**W**aldorf have been involved in making exciting and unique synthesizers for almost

20 years. But back in 2004, the original Waldorf Synthesizer Company had to declare themselves insolvent and ceased to exist. Thankfully though, with renewed investment, some personnel from the original Waldorf company and a whole new line of products, Waldorf have been resurrected from the synthesizer scrap yard and have come back fighting fit with their first new synth for some time: Blofeld.

Waldorf clearly have a sense of humour, naming the Blofeld (and also their upcoming Stromberg) after James Bond villains, but make no mistake this is a very serious instrument that belies its compact footprint. It's surprising just how small

the Blofeld is, yet it's quite heavy with an almost industrial feel to it – it could certainly take some serious gigging abuse for sure. Unfortunately, it doesn't look rack-mountable at this time, due to its strange shape and size, and the fact that the outs are top-mounted.

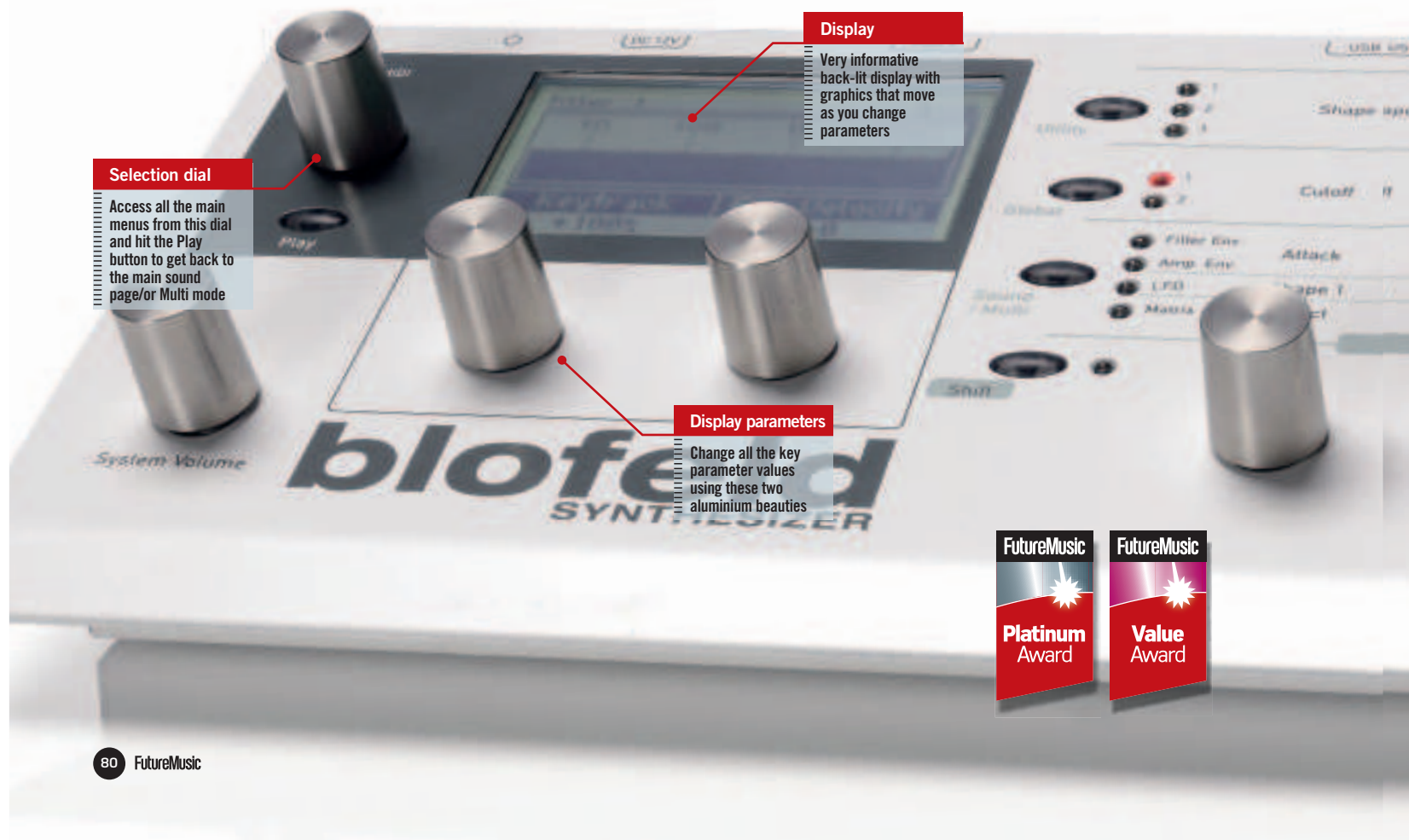
## Simple style

The metal front panel is the epitome of simplicity, with seven silver-metal/aluminium rotary dials, a very nice moving white, back-lit monochrome graphic display and a parameter matrix that's very easy to follow for selecting the various modes and settings quickly.

Select the function you want with the buttons on the left of the matrix and turn the corresponding dial to affect the function in the corresponding vertical column. Easy!

This makes it very fast for instant tweaking and in a very short period of time it will all become second nature to you when you're using it; really this is a dream to use especially considering how well the display keeps you informed of each and every editing move you make – both numerically and graphically speaking.

Connection-wise, the Blofeld is limited and this is perhaps in order to achieve that fantastic price. Firstly there's no MIDI out, except for via USB (the USB can act as a MIDI In and Out with a laptop for example), only one stereo output and no audio input. Interestingly the vocoder that's meant to be included in the original spec (and that's listed on the box) doesn't seem to have made it to our final version but with such a major part of the action being via a computer it's a possible update later.



### Selection dial

Access all the main menus from this dial and hit the Play button to get back to the main sound page/or Multi mode

