



Sugar Bytes THESYS

FOR PC
& MAC

If you're looking for a way of getting more out of your synths, Thesys may be the way to go. Alex Holmes steps it up.

KEY FEATURES

- Powerful control over any MIDI device
- Built-in synth for testing patterns
- Instant keyboard control for transpose, pattern select and Action section
- Random and Mutate functions for each sequencer
- Individual trigger and sync options
- Pattern sequencer

THESYS

Manufacturer **Sugar Bytes**

Price **€99**

Contact **info@sugar-bytes.de**

Web **www.sugar-bytes.de**

Minimum system requirements

PC 1GHz processor, Windows XP, 128MB RAM

Mac G4 1GHz, Mac OSX 10.4, 128MB RAM

Synth design, like many things in the electronic music world, is forever changing, with new software and hardware synths bringing new techniques and increasingly complex modulation routings. However, sit a synth pro in front of a 30-year-old Moog and he'll make it sing. The reason for this is obviously not cutting-edge technology, but programming prowess, which can be broken down into two things: the ability to program a good synth patch and the ability to write a good sequenced pattern.

Thesys, then, is the latest plug-in from innovative software heroes Sugar Bytes, and offers up a unique interface for creating your own complex instrument patterns and driving even the most basic of synths into a frenzy.

Mission control

Due to the fact that there are no samples or audio involved, the download weighs in at a mere 7MB and authorisation is dealt with quickly by serial number and internet registration.

The plug-in runs as either a VST or an Audio Unit within your host sequencer. Although you can run Thesys as its own instrument by using its fairly basic built-in synth, the real fun comes when you send the MIDI signal to another synth of your choice. This is easy enough in VST-based hosts, but a little tricky with Logic, as the AU format does not send or receive MIDI data. However, a workaround is provided and with a little tweaking in the Environment page you're good to go.

The interface has many things in common with Sugar Bytes' other chord and arpeggio sequencer Consequence, having separate lanes for pitch, velocity, gate time, performance (pitch bend, octave and chord controls) and a modulation section with up to eight lanes of MIDI controller automation. There's also a pattern sequencer for stringing together ideas, an Action section to perform a series of global live edits to the sequence, plus a keyboard display along the bottom showing which keys are currently active (you'll need at least a 49-note keyboard to get the most out of Thesys' live performance functions).

Making patterns

Initially, the input of sequences – particularly melodies – seems a little awkward, and drag-and-drop functionality for pre-programmed MIDI regions is surely likely in a future update. That said, with a little patience you can quickly build complex stepped patterns

complete with pitch bends, chords and multiple lanes of automation controlling different sections of your synth. Once you've created a pattern there are many ways in which it can be transformed, with subtle to extreme Random buttons available on the overall patch or, more usefully, on individual lanes, plus controls to shift each sequence up, down, left or right. Up to 16 patterns can be stored in each preset and these can be triggered by pressing the first 16 keys on your MIDI keyboard.

The next eight keys trigger the Action functions, which do such things as loop a section for a number of steps, shorten the gate time of each note, half the speed of the sequence and switch off notes that fall below a certain velocity. In practice this is a joy to use and performances can be given shape and detail by switching the effects in and out. It would, however, be even more useful if there were a few more Actions available and their distribution on the keyboard could be edited. Finally, the top two octaves of the keyboard control the pitch of your sequence, so you can transpose up and down on-the-fly.

Riff works

Thesys is not without its quirks, and despite offering masses of control there are still certain sequences that would prove impossible to program. But it's the unique nature of the product that makes it so appealing, and as a tactile live performance tool it's an immense amount of fun. At the end of the day, inspiration is worth a hundred cutting-edge super-synths and with Thesys you'll end up making killer riffs that you would never have come up with through raw programming alone. **MATT**

SUMMARY

WHY BUY

- Immensely powerful control over every aspect of your patterns
- Helps you think outside the box when programming riffs
- Performing riffs is fun!

WALK ON BY

- Could do with more control over pitch bend curves
- Tricky integration into AU hosts
- Presets are a bit weak

VERDICT

If you're after the ultimate programmable arpeggiator and a way of getting more out of your synths, Thesys is in a league of its own.



MEASURING UP

There are a few other options for gaining similar results, but none has the same degree of depth and control over a performance. Consequence (€149) is Sugar Bytes' polyphonic groovebox and is aimed more at chords and arps. There's also MIDI Madness (£49), which generates algorithmic MIDI melodies but doesn't have any performance features.