



TALISMAN

VOCAL COMPRESSOR · SATURATOR

USER MANUAL

Version 1.0 · VST3 + AU · macOS & Windows

Ghostnote LLC

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1. Introduction

TALISMAN is a vocal compressor and saturator built for modern vocal production — rap in particular, but anything sung or spoken. It chains two classic compressor characters (optical glue and FET grit) into a tube-to-tape saturation stage, and wraps the whole engine in five macro knobs so the fast path is: **pick a preset, turn DRIVE until it feels right**. When you want full manual control, the ADVANCED panel exposes real threshold, ratio, attack and release for both stages.



- **Two stages, two jobs.** GRIT is a fast FET-style peak compressor that adds attitude and density; WARMTH is a slow optical-style RMS compressor that glues and thickens without pumping.
- **Color you can steer.** The saturator morphs continuously from tube (warm, even harmonics) through transformer to tape (brighter, odd harmonics, gentle high roll-off) — all processed at 4x oversampling so the distortion stays clean of digital aliasing.
- **Loudness-honest.** AUTO gain keeps the output level-matched to the input, so more DRIVE means more character, not just "louder sounds better".

2. Installation & Compatibility

2.1 Formats and requirements

Item	Details
Formats	VST3 (macOS and Windows) · Audio Unit (macOS)
macOS	macOS 11.0 or later — universal binary (Apple Silicon + Intel)
Windows	Windows 10 or later, 64-bit
VST3 path (macOS)	/Library/Audio/Plug-Ins/VST3/Ghostnote TALISMAN.vst3
VST3 path (Windows)	C:\Program Files\Common Files\VST3\Ghostnote TALISMAN.vst3
AU path (macOS)	/Library/Audio/Plug-Ins/Components/Ghostnote TALISMAN.component
Window	700 x 480 px; grows to 700 x 648 when ADVANCED is open
Latency	About 61 samples (~1.3 ms at 48 kHz) from the linear-phase oversampling filters, reported to the host for automatic compensation

2.2 First install — security warnings

The installer is not yet signed with an Apple / Microsoft code-signing certificate, so both systems show a one-time warning when you first run it. The file is safe — every release is built and validated automatically on GitHub's servers — the warning only reflects the missing certificate:

- **macOS 15 (Sequoia) and later:** double-click the .pkg. When macOS says it "could not verify" the installer, close that dialog, open **System Settings > Privacy & Security**, scroll to the bottom and click **Open Anyway** next to the installer's name, then confirm.
- **macOS 14 and earlier:** Control-click (right-click) the .pkg in Finder, choose **Open**, then click **Open** in the dialog.
- **Windows:** if SmartScreen shows "Windows protected your PC", click **More info**, then **Run anyway**.

2.3 First scan

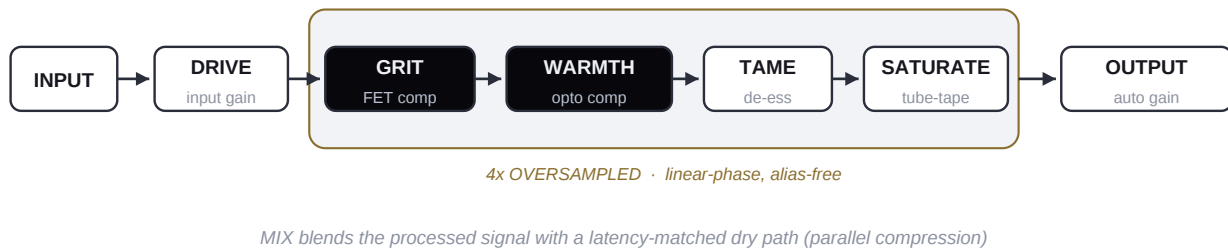
- **FL Studio (macOS & Windows):** Options > Manage plugins > Find more plugins, or press the rescan button. The plugin appears as "Ghostnote TALISMAN" under Installed / Effects.
- **Logic Pro (macOS):** the AU is picked up automatically on launch; if not, restart Logic or rescan in Settings > Plug-in Manager.
- **Ableton Live:** enable VST3 (and Audio Units on macOS) in Settings > Plug-Ins, then rescan.
- **Other hosts (Cubase, Studio One, REAPER...):** any VST3-capable DAW on either platform works; run the host's plugin rescan after installing.

