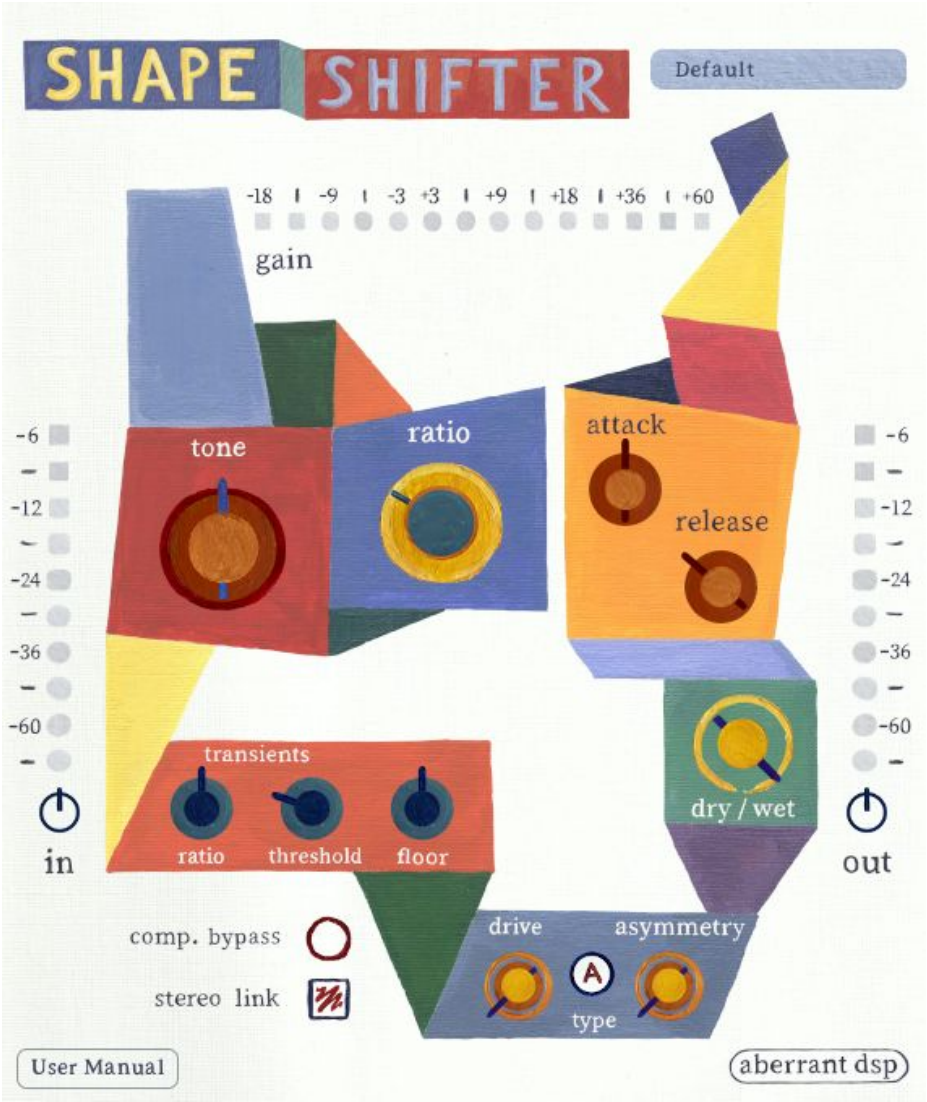
USER MANUAL

Setup

ShapeShifter supports the following formats and operating systems:
Windows 7 or later - **VST3** and **AAX** at **64-bit**
macOS 10.10 Yosemite or later - **AU**, **VST3**, and **AAX** at **64-bit - Intel or Apple Silicon**

To install *ShapeShifter* onto your computer, simply run the installer package for your OS.

Restart your digital audio workstation before loading in the plugin to a project. On **macOS**, you may need to restart your computer for new plugins to appear in some hosts.



ShapeShifter is a compressor — but one unlike any other. It wasn't designed as a utility compressor to be used on every track, but instead as a toolbox for adding color, body, and grit to your sounds. This can take the form of anything from a subtle vibe boost to blown-open, raucous carnage.

This plugin can operate in such a wide range of ways due to its melding of full-range upward and downward compression with finely tweakable controls. This means individual control over everything from the quietest to the loudest parts of your signal.

While *ShapeShifter* is an unconventional approach to compression, it was designed to be fun and easy to use. If it seems overwhelming, we recommend trying out one of our presets as a starting point. From there, the top four knobs will get you most of the way to your sound, the middle four will let you hone it in, and the Drive section will polish it all up with a layer of saturation and distortion.