### Display

Very informative back-lit display with graphics that move as you change parameters

### Display parameters

Change all the key parameter values using these two aluminium beauties

I don't know about you, but when it comes to the Waldorf range, I've always been a bit confused about what's 'real' analogue and what's 'virtual' analogue, so I'll clear this up straight away. The Blofeld is entirely modelled – 'virtual' synthesis – only. Note that some Waldorf products (such as the Q and Microwave) both used analogue filters, while the Pulse was a fully analogue synth.

### All in the details

The basic synthesis engine of the Blofeld goes like this: it's a three-Osc, 25-voice desktop synthesizer, incorporating Virtual Analogue and Wavetable synthesis. There are 1,024 program slots (all user writeable) and it has a 16-part multi-timbral mode for using with sequencers.

There are two independent effect units available in normal 'Play Sound' mode and there's one available per part in Multi mode, with one global effect as well. Feature-wise it's almost like the best of the Q and Microwave series put together in one, but with a

### Modulation and modifiers

The Blofeld has very extensive modulation capabilities but implements them in a very intuitive way. First off, there are three versatile and freely assignable LFOs for warping sounds. Each of the LFOs has a delayable start time, fade in, can be sync'd to MIDI clock and the start point

of each is also user definable. The only boundary here is your imagination, and the same goes for the Modifiers section. There are 16 modifier slots and these can be seen as elaborate internal patchbays allowing you to route virtually any parameter within the

Blofeld to any other parameter or source. You could route pitch to LFO, pitchbend to filter cutoff, and just about any other combination you can think of! The display massively helps here, giving you a full graphical reference point so you never lose track of what's being modulated!

number of great new additions. Be warned though: this is a very deep synth indeed.

The wavetable synthesis combines lots of different waveforms of varying timber and harmonic content that are put together to form a continuous cycle of sound that stops and starts with a key press or release. Each Wavetable is designed to have a different sonic character, further augmented by a Brilliance control to

enhance harmonics within the Wavetables (and the sawtooth and pulse oscillator models).

