

VSDS-X

A L Y J A M E S L A B

SIMMONS DRUMS EXTENDED VST USER MANUAL



BASED ON SDSV - SDS7 - SDS1 DRUM BRAINS

WINDOWS 32BIT



VSDSX

SIMMONS SDS-V EXTENDED DRUMS

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USER MANUAL 1.0

BY

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INTRODUCTION

My name is Aly James;

French steam funky musician, composer and creator of strange musical DIY devices and software.

I was planning for a long time to make an accurate Simmons VST dedicating to the 1st Great Analog drum synth in History, mainly because I have never been happy with packs of samples coming from different recording chains, lack of control over the pitch and source mixing and all that makes the unique sound of that legendary drum brain invented by Dave Simmons.

You probably already heard a Simmons drum synth without even knowing it... wondering **what was used to produce that huge drum sound?**

The Simmons **hexagonal shaped** electronic drums were all over the place, on **countless records and live shows during the 80s**, used by artists and bands like Genesis, King Crimson, Jean Michel Jarre, Prince, Herbie Hancock, Pink Floyd etc... The sound was not especially realistic but it was not the goal...the goal was to be **huge and versatile**. Invented by **Dave Simmons**, the most famous drum brain called the **SDSV or SDS5** was a drum synthesizer, bringing synthesis into the drummer hands.

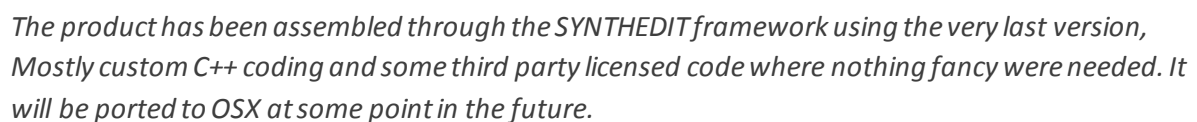
Often used abusively to generate only those pewwww pewwww tom tom sounds, the **SDSV module produced a wide range of sounds**. With a **great punch and sensitivity**, a truly unique and **cult sound, it can be used for almost everything**. The SDSV successor called **SDS7** bring some digital low-fi samples in the game and a bunch of additional features like bend direction or FM modulation for a broader range of possible sounds.

The SDSV is an historical piece of gear that has a place in the sound of the 80s and is still used today as a secret weapon. **Only around 5000** of these things are out there so don't count on finding a working one easily or for cheap. The machine was made by a true innovator that later unfortunately lost his Simmons Company (He should probably get his name back at some point!). As there were no accurate VST for this legend out there...

I had to make the VSDSX! I have also taken some freedom to tweak a bit the behavior of the original system to make it even more versatile.

Personally, I grew up listening to a lot of 80s music, the Simmons drum sound was preeminent and was a huge part of that particular sound. The fact that the SDS-V was mostly analog, it was also secret tool to make some drum layering with real drums or drum machines like the Linn LM-1 or

The coolest thing was that raw analog character and the awesome punch the brains delivered. All of these have been studied and I have tried to reproduce accurately the sound generation. I think the result is pretty nice, so let's bring back the Simmons sound together! VSDSX gives you even more control over the sound generation than the real Simmons brains 😊 at least if you are not an electronic engineer. It is based on the SDS-V but also mixes some features from SDS3, SDS7, and SDS1.



A special thanks to Dave Simmons (Simmons drums Creator) & Wolfgang Stoelzle (simmonsmuseum.com)

Mainly,

VSDSX can be triggered via MIDI following mostly the GM MIDI Drums mapping.

Each trigger will engage some envelope generators that will act on different part of the circuit. The output is amplified by an OPAMP and will be filtered in some way differently depending on the volume; the analog behavior emulation will reproduce the soft and hard clipping when pushed hard.

Each voice has its own knobs that will control all the parameters of the sound generation, Bass, Snare, Toms and Hihat/Cymbal are tuned differently.

One voice is EPROM based and can be replaced by external compatible. This opens up to any sample sounds Linn, DMX, Drumtracks etc... and even your own created EPROM content (See EPROM Loading.)

Basic MIDI implementation:

MIDI IN:

VSDSX can receive any MIDI CH as main source for triggers.
It can be triggered with a standard MIDI Keyboard/Pads or even a MIDI Drum Kit.

The mapping follows almost the same mapping as GM MIDI Standard.

Note that most DAW can convert incoming MIDI notes to another if needed and that most of the hardware MIDI pads can be assigned to any MIDI notes.

Bass – MIDI notes 35, 36	Cymbal – MIDI note 51
Snare – MIDI notes 38, 40	EPROM – MIDI note 39
Tom High – MIDI notes 41, 43, 45	
Tom Med – MIDI notes 47, 48	
Tom Low – MIDI note 50	
Hihat Closed – MIDI notes 42, 44	
Hihat Open – MIDI note 46	

INSTALLATION

COMPATIBILITY

VSDSX is a Windows 32Bit VST Instrument for use with MIDI capable DAWs.

RUN on 32/64 Bit Systems.

If you want to use it with a 64bit DAW you can use the DAW internal Bridge or JBridge.

INSTALL VST

1. Decompress the downloaded archive file
2. Copy the entire Folder **VSDSX** to your VST PLUGINS folder
3. Load it in your DAW

INSTALL STANDALONE

1. Decompress the downloaded archive file
2. Copy the entire Folder **VSDSX_STANDALONE** where you want
3. Simply RUN **VSDSX.exe**

State of VSDSX current features

WIN 32 VST runs on 32/64Bit Systems and it is multicore compatible.

HIGH QUALITY GUI

(Different panels for controls etc...)

INSTANT UPDATE FOR ALL CONTROLS

FULL MIDI AUTOMATION

With midi learn (right click to assign MIDI)

ANALOG MODELED OSCILLATOR

The special tone character of the drum synth is mainly caused by the raw analog waveform generation and by the circuitry itself, it generate harmonics that are normally not present in an ideal triangle waveform, VSDSX emulates that behavior and also models the analog clipping that occurs when pushed hard. You can also switch to a clean mode which will behave like an ideal system without OPAMP bandwidth limitation (more highs). These features alone offer a great versatility for sound design.

NOISE GENERATOR CIRCUITRY TWEAKING

The sound source of the drum synth was mainly a mix between a triangle oscillator and a transistor based noise generator. The way it was initially connected could be tuned for more or less frequency content. Each voice have different configuration and VSDSX offers user control over the internal noise filtering (especially useful on the snare voice card).

A lots of the circuitry parameters can also be fine-tuned, CV and VCA response, Trigger types (that will mostly impact the click attack generator time) etc.

SSM2044 Filters

The noise source was filtered by an SSM2044 low pass filter chip, the filter acts on the noise and clicks part and behaves differently depending on the voice, on bass & toms the resonance resistor was usually set to no resonance, but this can be tweaked inside the VSDSX if you want.

PITCH BENDING & SDS7 LFO FM modulation

One of the obvious things that must be there in a drum synthesizer is a pitch envelope to simulate the behavior of real drums. The SDSV module featured a bending down effect that can be set to more or less amount of bending. VSDSX also features a bend up option and an optional FM modulation taken from the SDS7 module.

SEPARATE OUTPUTS

The SDSV have separate outputs for every voices and so as the VSDSX.

You can choose from ALL to 1 Stereo Channel or Separate Channels for each voice.

TRIGGER SENSITIVITY CONTROL & VELOCITY

The drum synth is highly sensitive to the power with which a pad or a key is hit, VSDSX gives independent access to sensitivity tuning for each voice, pitch of the tone, VCF cutoff, click trigger etc... You can also disable the volume velocity tracking and only set a pitch sensitivity which gives access to a similar feature than the "run generator" found in certain Simmons Systems.

GUI & AUTOMATION

The GUI features all the SDSV controls (with the same weird naming :)) but can also give access to a full module display with more in depth controls, most of the parameters can be MIDI learned and controlled by an external MIDI Hardware or automation.

LOADING EXTERNAL EPROMS DATA

The VSDSX provides one voice which is EPROM based (like SDS1 or SDS7) the imported sample will benefit from the bend and noise mixing feature with that crunchy 8bit sound. Load your own custom made EPROM image. EPROM format is the same as VLINN for easy compatibility between software's.

VSDSX supports the following type and size EPROMS binaries (.bin)

2716(2048_Bytes) 2K

2732(4096_Bytes) 4K

2764(8192_Bytes) 8K

27128(16384_Bytes) 16K

27256(32768_Bytes) 32K

LOAD & SAVE FULL PATCH & BANKS in FXB/FXP

CONTROL PANELS

Overview

VSDSX GUI INTERFACE is pretty straight forward; it stores the different parameters on different panels.

The main interface let you select the voice you want to edit, for each voice you have those basic controls:

The **SENSITIVITY** controls let you fine tune how the trigger velocity will affect the sound. The **pitch setting** will act on the tone pitch from 0 to one octave, the **volume velocity control** can be set to off independently and the **attack setting** will affect the short pitch pulse of the tone. (See Triggers)

The **NOISE** knob will set the Noise VCF cutoff frequency (it works differently for Hihat and Cymbal). Note that it also affects the click sound as it is generated from the filtered noise source.

