



## The Element of Surprise v1.0

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### Welcome to The Element of Surprise!

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This synth is mighty easy to use. All you have to do is press the great big exclamation point. You can also adjust the volume and envelope by clicking and dragging the little squares up or down. For a fast envelope, pull down for the darker blues. Use light blues for sustained sounds, and whites for pads. If you don't want the envelope randomized, then turn off the button next to the envelope control.

That's it...that's the whole interface...the whole enchilada.

Under the hood, there is a full synth with multiple oscillators, filters, various types of modulation, and effects, all optimized to provide a wide variety of usable randomly generated sounds. But since they are all created randomly, don't expect to always run into normal sounding presets. Often you will find lots of interesting textures and moving, twisting, filtered sounds. If these are not the kinds of sounds you are used to using in your music then that is even better because experimenting with new kinds of sounds may lead your music in directions you might not have thought to go in before...and the results of those experiments may surprise you.

### WTF?

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You may be wondering why I made a synth that you can't really edit at all. The whole idea is to use this synth as part of an experiment in compositional spontaneity: Press the button until you hear a sound that grabs your interest, then write a song using, or perhaps even based on, that sound. No stopping for tweaking. Just grab a random sound and run with it.

So why would you want to do such a thing? This general philosophy has actually helped me break out of writers block and a creative rut I was in, and it was inspired by a suggestion offered to me by KVR member Funky Lime. (Thanks again F.L.!)

### The 2 Hour Song

I may have modified Funky Lime's original rules a little bit to fit me better, but in essence the idea is to write as much of a song as you can within two hours. You can go back to it again later if you want, but you must do as much as you can within that two hour limit. Optimally this would include the entire basic structure of the song, intro, verse, chorus, bridges, and all.

This writing exercise worked particularly well for me because I have the tendency to get stuck trying to perfect a single 16 bar section for the whole night, instead of laying down the ground work for the entire song first. So by limiting my time to such an extent, I am forced to keep moving forward and look towards the big picture first, instead of getting bogged down in the details. (Such as tweaking presets.) It also forced me to look more towards melody instead of getting caught in the cycle of tweaking a looping rhythm section. (Something I am often guilty of.)

Additionally, again because of the time limit, you don't have time to try to force ideas that aren't working. You've got no choice but to let them drop and keep moving forward instead. If you are willing to not think so much and just run with music comes out of you, you may find you can discover a whole new side of your creativity that you were never able to tap into before. I also recommend attempting to actively avoid your usual clichés whenever possible. You can often spot them coming because you usually have to make a conscious decision to use them. So if you get the urge to fill in a section with an old idea, ignore it and just write whatever comes out of your head the fastest. You may find that it's completely different than that old idea you've been forcing into your songs.

A big part of this though is also being willing to not worry about what the results are like. Don't worry about quality or style, just let yourself explore and experiment...and since you've only got two hours, you can't expect a masterpiece by the end of it anyway. But if you really try to get as much done as you can, you will probably find that you've achieved far more than you ever expected you could within such a short time period.

By the end of your two hours (if not from your first time trying it then, with luck, in latter sessions after you've settled in a bit with the idea), you'll hopefully find yourself so close to a complete song that it would be a shame not to try to finish it up, since you've already got the "hard part" behind you. So with a little more time to add more parts and polish it up, you've got yourself a new song and thus you've found your way past a bit of writer's block.

You may find it helpful to do this experiment with someone else who is also having writer's block, as a weekly event. This is how it was originally suggested to me, and it's how I got started with it. (Many thanks to Dusted William for doing those writing sessions with me.) The idea here is that both of you write your own songs on the same night, at the same time. Once your two hours are up, you render what you've got and upload it for the other person to hear. Knowing that someone else is doing it at the same time helped guilt me into writing instead of getting frustrated, giving up, and watching TV or reading KVR. And even if you think the session might not go well, it's still only two hours out of your life, and you're still working on music, so it's hard to justify not just doing it. Also, sending someone else what I had done helped give me a feeling of accomplishment and allowed me to get some feedback and encouragement. Once you've both settled into your groove, you don't have to do it at the exact same time anymore if you don't want to. You can just agree on a deadline each week where you have to present each other with a finished song.

But even if you don't have anyone around to try this with, you can get plenty out of this technique just doing this on your own. Ultimately it's not about working with someone else but rather just keeping yourself focused on your task, while getting out of the way of your own creative flow. It's been a quite a while since D.W. and I had those writing sessions, but I still follow the same general plan of action on my own when I decide to write a song, and it still works wonders for me.

So this little synth goes out to all who have writer's block. Hit that randomizer button until you hear a sound that grabs your attention and start writing a song with it as fast as you can. No tweaking, no thinking. Just run with it and let the music flow out of you.

Good luck and happy randomizing.

Ugo

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### **Credits**

The Element of Surprise, by Ugo (Chris Sciorba)

### **Created for the KVR Developer Challenge 2007**

**Presets by:** The Element of Surprise

### **This VSTi contains modules and prefabs by:**

Chris Kerry - [www.chriskerry.f9.co.uk](http://www.chriskerry.f9.co.uk)

Dave Haupt - [www.dehaupt.com](http://www.dehaupt.com)

e-ponic - [www.e-ponic.com](http://www.e-ponic.com)

Lance Putnum - [www.uweb.ucsb.edu/~ljputnam/synthedit.html](http://www.uweb.ucsb.edu/~ljputnam/synthedit.html)

Rick Jelliffe - <http://extra.schematron.com/>

Scoofster Modules - <http://scp.web.elte.hu/synthedit/modules.html>

Tweakbench - [www.tweakbench.com](http://www.tweakbench.com)

Attila Fustos - [www.vstline.com](http://www.vstline.com)

This synth was created with Synthedit - [www.synthedit.com](http://www.synthedit.com)

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