

Funk Plus

The Xotic Robotalk 2

IT'S FASCINATING HOW SOME companies evolve. While certain manufacturers stick to building one product that serves them well, others branch out. Such is the case with the California-based Xotic.

Established in 1996 as a high-end builder of basses, its customer list includes Michael Rhodes, Keith Horne, and Ric Fierabracci. In 1999, it also began manufacturing its AC and RC Booster effects, which helped the company carve a niche in the world of MI manufacturers. With users including Scott Henderson, Andy Timmons, and Tim Pierce, Xotic built a notable following.

The Robotalk 2 is Xotic's update of its popular Robotalk envelope filter. A two-channel filter, it can use each channel as a separate

sound, or layer them to create new effects. Each channel includes a Sensitivity and Decay knob, as well as a Channel volume and Resonance mini-knob. There is also a true-bypass on/off switch for each channel. In the center of the mini knobs is a Blend control that allows you to dial direct signal into either of the two channels. The good news for knob turners is that the fine tuning doesn't stop there. Add it up, and you have a box that'll make even the pickiest funk player salivate.

Inside the Robotalk 2 are two sets of DIP switches that further fine-tune the pedal. The first set of two switches is for input signal. With them, the Robotalk 2 can be set to produce optimum results from single-coil pickups, humbuckers, or active pickups on guitars and

basses. Those familiar with envelope filters know this is a blessing because filters react considerably different to various pickups. Active preamps, in particular, can drive them crazy. This cool remedy earns Xotic mucho brownie points.

The other set of DIPs fine-tunes the frequencies of the pedal. The first and second affect Channel A, while three and four are for Channel B. You can boost overall low-end response or any combination of frequencies. Experimenting with these settings yields all types of frequency fun. Bassists beware, though—an active bass combined with the low-frequency DIP boost can stress speakers!

To best accompany a single-coil solidbody playing funk rhythms in a recording studio, a classic low-peak filter setting was dialed up with the Sensitivity and Decay set to about 11 o'clock. These knobs are easy to adjust, while the mini knobs can be a little precarious. For most instances, once Volume and Resonance are set you can leave the channel alone but there is a slight annoyance factor with trying to fumble your thumbs around the small knobs. The good news is in the tone.

Once set, the Robotalk 2

proved well worth the trouble. There is some serious funk in this box! Throughout the session it was used for rhythm, lead, and even bass parts, providing the classic '70s stank. Being able to tweak low peak on one channel and a high peak on another is super-cool, not to mention convenient. High-peak rhythm parts have a hip AM-radio quality while remaining nice and juicy. The Low peak on the B channel is perfect for auto-wah lead sounds worthy of any dance floor.

Switching inputs for an active bass makes the funk complete, with a monstrously thick sound that'd make Bootsy proud.

Utilizing both channels of the Robotalk 2 is downright fun. You can conjure everything from percussive synth-style effects to what Xotic calls an "envelope phaser." On bass, in particular, it can mimic the sound of '80s analog synth by setting the pedal for a high speed open/close type response. Just add hair spray and eyeliner! Further experimentation on guitar revealed numerous sonic possibilities that take it beyond funk to an effect that could be useful in rock, industrial, and even soundtrack work.

Xotic has proven it can provide quality and great tone. If the idea of a "super" envelope filter has been one of your great pursuits, this may just be your cup of tea. There are countless hours of knob and switch fun in here and the sounds are all quite usable. Let there be funk!
— Sean O'Bryan Smith



XOTIC ROBOTALK 2
 Price: \$280 (retail)
 Contact: Xotic Guitars & Effects, 233 N. Maclay Ave. #403, San Fernando, CA 91340: (818)367-9593; xotic.us.