The **TONE** knob will set the base tone VCO frequency.

The **BEND** knob will set the bend amount applied to the tone pitch and VCF cutoff (not on snare). A push button will invert the envelope generator CV to produce a **bend up or down**. The bend down will start from the base frequency; the bend up will start very low and reach the bend frequency.

The **DECAY** knob will set the decay time of the sound envelope, it also applies to the VCF cutoff excepted for the snare. The **VCA response switch** can change the CV type from the natural exponential type (default) to a linear CV type.

The **NOISE TONE** mixer knob will mix the noise generator with the VCO accordingly.

The **CLICK** knob will mix the sound body (noise + VCO) with the short click sound accordingly.

PANELS:

FULL MODULE: Will switch all voices to the full module view.

MULTI OUT: Will set the VST to multiple outputs configuration.

This will route all the voices to a separate output labeled with the voice name. You have to enable the multiple outputs in your DAW. Each DAW has its way of doing it but it is generally straight forward. The multiple outputs let you MIX easily the VLINN voices in your DAW as you will have a plain channel strip for each one.

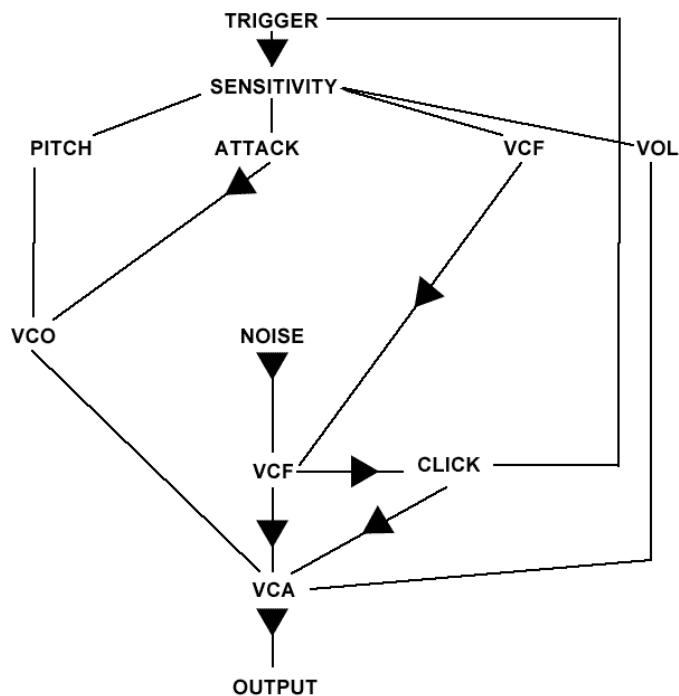
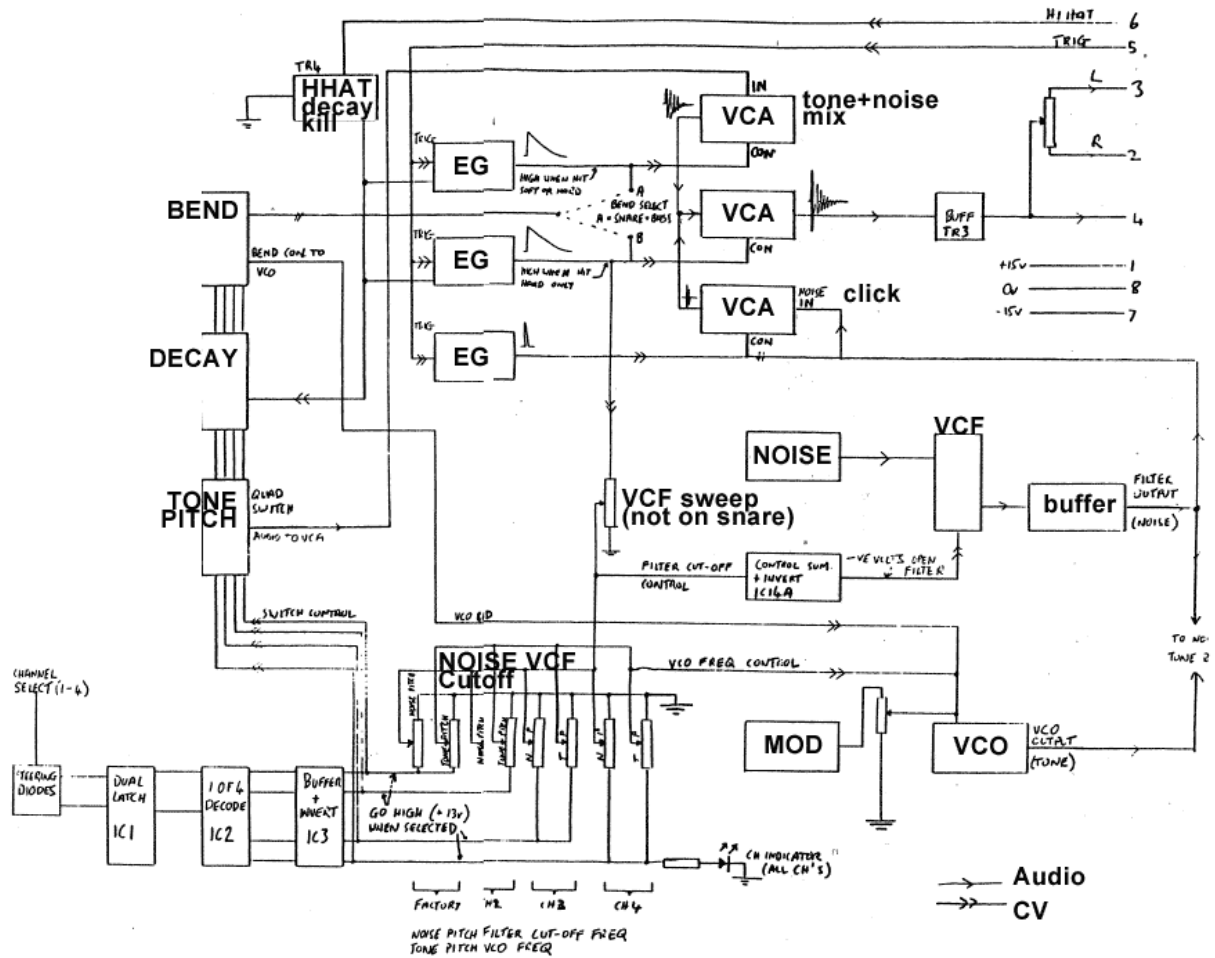
OPEN SETS: Access to global configuration panel. It Controls, SSM2044 velocity affect, CV curves and sound emulation modes (CLEAN or ANALOG).

EPROM Load custom: Access to the EPROM loading panel (only on the PROM voice)



Right click on a knob, button or slider will open a midi learn assign menu. Ctrl click + move allow fine tuning.

