POLYVERSE

Polyverse GUI Designer Scott Kane on the visual design of Supermodal
Brand new modal filter leverages space age hardware-like look to make the esoteric accessible and the ethereal tactile

Athens, Greece, January 24, 2022 - While designing user interfaces for plug-in manufacturers may seem like a niche line of work, it was the only one that made sense for Polyverse Graphical User Interface (GUI) designer Scott Kane. "I was already an electronic music composer and a graphic designer, so it combined my passions," he says. "Now I get to do what I love most." When Polyverse C.E.O. Assaf Dar Sagol first reached out to Kane about working with Polyverse, the two found an easy connection. "We talked for 3 or 4 hours about music," he recalls. "I was very happy that they found me." Kane's first design for Polyverse was 2019's Comet reverb plug-in, a highly tweakable and easy-to-use spatial effect whose visual simplicity belies its powerful and ear-grabbing sonic capabilities. It was an example of Polyverse's design ethos, one which emphasizes creativity and uniqueness in each plug-in, with capabilities ranging from the pristine to the extreme. Kane's mettle would be tested further with the next plug-in idea that Dar Sagol had brewing: a modal filter that utilizes hundreds of filter bands to model the behavior of resonating bodies. This ambitious concept would come to be known as Supermodal.

Before joining the Polyverse team, Kane was already well-acquainted with Polyverse in part due to his long time fandom of psy-trance duo Infected Mushroom, whose Erez Eisen is among Polyverse's co-founders. "I've loved Infected Mushroom since they were doing tutorials for Reason 1.0 back in 2000," he says. "There weren't too many artists making that kind of content at the time at all, especially at their level, so as a self-taught music creator it was incredibly valuable." Kane had also been an early adopter of Polyverse's first plug-in, I Wish. "I had seen the I Wish trailer and purchased the public beta instantly," he says. "It looked amazing."

The Birth of a Design
For Kane, Supermodal presented the challenge of taking a less well-understood type of processing–modal filtering–and making it accessible enough to invite experimentation by users of all levels of technical prowess. The process starts with a vision. "First I get the basic description of the product from Assaf and the team," he says. "Assaf has a good sense of what he wants and communicates his vision for a plug-in very clearly. Sometimes he has already made some draft software with the basic controls. The first thing I try to do is figure out a good layout for the controls. I might start with a pencil sketch just to see what's possible. And then the rest of the design elements, background, and look follow from there." In Kane's early designs of Supermodal, even a nocturnal bird was used as a potential point of reference for organizing knobs and sliders. "You can see that Supermodal is something like a face with two eyes, like an

owl or something. If you look at some of the early drawings I did you can see that that was an inspiration."

Kane then tries to join the functional with the aesthetic, furthering a visual ideal the company has long pursued. "Polyverse's interfaces are not skeuomorphic exactly, nor are they flat design," he explains, referring to design styles that prioritize lifelike verisimilitude and two-dimensional simplicity respectively. "We're not trying to emulate hardware so much as we're trying to change conceptions of what is hardware and what is digital. We're creating a kind of imaginary hardware that could exist in the real world, but might be too impractical or expensive to produce. So we don't like to have controls hidden in menus. Even with something like the modulation system, you have it all at your disposal and you can see the amount of modulation that you have and assign it to parameters in real time." Working with this ethos in mind, there is a deliberate economy to Kane's choices. " Everything has to be there for a reason," he says. "Everything is functional. For example, each of the little marks on all the sliders are clickable. If it's not for functionality, it might hint to the user what's under the hood and help them visualize and understand that more accurately."

Design in Motion
As with the software design behind Polyverse's plug-ins, Kane's GUI designs leverage iteration to deliver the best possible results. "We went through a lot of changes with Supermodal," he says. "We're on version 78 of Supermodal's design with the public beta. That's part of the process. It can be helpful to take time away from what you're working on periodically, then take advice and feedback from other team members when you come back to it." The functional evolution of the plug-in during development often drove Kane's design changes. "Sometimes there are changes in the functionality of the controls and things like that that I have to respond to, and when you change one design element, you might decide to change others responsively." Kane is always looking for small ways to improve how users engage with a plug-in like Supermodal, even if making a change requires a deep dive. "Since I work in a non-destructive way, I can change everything in the project as the plug-in evolves," he says. "But it's not always easy. There might be 4,000 Photoshop layers to go through!"

The most distinctive visual element of Supermodal is found in its Modal filter section: a large, spherical control with a series of symbols on it representing each of Supermodal's 27 resonation models. Kane recalls that early in design Dar Sagol had put forward an idea for a control scheme that would allow users to seamlessly morph between the models –which organize the plug-in's many filter bands into its distinct resonation behaviors modeled on physical materials and mathematical formulas alike–in three dimensions along X and Y axes. This led to the genesis of the distinctive spherical controller, which works like a trackball mouse that can be clicked and dragged to gradually shift the fillter's behavior between the models. "The spherical control was the biggest challenge with this plug-in, and it took some time to get it feeling right," he says. "I think we were all happy with how that came out by the end."

PRESS RELEASE

POLYVERSE

Dreams Into Reality

After a long design process, releasing Supermodal has been rewarding for Kane. "I get a wonderful feeling of gratitude whenever somebody tells us they like the product," he says. "It feels good to know they own something that I designed." While the feedback for the new plug-in has been overwhelmingly positive, Kane also welcomes criticism. "If you get a negative comment, that's okay too," he says. "You just learn from it." With an update to version 1.0 of Supermodal due in January, Kane has already turned his attention to new plug-ins in the Polyverse pipeline, bringing the same thoughtfulness and whimsy to each new innovative sound-shaping tool. "Assaf said to me once, 'We are like kids making our dreams come true and when we make plug-ins it's like we're playing with toys,' and it's very true," Kane recalls. "It's fun. The hard part is knowing when something is finished. Art never ends. It can always be better. But sometimes it's good enough."

For more information and to purchase plug-ins, please visit polyversemusic.com

About Polyverse

Polyverse Music is a "by musicians, for musicians" company that creates uniquely powerful tools and instruments for artists on the cutting edge of creativity. Founded in 2015, Polyverse has continually set the bar in terms of plugin innovation, vision, and user experience. Every person on the Polyverse team is a forward-thinking musician with extensive knowledge and experience with music, sound, synthesizers, and technology. In each new step, Polyverse continues to push the boundary of possibilities with digital musical instruments and effects.

Media contact
Ashley Kinchen
Public Relations
Hummingbird Media, Inc.
ashley@hummingbirdmedia.com
www.hummingbirdmedia.com