Fig. 1

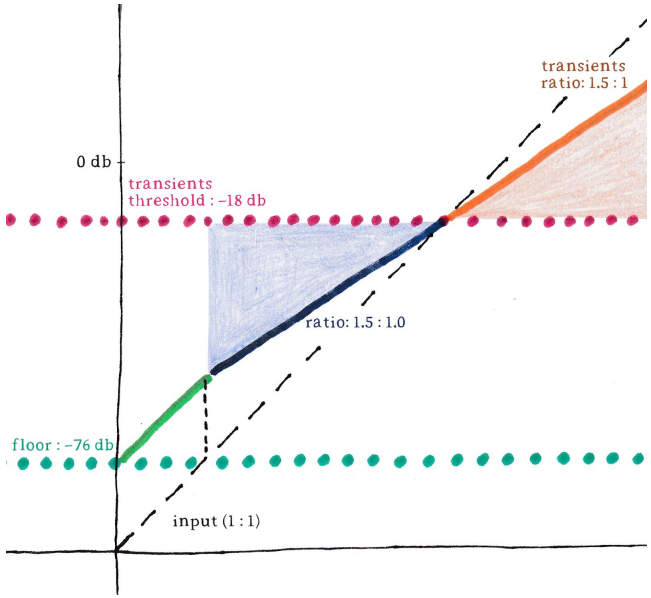
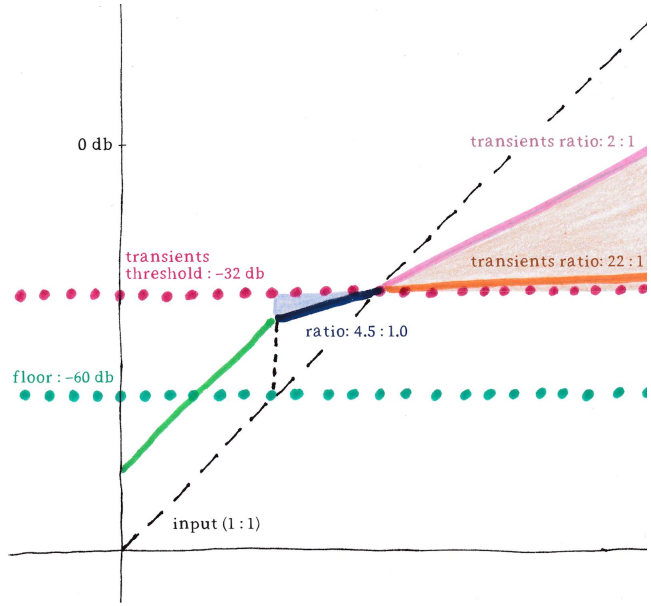
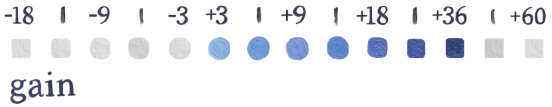


Fig. 2



Depending on the level of your signal, *ShapeShifter* will be performing upward compression, downward compression, or no compression at all.

When the **gain** meter is in the positive (the **blue** part of its range), **upward compression** is being applied:



This means that the signal is being boosted towards the **transients threshold** according to the ratio set by the primary **ratio** control.

When the **gain** meter is in the negative (the **orange** part of its range), **downward compression** is being applied:

This means that the signal is being reduced towards the **transients threshold** according to the ratio set by the **transients ratio** control. Note that the **transients ratio** control operates in relation to the overall **ratio**.

Any signal below the level set by the **floor** control will have no compression applied, but will be boosted a constant amount to prevent discontinuity with the compressed signal. This is portrayed by the green line on the graphs to the left.

The figures to the left illustrate several examples of *ShapeShifter*'s compression curve. Figure 1 represents the default setting, and Figure 2 shows a more extreme example and depicts two possible downward compression ratios (the pink and orange **transients ratio** lines).

Controls

Tone
Balances the high and low band compressor levels. Turning the knob to the left boosts the low band, while turning to the right boosts the highs.

Ratio
Controls the overall ratio for the compressor, which applies both upward and downward compression to the signal with a common threshold. It may seem like the ratio is rather low for the amount of compression you hear, but this is simply due to the fact that, unlike a typical downward compressor, *ShapeShifter* operates on the whole dynamic range of the signal.

Attack / Release
Control the attack and release times for the compressor. The attack time has a range of 0.2 ms to 200 ms, and the release time has a range of 20 ms to 2000 ms (2 s).