THE SDS-V

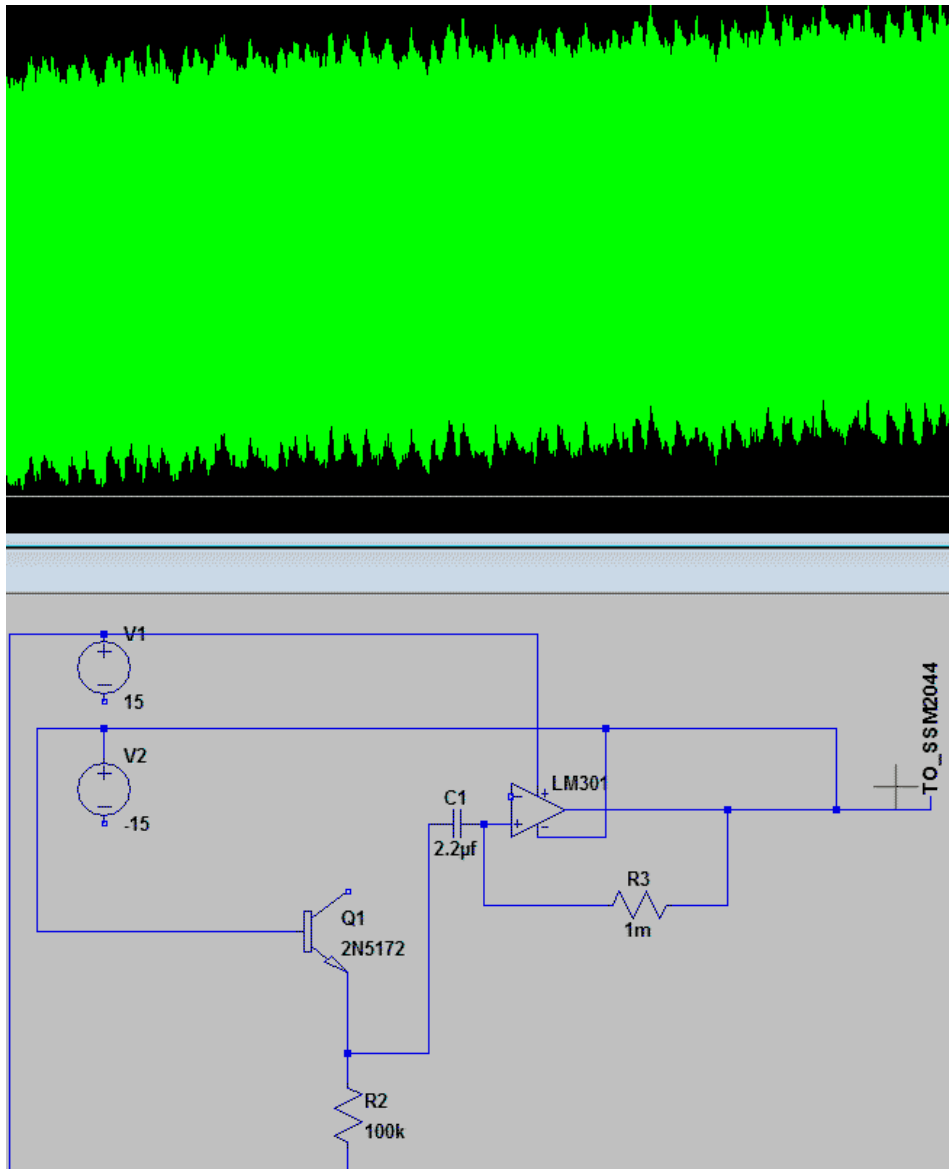


The SDS-V usually comes with a basic Bass, Snare + 3 Toms configuration but some lucky ones had the hihat and cymbal modules.

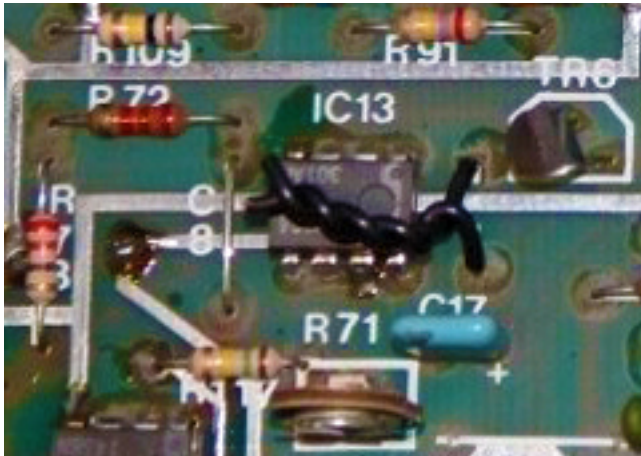
If you look at these circuit diagrams you can see how the signal flows, basically the trigger will engage envelope generators that will trigger the VCAs which will shape the noise generator, click and tone VCO. The click itself is composed of the same filtered noise source.

Let's look at the noise generator...

NOISE GENERATOR

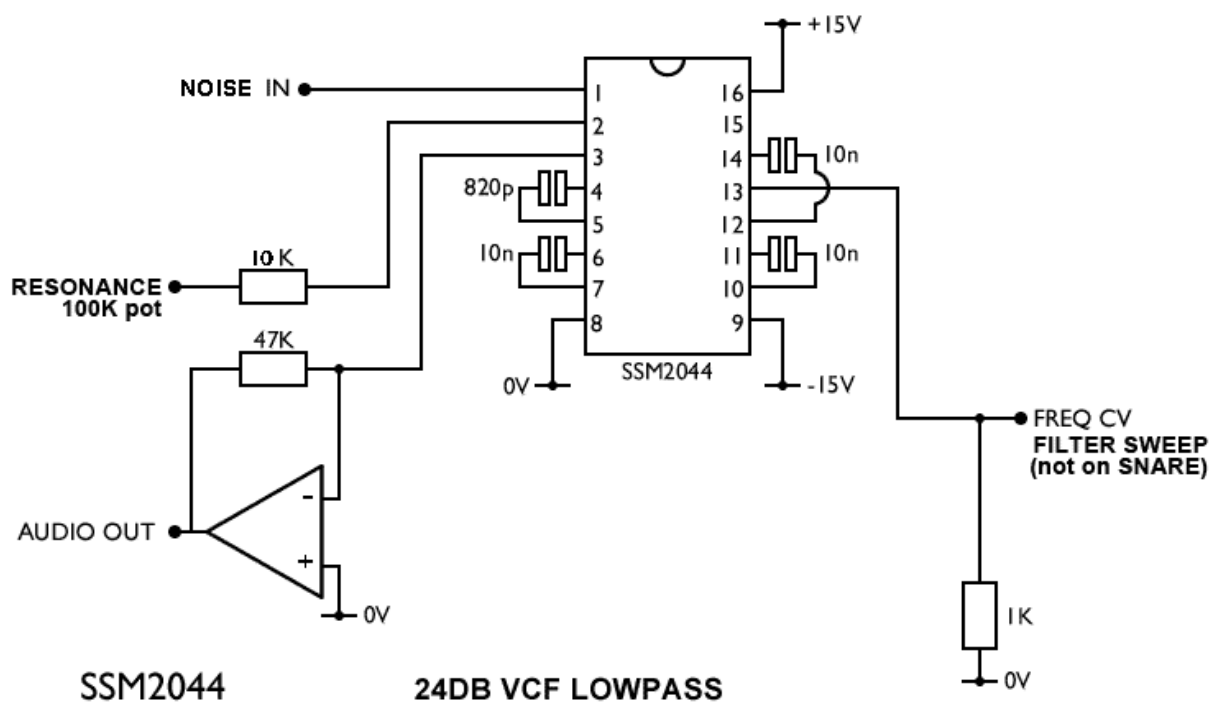


It is based on classic transistor noise amplification (transistor + OPAMP) with a special thing, the twisted wires...



It is called a gimmick capacitor, used to get a very small pico-farad capacitance and it is here in place of a proper compensation capacitor on the op amp. It seems to let one be able to 'tune' the noise easily, this is available to tweak in VSDSX as the **HPF** knob. It lets you filter out some of the noise generator frequencies and is nice to produce a fuller noise sound, the SNARE in VSDSX have an extra setting called **FULL NOISE** which will bring all of the noise generator frequencies.

THE SSM2044 VCF

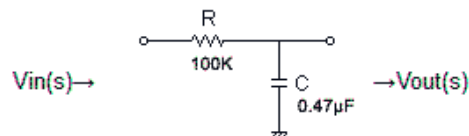


The iconic **Curtis chip SSM2044 (but also low cost) low pass filter** was used to filter the noise in the SDS-V, the resonance can be tweaked but never in a big amount and you will not reach self-oscillation on the SDS-V. This is the type of filter that will not maintain the gain around the cutoff resonance, so you will lose the bottom end. The frequency CV of the filter will be affected by the

envelope and the trigger velocity, the noise will get duller as the sound decay. The snare is connected differently and the envelope will not affect the frequency CV (which is more like a real snare).

THE VCO

The raw analog VCO triangular output get filtered by a basic RC circuit which form a low pass filter at 338.6Hz.



Transfer Function:

$$G(s) = \frac{2127.65957447}{s + 2127.65957447}$$

Cut-off frequency

$$f_c = 338.627538493[\text{Hz}]$$

CR Filter

Rise/Fall time of step response

$$R = 1000 \, \Omega \quad C = 4.7\text{E-}7 \, \text{F}$$

Pole(s)

$$p = -338.627538493[\text{Hz}]$$

$$|p| = 338.627538493[\text{Hz}]$$

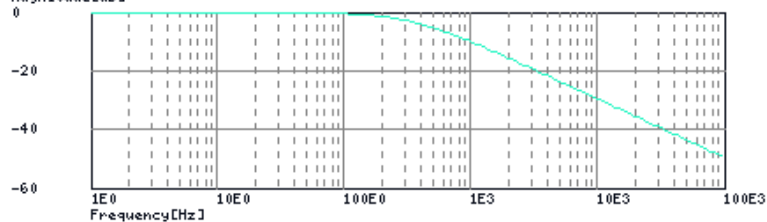
Final value of the step response (on the condition that the system converged when t goes to infinity)

$$g(\infty) = 1$$

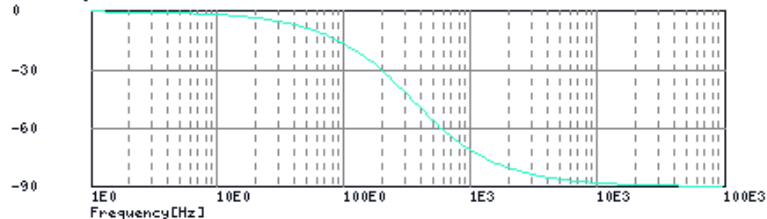
Frequency analysis

BodeDiagram

Magnitude[dB]



Phase[deg]



This filtering is only applied in VSDSX when you are in ANALOG mode.

