

MERIS OTTOBIT 500-SERIES BITRATE EFFECTS PROCESSOR

Reviewed by Geoff Stanfield

[HERE'S THE LINK TO THE REVIEW](#)

Moving in calculated rhythmic movements, I peeked up over the edge of the small, rooftop retaining wall. For days, I had been on the run, moving only at night and staying well-hidden during daylight hours. The landscape was familiar, but only from a distant youthful memory. Flashbacks to being in a dimly lit space with other kids, all at their own stations. A cacophonous symphony of 8-bit, ascending and descending melodic runs and circus-like themes. I was hungry, and I knew the only way to stay alive was to gobble up the pellets on the maze's path. I kept seeing giant cherries. I want them! I need them! Pixelated ghosts loomed around each corner. Peering upward through the thick, flat glass, I could see the massive and distorted faces of acne-skinned adolescent giants peering down into the arena. Then zooming cars, exploding asteroids... yes, invaders from space. I thrashed about, muttering, "Ott-o-Bit, Ott-o-Bit."

"Audio In » Video Game Out." *Ottobit* is the new 500-series module from Los Angeles-based Meris. It follows the very cool Meris 440 mic preamp and pedal interface, reviewed by yours truly.

Where do you even begin? It's like handing a creative kid a stack of paper and a pail full of colored Sharpies. Pair *Ottobit* with different sources and an open mind with a tilt towards the demented, and the possibilities are endless. Yes, you can go Super Mario Brothers or opt for the sound of exploding robot dinosaurs, but there are no presets, and the interaction of one feature with the others makes for an infinite array of sonic possibilities.

The control/feature set at your disposal: sample-rate decimation; bit reduction; pitch-track enabled ring-modulator; tap-tempo controlled triggered envelopes and LFO modulators; selectable LFO and ring-modulator wave-shapes; and blendable ring-mod AM/FM modulation. The analog signal path is made of premium components, and the digital processing is handled by 32-bit floating-point DSP with 24-bit AD/DA conversion. Now what you do with all of the above in the privacy of your home is your business.

Ottobit's faceplate is slick black with white stencil, and the module itself is not much more than that and a circuit board. Don't let the lack of the *Ottobit*'s mass fool you. If you closed your eyes and heard some of the tones it is capable of, you'd think a 2-ton robot with reptilian skin was ripping down the control room door. Do not, I repeat, do not break this thing out with hallucinating clients. It will end badly.

From big and clean, to lo-fi and mean, *Ottobit* is both a love-maker and joy-taker. Turn it on and start turning knobs, and it becomes its own noise-generating beast. Really. Tap the LFO to a desired tempo, and twist away. From distorted church bells, to the Melvins playing at the intergalactic Indy 500, to really bad alien-abduction tripping — it's all in there. Have a notebook handy to jot down the places you land, so that you can map your way back.

I have a Schumann PLL pedal that I simply adore. It never fails to help create the most sonically interesting textures and future robo-alien noises. It is not for everything, but it gets pulled out in moments when you really need to go the extra mile into orbit. It never disappoints. Until I took a spin with *Ottobit*, it was one of only a handful of devices I have come across that has this unique power. Now I have another choice.

When I first slotted this module into my 500-series rack and arbitrarily started turning knobs, it was easy to arrive at a beastly tone on both guitar and bass. Clicking, pulsing, warbling fun box. They could have named it Throbbing Gristle, but that name was already taken.

I love this unit on bass. From a little edge and grit, to full-blown mangle — bass is the place. Electric bass takes on a whole new meaning and can have all new uses and functions in a mix. If you run it in parallel, the *Ottobit* can be added to taste; or if you desire, run it straight-in and wide-open for sounds that are very non-bass. It's also really nice when you want to add a little (or a lot of) something to a synth-bass. Like on bass, adding mild amounts of *Ottobit* to guitar can give the track a nice texture and interest, and again, letting it rip gives way to glitch, bleep-bloopy, buzzy goodness.

This module could have been used to create a variety of voice effects for *Star Wars*. From robot to Lord Vader in the twist of a knob, *Ottobit* makes voice-mangling easy. I really like the pitch-track feature in use with the ring modulator; sometimes you want to have that extra control that reigns it in from absurd to an actual useable effect.

There wasn't anything I routed to the *Ottobit* that I didn't find some amount of joy in the result. Drums, keys, vocals, guitars, bass, saxophone, synths — you name it. *Ottobit* destroyed it in the best sort of way.

I really like a product that will inspire creativity. Sometimes you're just plain stumped, and simply plugging in the *Ottobit* sparks ideas through sound. Blip, bleeps, fuzz, and full-on decimation are all there as launching pads. Worth mentioning is that the *Ottobit* is going to deliver a different result for whomever is operating it. No presets — so turn the knobs and stop when you arrive at your destination.

If pristine audio is your sole path, then this is not the box for you. If you are forever on the hunt for fresh sounds and ways to set your mix or production apart, you will want to take *Ottobit* for a drive. It makes space travel easy.