### Ride the wave

The Blofeld has 128 Waves per Wavetable – and 66 Wavetables in total. The length of the tables can also be limited. Using various modulation options, Wavetable synthesis allows for very ethereal, rich and textured sounds. On top of this, Wavetables are

great for continuously evolving sounds (particularly pads) and can also be great for bell-like textures and much more. And

The number of sound-shaping options is just incredible for a synth that's this inexpensive and compact

### TECH SPEC

**General Controls:** Seven endless metal dials and volume dial

**Display:** Graphic Display 128 x 64 pixels with white background LED

**Sound generation:** More than 1,000 user writeable sound locations, 16-part multi-timbral, Three Oscillators per voice with saw, sine, triangle, variable pulse and FM between oscillators, All Q Oscillator Models, All Microwave II/XT/XTk Wavetables, Two drive stages per voice with selectable Drive Curves, Three fast LFOs per voice, Four fast envelopes per voice, Powerful freely programmable arpeggiator with detailed graphical interface

**Filter:** Two independent Multi Mode filters per voice, Filter FM, 11 filter types including comb, notch low-pass, high-pass, band-pass, PPG Wave and more

**Connections:** Stereo Output, Headphone output, MIDI In, USB Connector for MIDI In/Out

**System requirements:** Windows ME minimum, Windows XP or newer recommended  
Mac OS X 10.2 minimum, Mac OS X 10.3 or newer recommended

**Modulation/Modifiers:** Modulation Matrix with 16 Slots, freely programmable, Four modifiers for transforming Modulation Sources with various algorithms, Three fast LFOs syncable to MIDI Clock, Note Retrigger with adjustable Start Phase and fade in

**Effects:** Ring Modulator for Osc 1/2, Noise Generator with Noise Colour, Chorus, Flanger, Phaser, Overdrive, Triple FX (S&H, Ring Modulation, Chorus). Plus Delay, Clocked Delay and Reverb all only available on global Effect slot

**Dimensions:** 304 x 132 x 54mm

**Weight:** 1.3kg



Tough metal case

Built for the studio or stage it's a heavy little metal beast

# The good and great

JD73's top three things he liked about using the Waldorf Blofeld



> The Blofeld is so compact and portable that there's little excuse not to take it with you wherever you go. You could use it with your laptop on a train or at gigs or studio sessions.

> There's a lot going on under the surface but the Blofeld is very intuitive. Scroll through one menu at a time using the system dial, or go direct to the page you want using the Parameter matrix. Turn those dials and hear what happens; you can't go wrong!



> The sound is huge, raw and atmospheric and sits well in a mix with both real acoustic instruments and more electronic styles. You can also program great kicks, snares and hats and trigger these from your sequencer of choice.

what's more, they definitely sound amazing and inspiring on the Blofeld.

You'll be glad to know that the Blofeld also has Wavetables on board from the Microwave XTK and XT and also from the Q and Micro Q models. It also incorporates the 'Upper Wavetable' from the venerable PPG Wave that could be looked upon as a 'best of' Wavetable, incorporating all the extreme Wave types from smooth to nasty. As far as Wavetable synths goes, this is almost as good as it gets but for several thousand pounds less than the originals.

## High standard

Now on to the Virtual Analogue synthesis/Osc section. This is all standard issue on the Blofeld but the implementation is fresh. The waves include sawtooth, triangle, sine and variable pulse wave. Each Osc can have its own PWM source and amount. They sound suitably phat and analogue-like and I'm very impressed by the solid, heavy and wide frequency range of these VA oscillators. Osc sync between Oscs 2 and 3 is also available.

Any of the three oscs can frequency modulate one another, for







#### Connections

DC 12V power, MIDI In, USB, headphone out and stereo outputs. It's the bare minimum really

## The arpeggiator

The arp is a great addition to the Blofeld and, like the LFOs, can be MIDI clock sync'd to your sequencer's tempo. In Multi mode, there's one arpeggiator available for each of the 16 parts. There are several other modes also available, including hold

and one shot, 15 preset patterns and user-definable slots as well.