ANALOG SOUND

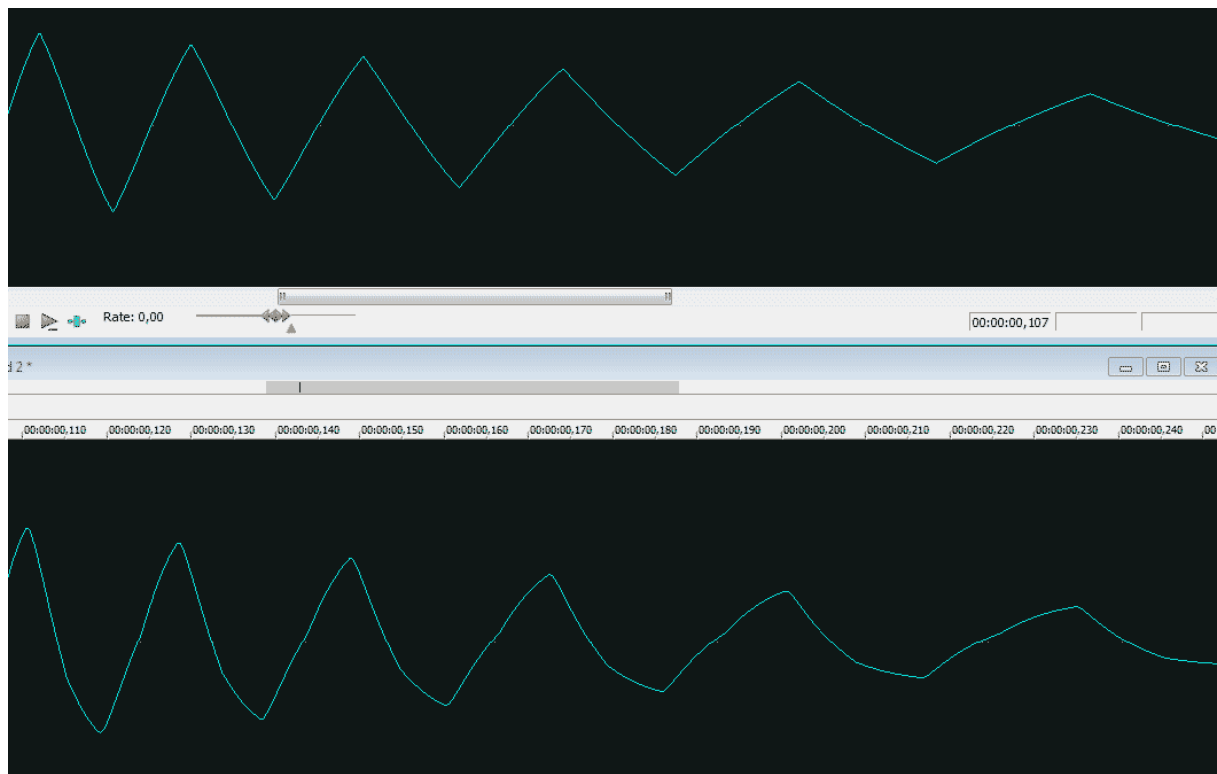
The nature of analog is that every part of the circuitry will influence the other.

One of the main things that get affected is the sound harmonics and distortion.

VSDSX lets you switch between a CLEAN (read ideal mode) and ANALOG (harmonics and filtering)

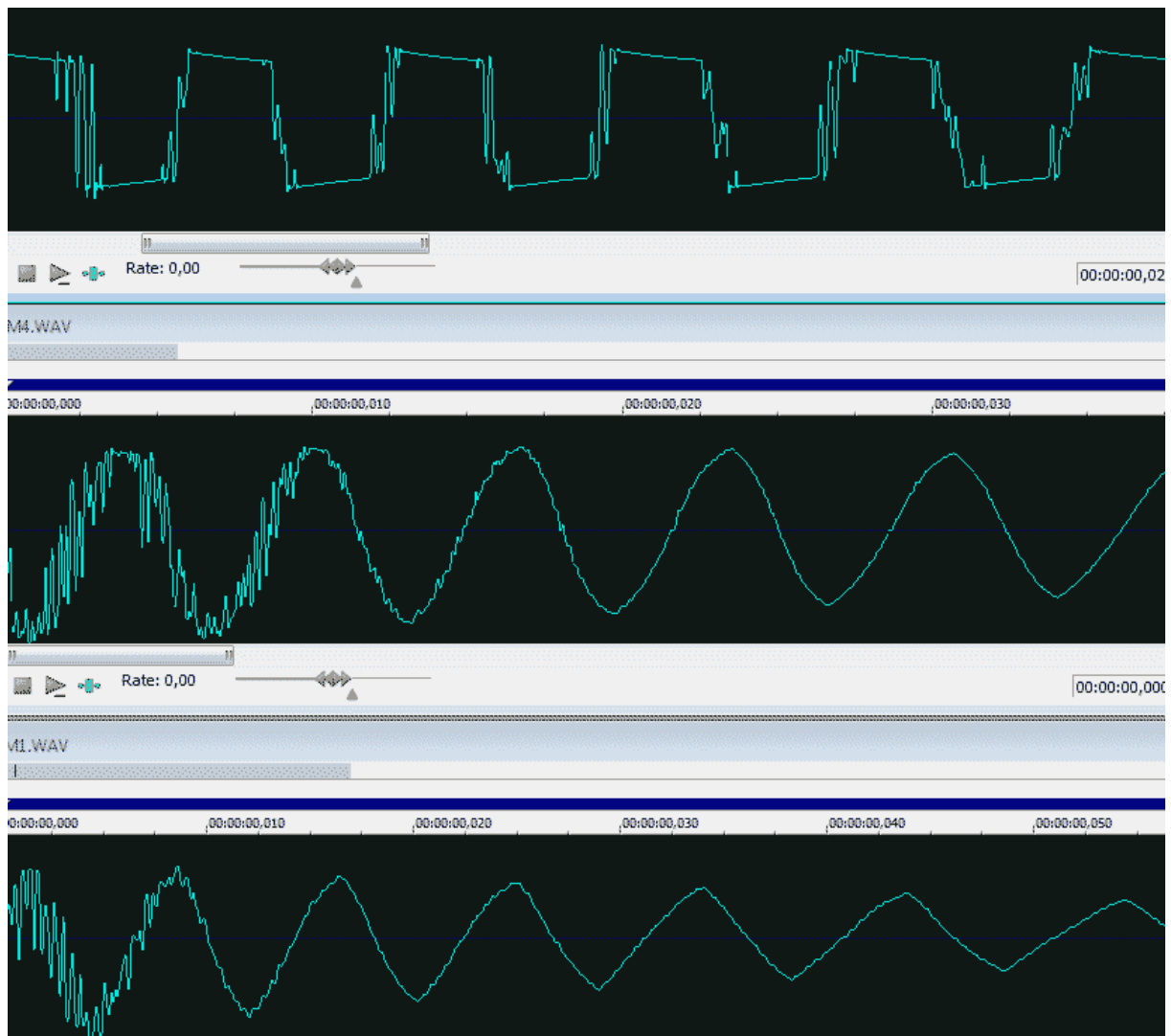
The nature of the tone VCO will be affected by this setting, especially because an ideal triangle wave contains only odd harmonics, it has a characteristic sound, similar to a square wave. When in analog mode, different harmonics will be introduced; included even ones and the sound characteristic will change a bit.

The graphic shows the differences between clean (ideal triangle) and analog



The **analog clipping** also happens on CLEAN mode and will affect the sound depending on the voice volume. Note that the more you mix CLICK with the sound body, the less volume the sound body will have. If you set the NOISE TONE mix to full body, no click the volume will increase significantly and you might reach clipping earlier. The analog clipping is pretty nice and can bring some punch and presence to the sound, it depends what you are after.

This graphic shows the waveform from really clipped to none.



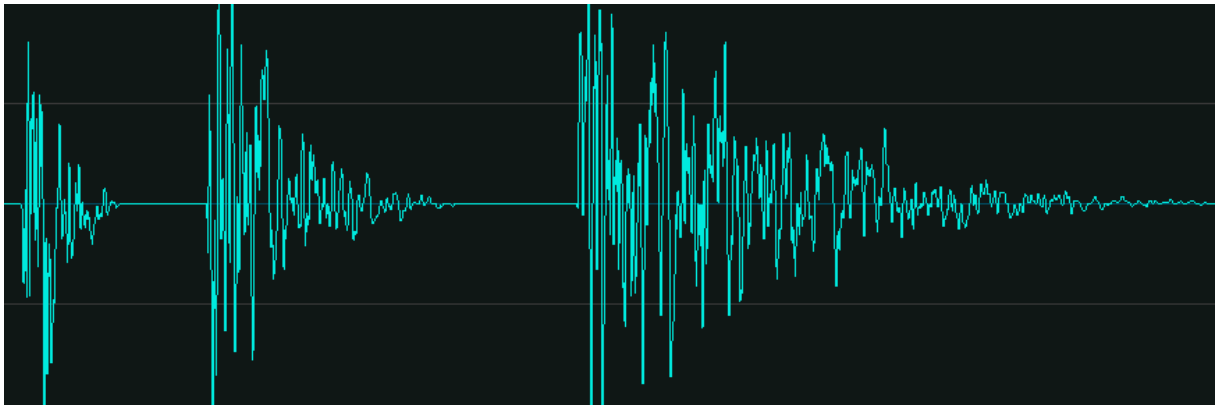
The volume can get pretty high so be sure to reduce your DAW channel volume to keep plenty of headroom☺.

