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Steal This Sound

Erasure's "A LITTLE RESPECT"

Vince Clarke has cemented his place as a legend of synth pop. In the '80s, he penned numerous hits with Depeche Mode prior to forming smash duo Yaz with singer Alison Moyet. Yaz disbanded after just two albums, but Vince returned with singer Andy Bell in 1986 to form Erasure, and they've released 13 albums since. Full of Vince's bubbly synth stylings, "A Little Respect" is perhaps their best-known track. Let's examine the synth-and-piano chordal figure that drives the track. I used Arturia Prophet-V; a real analog synth such as a Prophet '08 would also rule.

Step 1. Set up a piano sound in your DAW. It doesn't need to have a big memory footprint, as a medium-quality piano will do. Add compression and stereo chorus, as well as an EQ with bass rolled off and some high-shelf boost.

Step 2. Turn to your analog or virtual analog synth, and set both oscillators to a pulse wave at the same pitch. Detune them by a couple of cents. Set the waveform to pulse for both oscillators.

Step 3. Set the low-frequency oscillator (LFO) to a triangle wave at a rate of about 5Hz, and route it to both oscillators' pulse width. Set the modulation depth around 75%. Things should be pretty warbly here—the straight piano

sound you'll layer in tends to un-warble the overall tone.

Step 4. Set both oscillators to full volume in the oscillator mix section.

Step 5. Set filter cutoff about 75% open, resonance off, envelope amount to 50%, and keyboard tracking to full.

Step 6. By turning up the envelope amount knob, the filter cutoff will be lightly controlled by the envelope generator. Set the filter attack at 20ms, decay at 300ms, sustain at 50%, and release at 300ms—these values don't have to be exact. Duplicate these settings for the volume envelope.

Now program and quantize the chords in your sequencer, and make sure to copy the sequence for the piano and synth sounds. It's all simple triads, mostly in C, so it should be pretty easy to pay a little respect to Mr. Clarke. Mitchell Sigman