Direction can also be changed, as well as pitch, with up to ten octave jumps! Note lengths/cycles can of course be varied from 1/96 notes to 64 bars long, and the

arpeggiator can also be affected by note/key velocity and has a glide function as well. Again the display presents a very detailed graphical representation of what's going on in the arpeggiator, so you always know where you are.

12/24dB slopes, comb, notch, band-pass and the low-pass model from the PPG Wave. These all sound very analogue and smooth, with each having a distinctive sound and there's no filter stepping even with high resonance settings; only smooth sweeping from rumbling sub to screaming highs.

## And there's more

Just when you thought there couldn't be any more room in the box, you'll find a two-part effect section, a flexible modifiers and modulations section (see the box on page 81) and a versatile arpeggiator. The effects section has chorus, delay, reverb and more overdrive options with lots of

control. The effects are lush with a grainy, gritty – yet rich – texture and they sound very refreshing when compared to other digital synths,

which gives the Blofeld an utterly unique sonic signature.

Without doubt this is one of the most inspiring, feature-packed and unique-sounding synths I've had the pleasure of using. Waldorf have truly created a monster atmosphere synth of epic proportions and all in a tiny box for a tiny price. **FM**

causing anything from subtle wavering to sonic mayhem. Watch those speakers jump! Again, each Oscillator can have its own FM modulation source and amount as well. The

Thankfully the graphic display always helps makes sense of the different modes in this very complex synth.

It's worth noting that Standard, Single and Multi-trigger modes are

# The Blofeld is well suited to pads, leads and basses but also warped and twisted sound effects too

number of sound shaping options is just incredible for a synth that's this cheap and compact.

Finally in the Osc section, there's a Unison mode (which can have up to six voices, and de-tune and dual modes) poly/mono modes, glide with several modes and super-fast or super-slow glide rates. The Osc ranges are huge, from 1/2 foot to 128 foot. And there's Ringmod and variable colour noise to boot. The attention to detail is just dizzying and the results are stunning. The Blofeld is well suited to pads, leads and basses but also warped and twisted sound effects, and is also very capable of punchy drums sounds, of which there are plenty on board ready for tweaking.

The four envelopes in the Blofeld aren't standard affair either. Modes include ADSR, ADS1DS2R, One Shot, and Loop (the Loop envelopes can actually be used like extra LFOs.

included but there's also Poly or Mono allocation available per envelope as well. And if this all sounds a bit too complex right now, then don't worry; you just have to get your hands dirty, turn those dials and experiment to find out exactly how each parameter affects the sound. That's the key to the Blofeld!

The sound shaping/filter section is also very deep. There are two multi-mode filters per voice, filter FM, a mod source, 13 different drive curves including tube and clipping (the tube drive sounds particularly authentic and not harsh or digital) filter panning per filter (for independent stereo spectrum placement), several pan sources (for triggering the panning in different ways) and the filter can be routed in serial or parallel before hitting the left and right outputs.

There are 11 types of filter, including low-pass and high-pass with

## ALTERNATIVES



### Nord Wave

£1,395

The latest board from Clavia with VA and Wavetable synthesis as well as user sample upload capability. See *FM196* for full review.

[clavia.se](http://clavia.se)



### Cakewalk Rapture soft synth

£100

Highly specified Wavetable soft synth including 40 envelopes, step generators, FX, extensive modulation capabilities and sample import too.

[cakewalk.com](http://cakewalk.com)



### PPG Wave

About \$2,000, second hand

The Wavetable synth that started it all and inspired many of the features on the Blofeld. Rich, sought-after sound with analogue VCA, VCF and 12-bit sampler. Hard to find now, so keep checking the 'bay (and your bank balance).

[ebay.com](http://ebay.com)

FutureMusic VERDICT	
BUILD	★★★★★
VALUE	★★★★★
EASE OF USE	★★★★★
VERSATILITY	★★★★★
RESULTS	★★★★★
An winner of a synth from Waldorf, with depth and sound unheard of before at this price.	