Automat

Steal This Sound

Madonna's
"LUCKY STAR"

Most folks think of '80s-vintage Madonna and remember the hair, rubber bracelets, and attire that spawned a generation of dress-alikes. *Listen* to the Material Girl's early hits, though, and you'll find some pretty sweet vintage synth work. This month we'll break down the swirling, arpeggiated intro of "Lucky Star." You can create the patch on just about any two-oscillator virtual or real analog synth, but you'll certainly need to sequence it! I used AlphaKanal's nifty free soft synth Automat for Mac OS X. Mitchell Sigman

Step 1. Select a pulse wave for oscillator 1. Set it to a medium width using the pulse width control.

Step 2. Select a sawtooth wave for oscillator 2. Tune it to the same octave as oscillator 1, but detune a couple of cents from oscillator 1 for subtle chorusing. Set the mix of both oscillators equally.

Step 3. Select a 24dB-per-octave (or four-pole) lowpass filter (LP4 in Automat) and set the cutoff frequency fully open. Set the resonance to 50% to thin the sound out. Filter envelope amount and key tracking can be left at zero.

Step 4. Set the amplitude envelope as follows: attack at zero, decay at 10%, and sustain and release both at zero. You'll need

to fine-tune the decay amount, but this is best done after the note sequence is programmed.

Step 5. Using a bus send effect or insert, add a quick single sixteenth-note delay. (This comes out to 127ms at Lucky Star's tempo of 118bpm.) Add a large hall reverb with about three seconds of decay using a stereo send to a stereo bus. Finally, add some low-shelf EQ to reduce clickiness and a slow panner to replicate the stereo movement.

Step 6. Program the note sequence—an arpeggiated *A* sus chord playing 32nd-notes, ascending four octaves then descending in groups of three: *A D E | D E A | E A D |* etc. I recommend programming in half-time with a click, then quantizing.