Transients - Ratio
Controls the ratio for the downward compression relative to the overall compression ratio. We found that upward and downward compression are easier to control when their ratios are linked, but this control allows you to tweak the downward ratio separately to have better control over the transients of your sound.

Transients - Threshold
Controls the threshold of the compressor, below which the upward compression is applied and above which the downward compression is applied. The range of this control is from -6 db to -56 db.

Floor
Adjusts the lower bound at which the upward compression stops being applied. At values below the Floor level, the compression ratio of the input to output is 1:1. Above the Floor value, upward compression starts to be applied at the chosen primary ratio up to the threshold. The Floor control has a range of -96 db to -56 db.

Drive
Controls the amount of drive applied to the audio. This can be everything from a subtle saturation to a harsh, biting distortion. The top portion of the knob pushes the drive to its extremes by applying more input gain into the drive model.

Drive Type
Type A is a more subtle and warm distortion that can be used as light saturation at lower levels and a grittier, guitar-pedal like distortion at higher levels. Type B is a harsher, more hard-clipping version of the A model.

Asymmetry
Controls the asymmetry of the drive being applied to the signal, allowing for harsher, grittier textures by boosting even-order harmonics.

Dry / Wet
Controls the mix of dry signal to wet signal on the output of the plugin. Note that even at 0% wet, some filtering is still happening to allow the dry signal to have coherent phase with the wet.

In / Out Gains
Control the gain of the signal at the input / output of the plugin. These have a range of -24 db to +24 db.

Stereo Link
When the Stereo Link is toggled, the detectors for the compressor are using an average of the left and right channels of the audio. When the Stereo Link is turned off, the compressor detects and calculates the gains for the left and right channels separately.

Comp. Bypass
Bypasses the compressor processing in the plugin, while keeping the drive section enabled. This allows one to use the Drive section on its own.

This section details some of the primary ways that *ShapeShifter* can be used in your mixes. Each use case has a description and a list of some of the factory presets that highlight that specific use of *ShapeShifter*. This guide is a good place to start exploring what *ShapeShifter* can do.

General Purpose Compression

Despite its non-traditional approach to compression, *ShapeShifter* can be great as a standard utility compressor on buses or individual tracks. With the main ratio knob set at 2.5 or lower, the compression applied can remain quite transparent while still providing a loudness boost and a bit of extra body to your sounds. Careful adjustment of attack and release times can help maintain transparency here as well. A little bit of drive here can also go a long way towards a fuller sound and extra harmonic richness. The Type A drive model is subtler and more transparent, while the Type B model is grittier and louder. In this context, we recommend Type A for more level sources like vocals or strummed guitar, and Type B for more transient sources like drums or plucky bass.

Presets:

General

Subtle
Parallel Comp
A Sweet Spot
A Bit of Color
NR Comp

Drums

Tight + Bright
Gated

Guitar

***Acoustic*:**
Subtle Comp + Drive
Clean Compression

***Electric*:**
Added Character
Squeaky Clean

Keys

***Piano*:**
Bright + Subtle
Colorful

***Keys*:**
Shimmery

***Synth*:**
Warm + Thick

Bass

Bass Thickener
Plucky Bass

Vocal

Clear Crisp Vocal
Lead Vocal Comp.
Vocal w. Character

Extreme Compression

While *ShapeShifter* works well as a standard utility compressor, we wanted users to be able to push the compressor to extremes not usually reached in compressor plugins. Pushing any control past the 80% mark will bring the compressor into wild frontiers where you can explore intense overcompression, nightmarish distortions, and strange dynamic shapes. Thanks to *ShapeShifter*'s upwards compression, turning the main Ratio knob to values between 5:1 and 8:1 will result in extreme squashing of the dynamics without sapping all of the life out of the original sound.

Presets:

General	Drums	Guitar	Keys	Bass	Vocal	Extreme
Squished NR Comp XL Reshaped	Huge + Punchy	***Acoustic*:** Hyper Compressed ***Electric*:** Bright + Smushed Nose Bleed	***Piano*:** Over Compressed ***Keys*:** Gritty ***Synth*:** Bright + Wide	Pluckier Bass Heavy Bass Squashed Bass	Vocal w. Grit Grungy Vocal Indiscernible Vocal	Totally Reshaped Stormy Noisey Blown Out All Fuzz Wild Distortion Pulse Demon Basically Unusable

Distortion

In addition to its compression processing, *ShapeShifter* includes highly controllable drive models. One of our favorite things about this plugin is how the distortion and compression processing interact with each other. The dynamic leveling that the compression can provide combines nicely with a coating of distortion, resulting in warm blankets of fuzz, nasty soundscapes, and beyond. If you're just looking for a distortion effect to throw on a track, try bypassing the compression altogether to hear how the drive sounds on its own - a few of the presets below, such as the "Saturated" preset, are good examples of this.

