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DAFT PUNK'S "DA FUNK"

by Mitchell Sigman

In 1997, French synth-house duo Daft Punk burst onto the dance scene with the infectiously hooky four-on-the-floor jam "Da Funk." It's such a simple tune that it could almost be a nursery rhyme if it weren't for the radically distorted synth lead drilling its way through the entire track. It's tough to say what synth originally produced it, because the sound is dominated by resonance and distortion, so we'll nail this sound in the soft synth world.

We'll also make it easy for you to get in on the fun by using the cool freeware synth Automat from Alphakanal. I have to admit, I'm pretty blown away by Automat – with three oscillators, dual filters with multiple modes, and built-in effects, this slick little synth can easily hold its own with the paid-for synths you often see me using in this column. Get it at blog.alphakanal.de.

1. At its most basic level, this patch consists of two sawtooth waves tuned a perfect fourth apart, so select saw waves for oscillators 1 and 2.

2. Using the Coarse oscillator tuning control on oscillator 2, tune it up a perfect fourth (five half-steps) from oscillator 1.

3. Make sure the volume of each oscillator is fully up in the mixer section directly to the right of the oscillator bank. You can leave oscillator 3 off by setting its wave to off, or by turning down its volume in the mixer section.

4. Now we'll set the filter. Automat has two filters; oscillator 1 routes to filter 1, oscillator 2 to filter 2. Since we want the same filter settings for both oscillators, Automat includes a little "dash" between the two filters. Click it to lock the two filters' controls together.

5. Set the filter type to BP2, which is a two-pole bandpass. Be sure to experiment with the different filter settings later – they all sound great!

6. Set filter Cutoff to nine o'clock, Reso (resonance) almost full up, Env (envelope amount) at about one o'clock and the filter envelope controls at the following "o'clock" values: Attack at eight, Decay at one, Sustain at eleven,

and Release at one. See the screenshot for precise values.

7. Moving on to the amp section, simply set Sustain full up and Release halfway up; everything else can stay at zero.

8. Now we'll use the shaper/filter section (labeled "S-FL" on Automat's panel) to grunge it up. You can experiment with settings, but I set Mode to "shaper," Shape to "silicon," Bias halfway up, Drive almost all the way up, and volume all the way up. Dirty!

9. Select "chorus" from the pop-up menu in the CHO section and dial to taste; try not to go too nuts. Note that my mix control is only about one quarter of the way up.

10. Finally, set the keyboard mode (a drop-down menu all the way to the right) to mono. I also knocked the master transpose down an octave to C1.

That's all. Make sure to play around with the filter cutoff and envelope amount to see how minor tweaks radically affect the tonality of the distortion. **[K]**