FULL MODE



The Full mode gives you access to all the fine tuning controls of the voice card.

- **VOL:** Set the general volume of the voice, can reach analog clipping if pushed hard.
- **HPF:** This setting Controls the internal filtering of the noise generator, usually set to high excepted for snare, you can tune this parameter like you want.
- **RES:** This is the SSM2044 VCF lowpass resonance, usually set to none on SDS-V, excepted for snare; you can tune this parameter like you want.
- **CLICK Trigger Shape:** This is useful to emulate different type of trigger CV, Simmons pads generates a richer trigger pulse than sequencer CV for example. This will affect the length of the click; this parameter ranges from 78ms to 315ms. The reset button will restore factory setting.

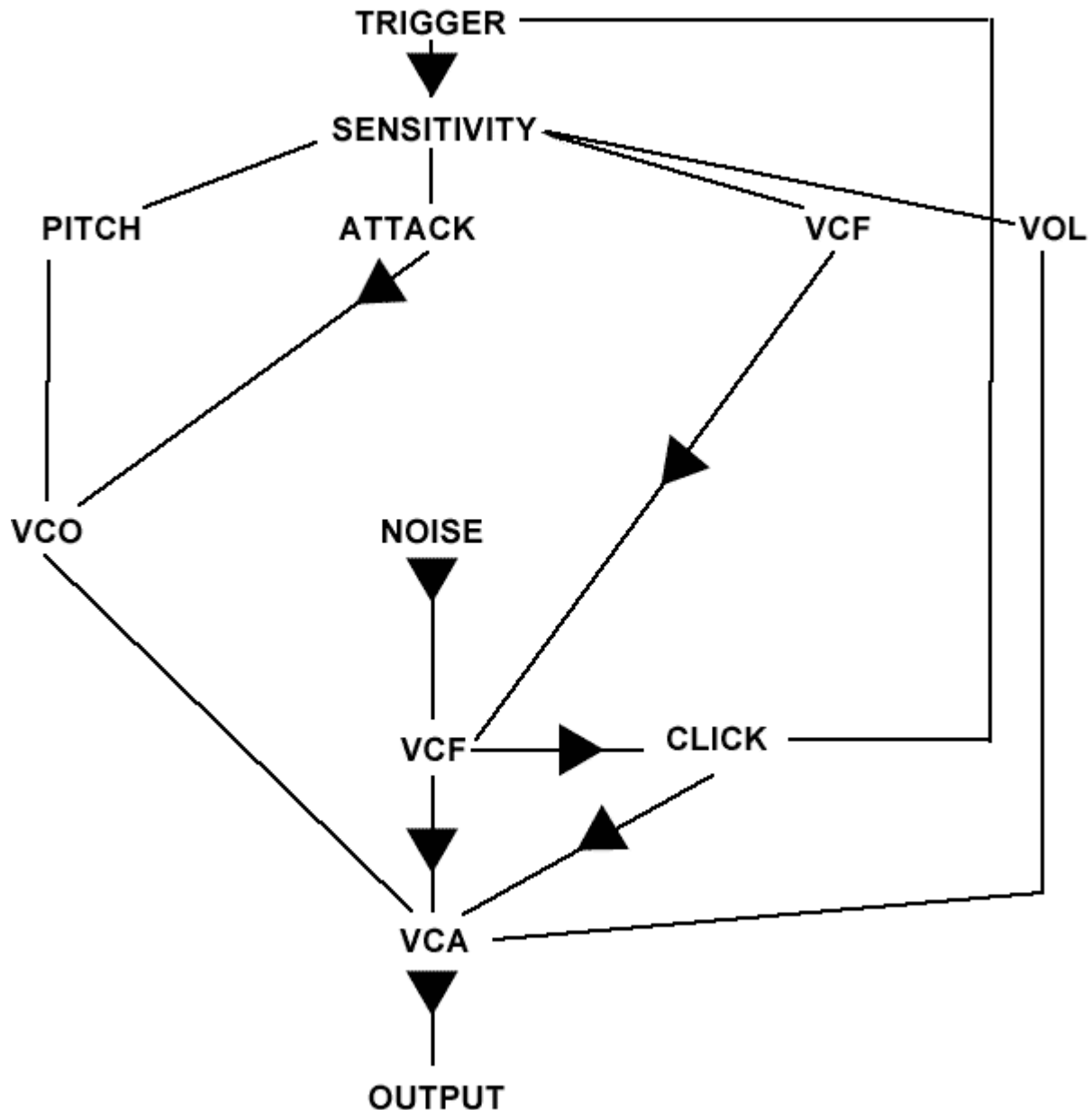


- **MOD amount:** This is the a Frequency Modulation amount, an LFO is available **per voice** (like a super SDS3) the LFO can be set to a triangular or square output shape, the modulation is applied to the VCO pitch (note that the snare has an additional switch which let you additionally route the modulation to the VCF, in this case this is a pre-fader modulation (full modulation is sent regardless of the mod amount)
- **RATE:** This controls the speed of the LFO, the **divide** switch will set the frequency to a **low range** or a **high range**.

All these parameters can really shape the sound in many ways; it is up to you to experiment!

TRIGGERS

The VSDSX is highly velocity sensitive, when a trigger is sent it will follow this path:



The amount of which the velocity will affect those parameters can be fine tuned

The **pitch setting** will send the pitch higher depending on the velocity, for example if you set the tone pitch at 440Hz (A) and the pitch sensitivity is set to 2 SEMI (2 semitones) when you hit the pad hard (velocity 127) the starting tone will be 2 semitones higher so a B note. If hit at mid power (velocity 64) the tone will start 1 semitone higher so an A# note etc...

The **volume** setting will enable or disable the velocity tracking applied to the volume, this is useful to emulate the “run generator feature” found on certain Simmons systems, if you set the volume

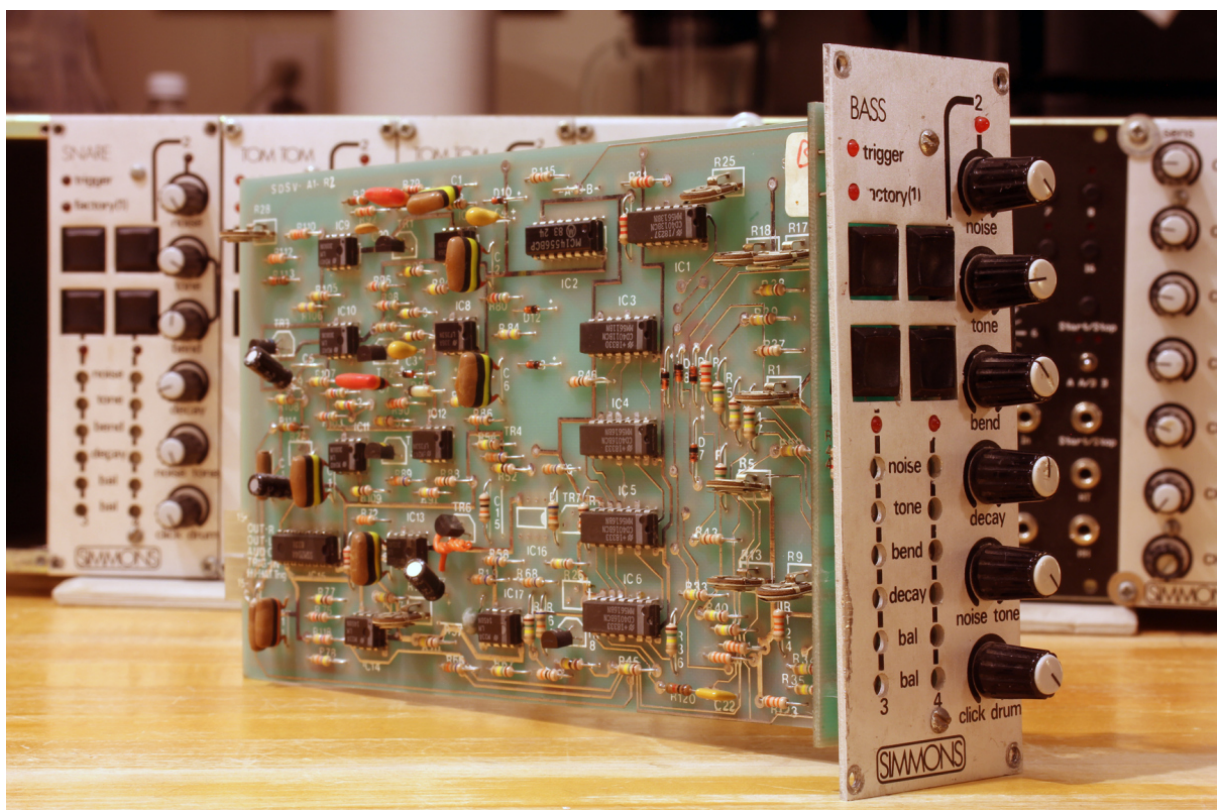
tracking to OFF and the pitch setting to 1 OCTAVE, hitting the pad at different velocity will only affect the pitch, which is useful to make tom runs on only one pad☺.