Presets:

General	Drums	Guitar	Keys	Bass	Vocal	Extreme
Saturated Nice Distortion	Warm + Crunchy Spacious + Lofi	***Acoustic*:** Lofi ***Electric*:** Clean Drive Distortion Trashy Emo Fuzzed Out	***Piano*:** Warm + Saturated ***Keys*:** Gritty ***Synth*:** Bright + Wide	Distorted Bass	Vocal w. Grit Lofi Vocal Grungy Vocal Indiscernible Vocal	Stormy Loveless Blown Out All Fuzz Wild Distortion Pulse Demon Basically Unusable

Bright

Under the hood, *ShapeShifter*'s compression operates in several independent bands. The tone control leverages the frequency separation of these bands to change the overall tonal balance of the signal through volume and compression adjustment of the high and low bands. On the higher end of the tone control, this adds a shine to your signal that can help it stand out in a mix. The NR Comp feature from our plugin *SketchCassette* provided a similar brightness and was an initial inspiration for *ShapeShifter*'s sound — a range of examples of the NR Comp sound can be found in the General section of the presets.

Presets:

General	Drums	Guitar	Keys	Bass	Vocal	Extreme
NR Comp NR Comp + NR Comp XL	Tight + Bright Gated Snappy Snare	***Acoustic*:** Bright ***Electric*:** Squeaky Clean Bright + Smushed	***Piano*:** Bright + Subtle Colorful ***Keys*:** Shimmery ***Synth*:** Bright + Wide	Pluckier Bass	Clear Crisp Vocal Grungy Vocal	Totally Reshaped Noisey Wild Distortion Pulse Demon Basically Unusable

Warm

Turning the Tone knob to the left will boost the low-frequencies of the compressed signal, creating a generally warmer and darker sound. This adds body and thickness to a track, exhibited in subtle amounts through presets like "Keys - Soft" and intense amounts in presets such as "Stormy". Combined with the Type A drive, this creates a lovely saturation-style distortion reminiscent of vintage analog equipment - try out presets like the "Warm + Crunchy" setting for drums or the "Warm + Saturated" piano preset to hear this in action.

Presets:

Drums	Guitar	Keys	Bass	Vocal	Extreme
Warm + Crunchy Spacious + Lofi	***Acoustic*:** Lofi ***Electric*:** Trashy Emo	***Piano*:** Warm + Saturated ***Keys*:** Soft ***Synth*:** Warm + Thick	Bass Thickener Heavy Bass	Vocal w. Character Lofi Vocal Indiscernible Vocal	Stormy Loveless

Lo-fi

Although this plugin isn't designed specifically for lo-fi and vintage sounds, it is well suited for getting those sought-after nostalgic tones. Applying the Type A drive model can add everything from subtle analog saturation to warm crunchiness. Additionally, utilizing the Tone knob to roll off the high end and compress the low-mids can provide a hazey, washed-out feel to your sound, reminiscent of tape filtering. One of our favorite ways to use *ShapeShifter* is to pair it with our plugin *SketchCassette* to liven up clean digital software instruments and add a touch of dirt and character. Try loading up *ShapeShifter* with one of the presets below, adding it to an FX chain with *SketchCassette*, and experimenting with the ways they can interact.

Presets:

General	Drums	Guitar	Keys	Vocal	Extreme
Saturated	Warm + Crunchy Spacious + Lofi	***Acoustic*:** Lofi ***Electric*:** Trashy Emo	***Piano*:** Warm + Saturated ***Keys*:** Gritty	Lofi Vocal Grungy Vocal Indiscernible Vocal	Stormy Noisey Loveless

