

PRODUCT REVIEW

Izotope Nectar 2

by Michael Hodge

Whether you are making big budget records, demos, or stems for your band, Vocal production is going to be one of your highest priorities. It takes the right combination of skill and plug-ins to make your vocals compete with the pros. Izotope Nectar 2 is an all-in-one Vocal Processor (sweetener) used by top Grammy Award winning engineers like Tony Masserati, Vance Powell, and Dave Pensado.

OUT OF THE BOX:

Nectar 2 software comes in a downloadable format, and requires authorization online or with an iLok Key. It's compatible with Windows: XP, 7-10, and Mac: OS X 10.6.8-10.11. It's available in all the current formats: AAX, RTAS, VST, VST 3, and AU. Nectar2 works all the current popular DAW's including Pro Tools, Ableton Live, Logic pro, Cubase, Studio One, and several others. Nectar 2 has a number of updates including a bigger GUI and a redesigned user-friendly layout.

A CLOSER LOOK:

The gold toned interface is elegant and well thought out. There are 11 processor modules: Gate, EQ, De-Esser, Pitch, Dual Compressors, Limiter, Saturation, Harmony, FX, Delay, and a Plate Reverb. The plug-in has two main pages. The Overview page shows which processors are engaged, and the Advanced page shows the individual processors and their controls. The Plug-in comes with 200 presets including Genre specific ones like Pop, Rock, Hip Hop, Indie, Jazz, and Voice Over. They're a great starting place and range from subtle to wild.

Lets take a look at some of the individual processors inside Nectar2. They can be in any order by dragging them into place, making for some quick and interesting options.

EQ Module:

First up is a nice spectrum overlay of



the vocal EQ curve that is zoomable and scrollable. I like this because I can see right away what's going on EQ wise in the vocal performance. Included are 8 EQ nodes with six shapes, including Elliptical, Bandpass, Butterworth, and Pultecs. I love the Alt-Solo feature that solos the Frequency spot under your mouse, making it real easy to find troublesome frequencies. This is a very versatile EQ.

Compression Module: This is actually a two-stage compressor that can be set in Parallel mode, and models Digital, Vintage, Optical, or Solid State circuits. I find that two compressors working together helps keep the Vocal in the mix where you want it, and the Parallel mode allows some Transients to pass so it sounds natural. There are the usual Threshold, Ratio, Attack, and Release settings, with a visual Knee. Additionally, it has a cool visual Gain Reduction Trace feature that helps you to see what you are doing to the signal. It's a great feature.

De-Esser Module:

The De-Esser is modeled on the classic DBX 902 De-Esser. It's friendly to the first time user, and I really like this visual Trace that lets you "see" when the De-Esser is engaging the detected sibilance. I have used several De-Essers, and this is one of the best.

Gate Module: Gates, in my opinion, can be kind of boring, but this one has

all the features you need, plus the Visual Trace that lets you "see" the Gate doing its thing. What's great about all these Visual Traces are that you can easily tell if you are overdoing something to mess up the signal, and it's a great learning tool.

Saturation Module:

Modern recordings use Saturation, which brings out harmonic structure to enhance and increase the individual sound's signature. This module has five nodes: Tape, Tube, Warm, Analog, Retro, and a High Shelf feature to protect you from too much of a good thing. My favorite is the Tape and Tube settings on Vocals. They're all useable though. Again, the visual display is genius to show what happens to the EQ spectrum as you add different types of Saturation.

Harmony Module:

This is one of the most exciting features of Nectar 2. Up to four-part harmony can be generated with this module. It automatically detects the key signature of the song, or you can select your own key and scale. There is individual Panning, Level, overall Pitch variation, and Delay of each Harmony part. Right away I knew I'd heard this "sound" before. Without naming artists, let me just say there are a ton of creative possibilities here. The harmonies can also be assigned to midi notes on a keyboard, and you can get great results on BGV's like

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Oohs, etc. It’s not perfect, but in a mix it is really modern sounding. On the visual side there’s an EQ spectrum with High and Low shelves, allowing EQ control on how the harmonies sit in the track. I recommend you check out the Pro-Tools-Expert demo on YouTube.