The **attack** setting will affect the short pulse that is sent to the VCO pitch, it is so short (19ms) that you don't notice a pitch change but instead it gives a more pronounced attack to the sound, you can really hear it if you set for example the BASS to no click, no noise and change the attack parameter.

It ranges from 0 to 3 (which basically send the pitch from 0 to 3 octaves higher for 19ms). The amount of attack also depends on the velocity.

Note that the VCF cutoff is also affected by the velocity; this can be fine-tuned on the OPEN SETS panel.

BASS VOICE



The BASS voice tone can be set from 30Hz to 440Hz

This is the classic configuration of the BASS card:

BASS: 30-440Hz

Noise cutoff gets brighter with velocity

No bend velocity

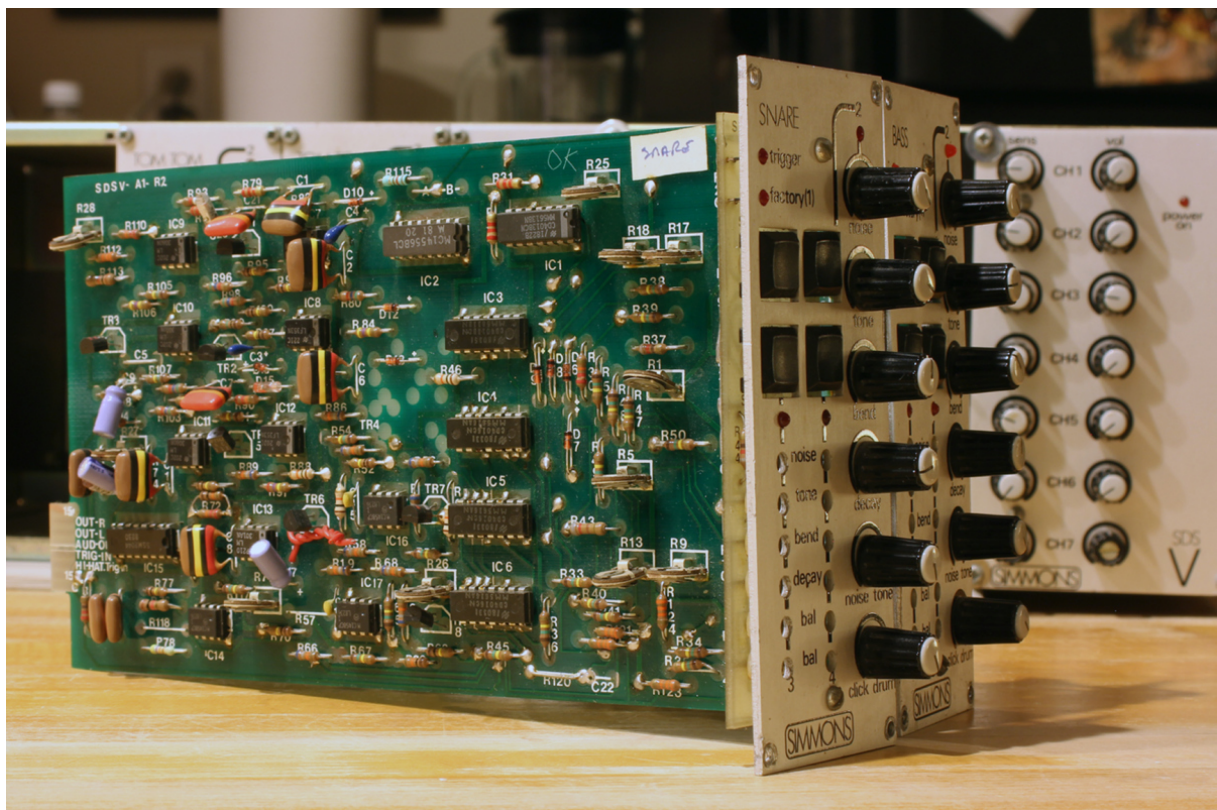
R25 Filter Dynamic Sweep (Filter Cutoff envelope affect) 75%

R27 No resonance

R26 No mod Depth

R71 Noise is equal gain with tone 50/50

SNARE VOICE



This is the classic configuration of the SNARE card:

SNARE: 100 - 880Hz

No bend velocity

R25 Filter Dynamic Sweep (Filter Cutoff envelope affect) 0%

R27 Resonance Q should be 60%

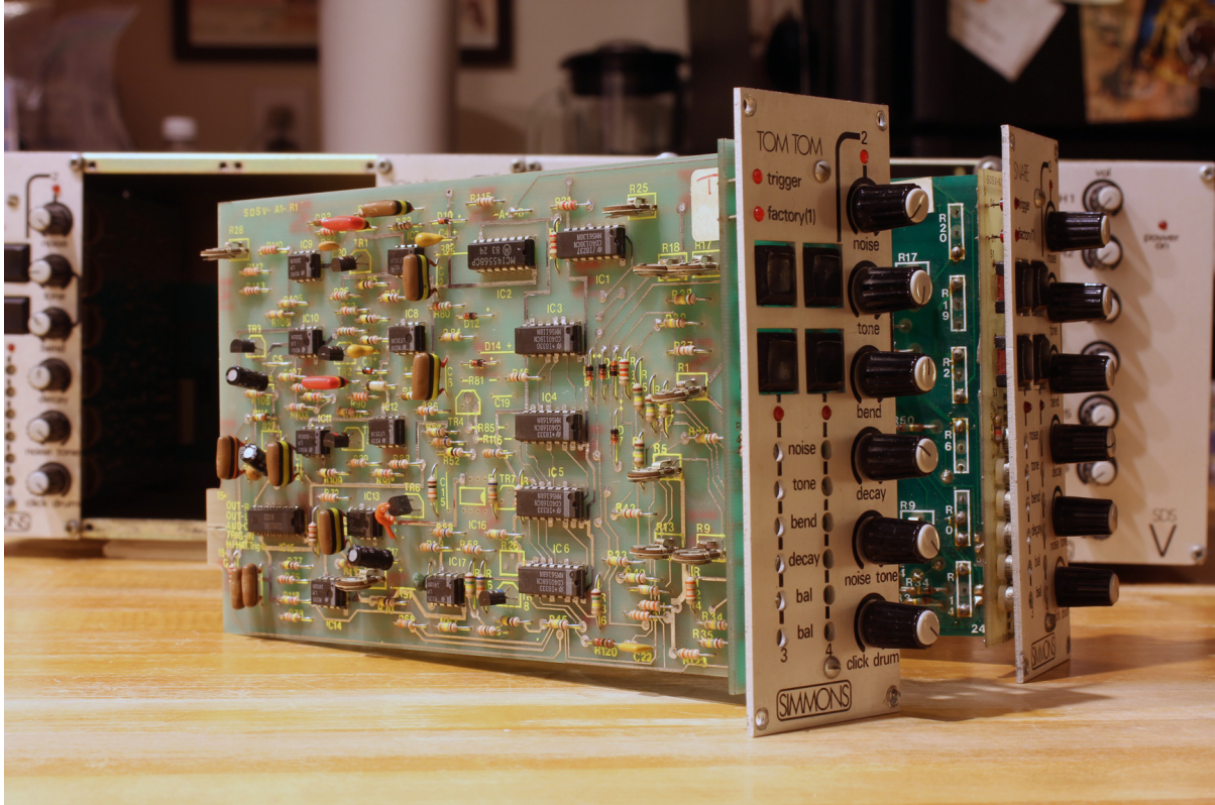
R71 Slightly more noise than tone (lowers tone or boost noise level)

R26 50% Mod (on hard hits)



The SNARE featured 2 additional parameters, the **FULL NOISE** (which lets all the noise generator frequencies pass through) and the **VCF modulation switch** (it will send the full modulation amount to the VCF cutoff, regardless of the modulation amount). VCF modulation is applied additionally to the VCO modulation, so you will still have control over the VCO modulation.