Blown Out

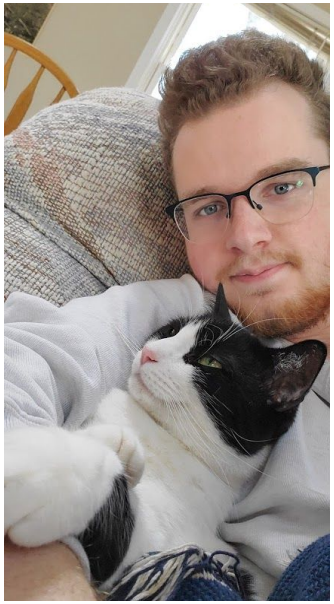
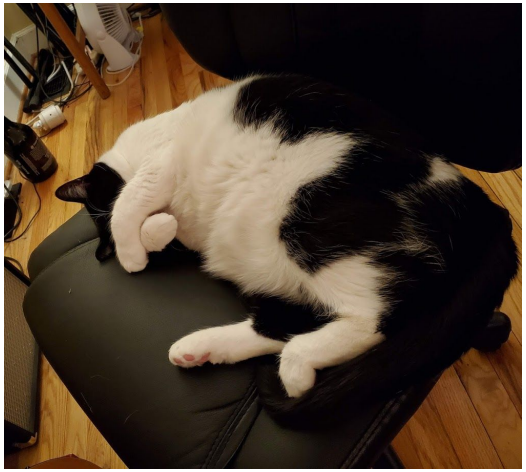
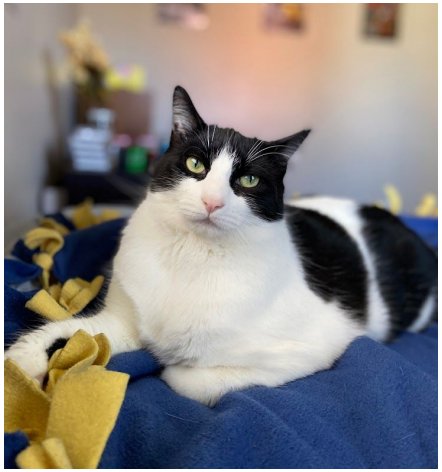
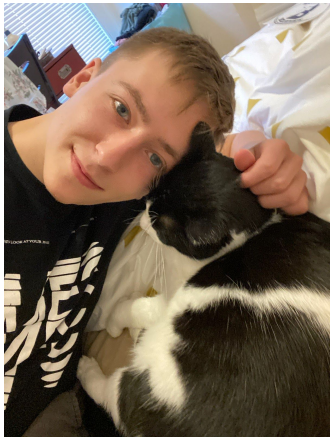
At its most extreme settings, *ShapeShifter* can completely destroy the sound being fed into it. This sometimes manifests in really interesting and exciting ways, and sometimes in pain-inducing, nothing-but-noise ways (see preset "Basically Unusable"). Either way, if you're looking to emulate the sound of broken equipment, or to compose an otherworldly piece of noise-art that will get Indie Reddit talking, you've come to the right place - pop on one of the presets listed below or simply try turning a few knobs all the way up until you find a sound you love.

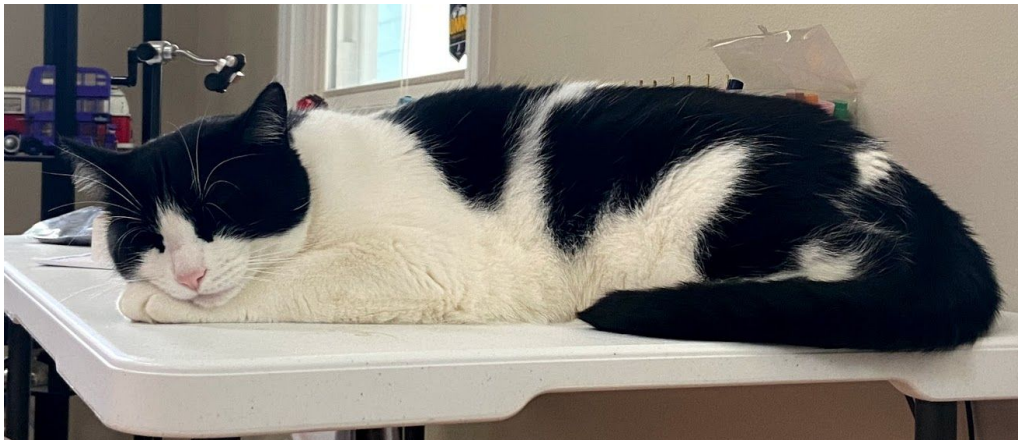
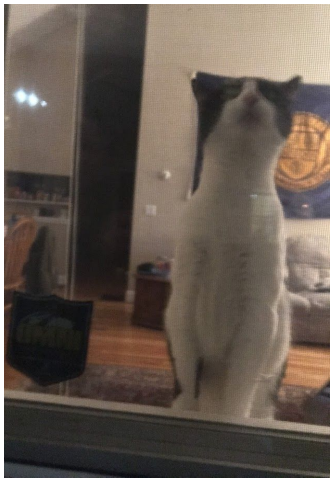
Presets:

Guitar	Vocal	Extreme
***Electric*:** Trashy Emo Fuzzed Out	Indiscernible Vocal	Noisey Blown Out All Fuzz Wild Distortion Pulse Demon Basically Unusable

Thanks for your support!

- Ben and Dan

- Jon