Reverb and EFX Modules

The Reverb module is based on the classic EMT 140 Plate that is the “go to” Vocal verb for many top engineers. To me it’s warm, and sounds as good as the individual EMT Plate plug-ins I have from other manufacturers. Included are good selections of EFX in

Nectar 2. They include: Distortion, Phase, Flange, Chorus, and a Delay/Stutter (Shred) effect that can sync to your DAW. Again, it opens up a lot of possibilities, and I recommend trying a bunch of the included presets.

Conclusion:

Nectar 2 is very impressive. I’ve enjoyed it from the moment I first inserted it on a vocal. The new interface is very intuitive, and with all the presets and instructional videos, it’s a no brainer. I’ve had great results on guitars too. If you’re making Vocal stems for live or mixing it’s pretty stellar. I’ve also tried

Nectar in parallel on a separate Vocal track that already has my normal mix chain for some extra beef, and I loved it. You won’t regret trying out this plug-in. Nectar 2 Standard edition, that I used for this review sells for \$229.00 There’s a Production Suite Version that adds a great Vocal Tuning Module and Rewire for \$299. For more information go to: <https://www.izotope.com>.



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clear, and full, with plenty of sweet top end jangle and no midrange mush.

The rosewood fretboard sports several interesting inlay shapes. One is the same “propeller” inlay used on EKO guitars of the same era. The frets are medium/jumbo in size, an oddity on a guitar of that era. The bridge is surrounded by an Art Deco plastic pickguard and features two height adjustment screws and six small saddles.

Testing this guitar was an experience unto itself. I had never played a Wandre guitar. Indeed, I had never seen one before until recently. I plugged into a nice sounding low watt Carr amplifier, strummed chords, and cranked out a few pentatonic blues licks. It sounded great, but it was clear from the start that the Spazial was not meant for heavy blues/rock playing, and you’ll never shred on it. This guitar would excel as a rhythm instrument in an old school R&B, coun-

try, pop, or surf context, given that it was manufactured in the days preceding the advent of heavy rock. I don’t think “Mississippi Queen” would sound very good on the Spazial, for instance, and forget about “Enter Sandman.”

Wandre Pioli made his unique guitars until 1968, and then turned his attention to other artistic pursuits: motorcycles, and the manufacture of leather clothing. He passed away in 2004. Author and scholar Marco B. Sharma wrote a book about Pioli called Wandre: The Artist Of The Electric Guitar that was released in 2014. It is available in English and online from www.anniversary-books.it.

Without a doubt, the most famous user of Wandre guitars is Americana country guitarist, singer, and songwriter Buddy Miller, who owns several Soloist models, which are conventionally shaped single cutaway guitars with three pickups. Miller bought them all at a Colorado pawnshop in the ‘70’s for about

\$75 each. Today, certain Wandre guitars are reportedly priced in the five figure range. Wandre Pioli only produced a limited number of guitars, perhaps seventy thousand at best, and certain models are quite rare today, but the exact number is unknown. It was said that the reason the numbers are low was because Pioli found it difficult to stick to a rigid production schedule. Each instrument was a separate work of art in his eyes.

My thanks to Buzzy Levine, owner of Lark Street Music of Teaneck, New Jersey, for allowing me to photograph and play this quirky vintage Wandre guitar.

Bob Cianci is a lifelong musician, music journalist, and author of the book, *Great Rock Drummers of The Sixties*, and has written extensively for many guitar and drum publications, newspapers, websites, and fanzines. He is a working guitarist and drummer in three bands in New Jersey.

His guitar collection numbers over twenty-five pieces at the moment, and is constantly evolving.



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