TOM VOICES



This is the classic configuration of the TOM cards:

TOM HI & TOM MED : 100 - 880Hz TOM LOW : 30 - 880Hz

Noise gets brighter with velocity

Bend amount velocity

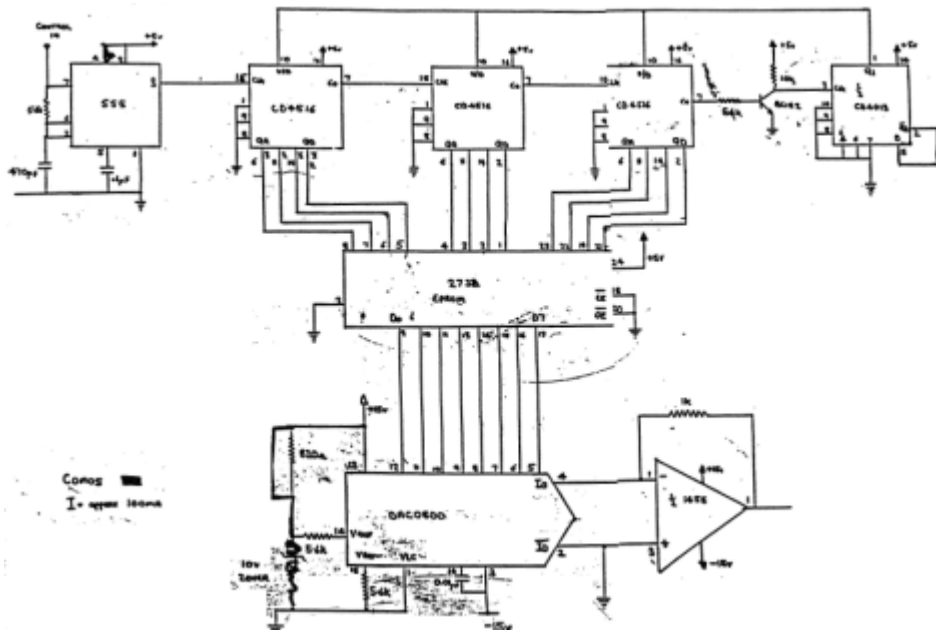
R25 Filter Dynamic Sweep (Filter Cutoff envelope affect) 75%

R27 No resonance

R26 No mod Depth

R71 Slightly more tone than noise

HIHAT & CYMBAL VOICES



The Hi-hat & Cymbal modules were pretty rare and unique sounding, mostly they were sample based, same configuration for both cards, but in a very particular way.

Honestly, the metallic waveform has nothing to do with a real hi-hat or cymbal sound, you can hear its looping and the raw 8bit character, but: This is a CULT sound! If you play this with bending up or down while toying around with noise and filter, you get these famous cymbal sweeps!

Velocity can also act on the sample rate and it sounds pretty original.

Memory was expensive at that time so you cannot store a long sample and be cost effective.

So Dave Simmons looped the short sound stored onto a 2732 EPROM, a trick first used by Roger Linn in the LM-1 but this time, the sample is read forward then backward.

The loop plays all the time inside the SDSVs digital modules and only VCA and VCF are triggered, this configuration opens up to very long decay settings.

The 555 Timer is the clock which set the speed of sample reading, the CD4516 are the counters and the CD4013 is changing the readout direction once counter reach the end.

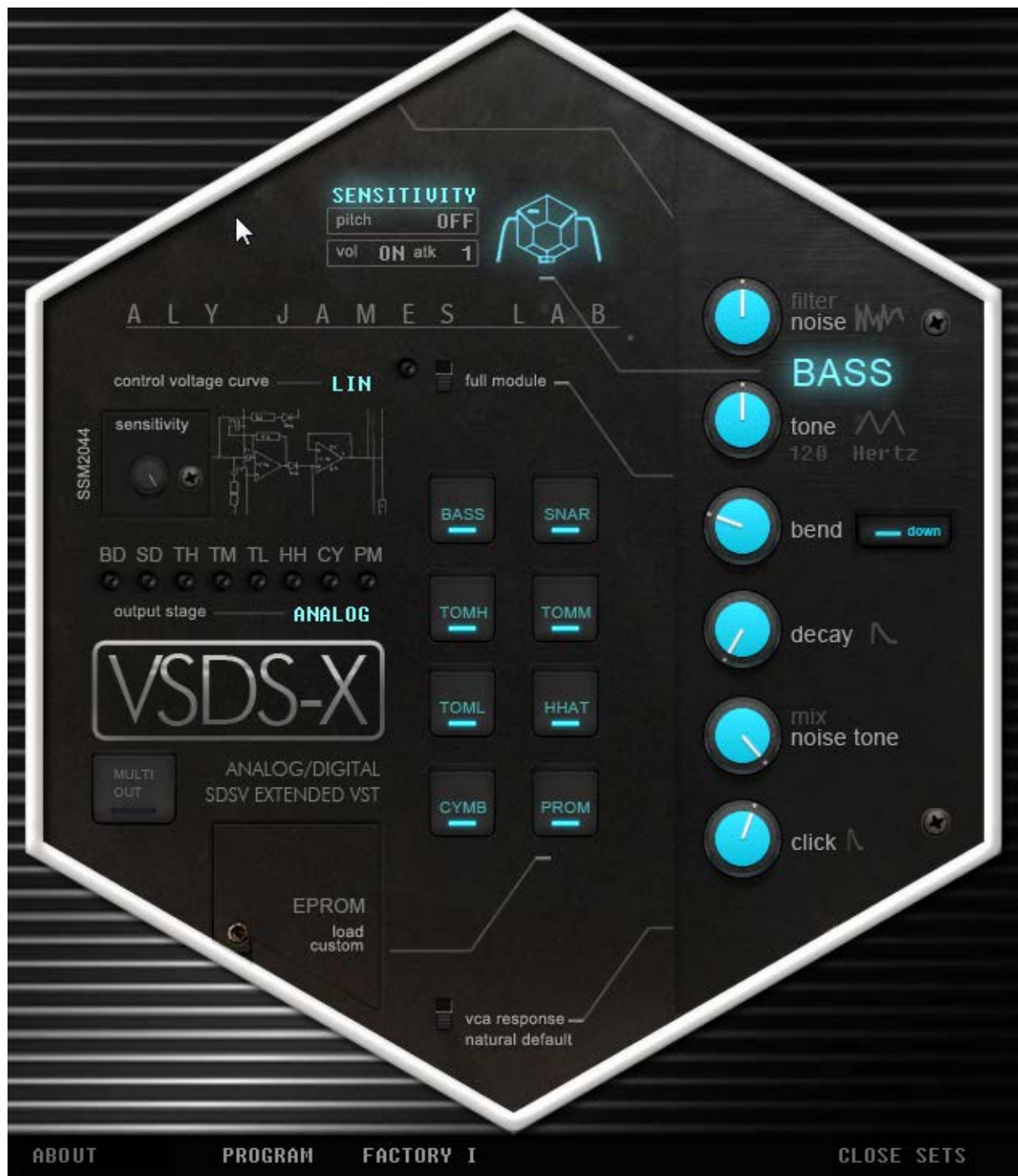
The data are stored as a linear 8bit format and decoded by the emulated linear 8bit DAC.



PLEASE NOTE A PARTICULAR BEHAVIOR for the NOISE filter knob, when set fully anti clock wise it is affected by the envelope and behaves like the BASS and TOM voice (the noise gets duller as the envelope decays). When it is set at 12 o'clock it behave like the SNARE voice (cutoff is not affected by the envelope) and when set fully clock wise, the noise starts dull and gets brighter as the envelope decays.

The fact that the raw sample source gets affected by the pitch bend envelope gives the HHAT and CYMBAL that unique sound. **One thing that also happens on real hardware** is when the 555 timer is affected by the bend amount and happens to be set at 0Hz the sample source will not play anymore and will disappear until the speed change to a higher speed value.

SETTINGS



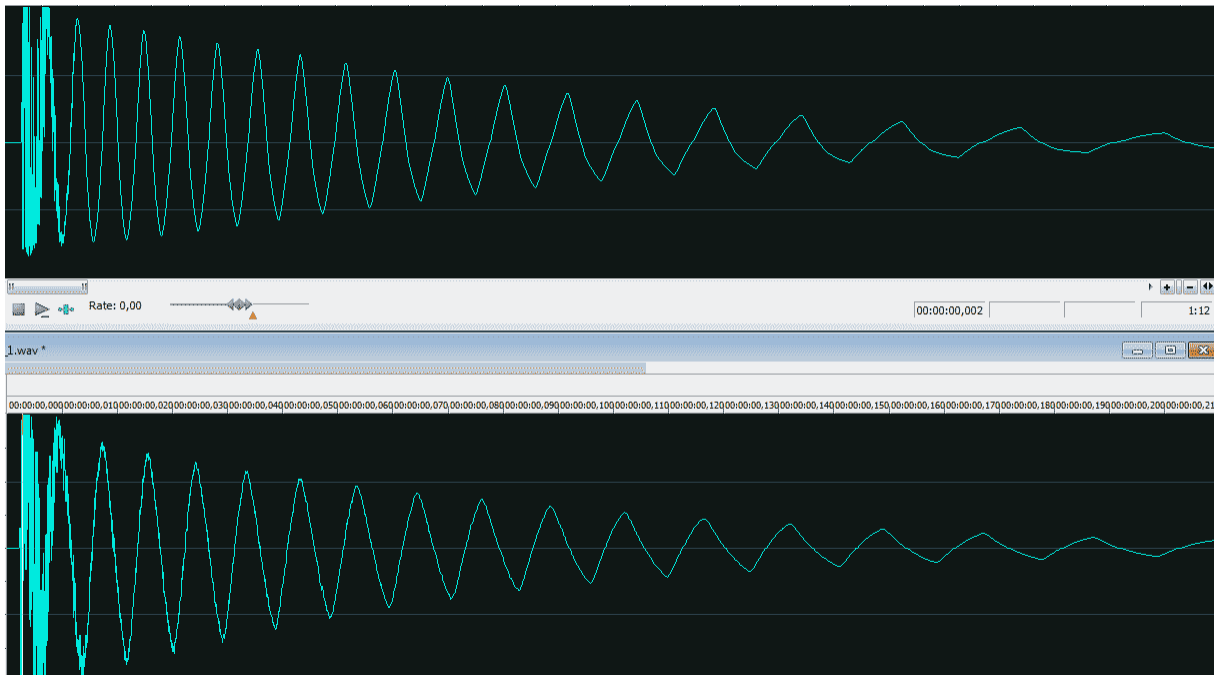
The OPEN SETS panel will let you fine tune some global parameters like control voltage curve, output stage emulation modes and SSM2044 (VCF) sensitivity. These settings affect VSDSX globally.

Output Stage

VSDSX let you choose between **CLEAN** and **ANALOG MODE**

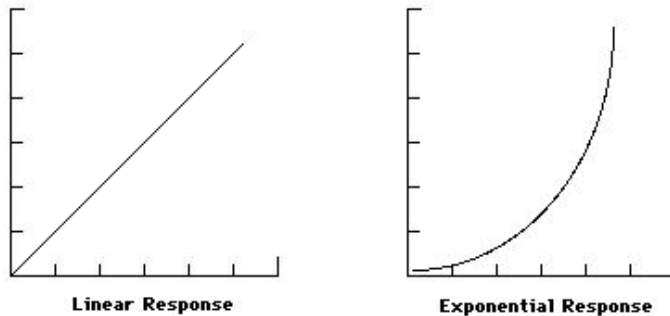
- **CLEAN:** In this mode the circuitry will behave like an ideal system, pure triangle waveform and less filtering. This can be useful for a brighter and edgy sound.
- **ANALOG:** In this mode the analog oscillators will be affected by the circuitry, will have more harmonics but also more filtering. This is a sound closer to the real hardware.

This graphics shows a comparison between the output of VSDSX VST and a real SDS-V at similar settings.



Control Voltage Curve

The internal control voltage can be tweaked in VSDSX, it is normally a linear behavior but you can also set it to a logarithmic behavior. This will change the way the voltage from the envelopes is sent the VCAs and change the resulting sound behavior.



SSM2044 Sensitivity

As seen previously the trigger **velocity can affect the VCF cutoff**, this sensitivity setting will let you fine tune the amount of voltage applied to the VCF cutoff.

The normal behavior is to set it fully clock wise but you can reduce the amount for a less responsive filter and a more linear response if needed.

Note that the VCF also affect the Click so you will notice that the sound gets duller while you decrease the sensitivity.

A basic setting to understand how it works is to set the sensitivity fully clock wise and the noise filter knob at 12 o'clock. When hit hard (velocity 127) the cutoff will be like if you have set the noise filter knob to near max, if the trigger velocity is very low the cutoff will be near the knob setting point. So the harder you hit the brighter the noise/click source will be, depending on the noise filter setting.

EPROM LOADING



Custom EPROMS

The VSDSX features an import function for compatible EPROM Binary Images (.bin files)

This kind of works in a vintage way...Mainly because **HEY! IT'S A VINTAGE GEAR EMULATION DUDE!**

- **FIRST** you need to set the custom size of the EPROM image you plan to load, don't do it after because changing the size of a custom slot will erase the memory of the PROM to ensure the next loaded data will not be corrupted.
- Note that the EPROM sizes available correspond to typical format you might find and most of the samples you will load will fit in.
- Once the size is specified you can **LOAD** an EPROM image of the corresponding size by **clicking on the triangle button**. If you make a mistake it will not blows up ☺ simply if you try to load a bigger file than the size previously set you will lack the ending part of the sample... if you do the opposite, loading a shorter file than the previously set size you can have corrupted data instead of silence in certain cases.
- Note that the **PROM CARD** voice is an additional voice which means that it does not contain data unless you load some in.
- The sound data will be mixed with the noise generator, much like the **HIHAT & CYMBAL VOICES**.

THE DAC emulation has been switched to an AM6070 DAC instead of the linear 8bit DAC used on SDS1 or SDS7 for obvious compatibility between VSDSX Software and VLINN (Linn LM-1) Software.

This simply means that you can load 8bit companded EPROM binary images that can have a 12bit range. Just make sure to reduce your sample to 8bit prior to converting into an EPROM image if you want the same limitation as the original systems.

Paul J Whites, owner of ELECTRONGATE.COM did a great work in finding and hosting a huge archive library of compatible EPROM images in companded format that you can load in VLINN VST, VSDSX VST, Linndrum, DMX etc...

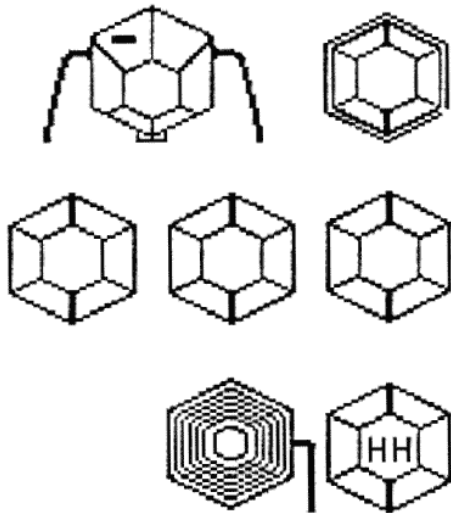
Some EPROM images are provided in parts and need to be assembled to a bigger EPROM image. You can do that easily with the [PROMENADE](#) software provided and hosted on the same website. **It also lets you convert your own .wav prepared samples to compatible .bin images.**

Yeah, you can also load your own personal custom made samples into the VSDSX, and it will pass through the circuitry.

It is a good way to experiment has you can load anything in there... just make sure you prepare your samples correctly, normalize the peaks and put a nice fade out in the end so the sample do not cut short, this could also produce buffer squeak in some cases.

Try to record your sample at 22050 Hz so as you can have a nice range of tuning.

PRESETS IMPORT / EXPORT

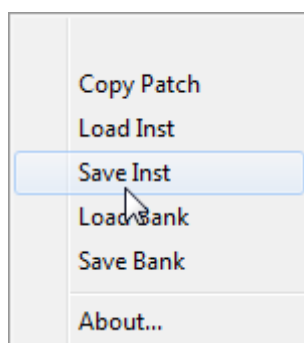


FXP & FXB

VSDSX can load and import its own format presets & banks. All Custom EPROMS file paths are also saved with the patch.

All MIDI LEARNED & ASSIGNED parameters will also be saved with the patch.

Simply name the preset and right click the **PROGRAM MENU** to save either 1 preset or the whole bank, you can also copy the current patch to another location.

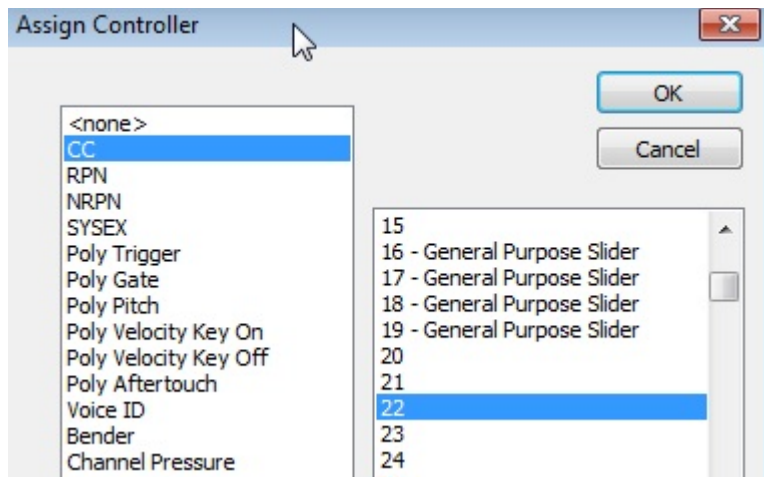


MIDI AUTOMATION

MIDI LEARN

Almost all of the VSDSX parameters can be **automated via midi learn** or **DAW automation** allowing great control over the sound.

Simply right click on a button, knob or slider to assign external MIDI Control or use DAW automation.



Almost all type of MIDI message can be assigned or MIDI learned.

LINKS

Aly James centric links

Official Website www.alyjameslab.com

Dev Blog www.alyjameslab.blogspot.com

Facebook News www.facebook.com/alyjamesound

Youtube Channel www.youtube.com/alijamesproduction

Soundcloud demos <http://www.soundcloud/alyjameslab>

Twitter @alyjamestwitt

CONTACT alyjames.info@gmail.com

External links

Simmons Museum Website <http://www.simmonsmuseum.com/>

ELECTRONGATE Archive <http://www.electrongate.com/dmxfiles/downloads.html>

PROMENADE Software <http://www.electrongate.com/dmxfiles/promenade/index.html>

HOPE YOU HAVE FUN WITH THE VSDSX!



DISCLAIMER & LICENCE AGREEMENT

DISCLAIMER

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