3. Quick Start

Step	Action
1	Insert Ghostnote TALISMAN on the vocal. Pick a preset close to the job (e.g. <i>Upfront Rap</i> , <i>Melodic Hook</i> , <i>Podcast / VO</i>).
2	Turn DRIVE up while the vocal plays. Watch the sigil: occasional flickers of 2–6 dB gain reduction on phrases is the sweet spot.
3	Add WARMTH for glue and body — it should be felt as consistency, not heard as pumping.
4	Steer TONE : left for thick tube warmth, right for tape brightness and sheen. Leave AUTO on so the level stays matched while you work.
5	Toggle BYPASS to confirm the vocal got better, not just different. AUTO keeps the comparison fair.

If "S" and "T" sounds turn sharp as you drive harder, switch **TAME** on — it softens sibilance before the saturation stage. For surgical de-essing use Ghostnote VEIL after TALISMAN instead, and leave TAME off.

4. How TALISMAN Works



4.1 The two compressors

GRIT is modelled on FET limiting amplifiers: an instant-reacting peak detector, a tight 4 dB knee, and a ratio that *risers with sustained input* — the harder and longer you push it, the harder it grabs, which is exactly the "all-buttons-in" aggression FET units are loved for. **WARMTH** is modelled on optical levellers: a slow RMS detector, a soft 9 dB knee, gentle ratios, and a two-stage release that recovers quickly from short peaks but slowly from sustained loudness. GRIT adds attitude; WARMTH adds evenness.

4.2 SILK and HEX

The MODE switch re-voices the whole engine. **SILK** leads with the optical stage: slower FET attack, lower ratios, less input drive — smooth, warm, musical. **HEX** leads with the FET: 0.3 ms attack, ratios that can reach 16:1, more input drive — fast, hard, unstable in the way that reads as pumping grit and attitude. SILK for hooks, R&B and voice-over; HEX for rap, trap and parallel crush.

4.3 The saturator

TONE morphs the saturation curve itself. Fully left is an asymmetric tube law that generates mostly even harmonics — thickness and warmth. Fully right is a symmetric tape law generating odd harmonics, with a tape-style high-frequency roll-off that sweeps from 20 kHz down toward 5.5 kHz as you push right — brightness with a rounded top. The centre is a clean transformer-like blend. All saturation runs at 4x oversampling with linear-phase filters, so pushing hard does not smear digital aliasing across the vocal.

4.4 AUTO gain

AUTO continuously matches the processed loudness back to the input loudness (within ± 12 dB), smoothed slowly enough that it level-matches without ever pumping. It makes DRIVE honest — and it makes the BYPASS comparison meaningful. It is on by default; OUTPUT then serves as fine make-up gain.

5. Controls Reference

Control	Range	Default	What it does
DRIVE	0–100 %	0 %	Pushes the vocal into the FET compressor and the saturation. Low = clean; high = compressed, gritty, in-your-face.
WARMTH	0–100 %	0 %	Optical compression for glue and body. Higher = more glued and consistent, without obvious pumping.
TONE	–100 – +100	0	Saturation character: left = tube (warm, even harmonics), centre = transformer, right = tape (brighter, odd harmonics, gentle high cut).
MIX	0–100 %	100 %	Dry/wet blend against a latency-matched dry path. Lower it for parallel compression: punch and density under an untouched vocal.
OUTPUT	–60 – +12 dB	0 dB	Final level after all processing — fine make-up gain or bypass matching. –60 dB acts as a mute.
MODE	SILK / HEX	SILK	SILK: smooth optical-led glue. HEX: aggressive FET-led grit with ratios up to 16:1.
TAME	on/off	off	Built-in de-esser before the saturation, so esses stay civil under drive. Leave off when Ghostnote VEIL handles de-essing.
AUTO	on/off	on	Automatic gain compensation — output stays level-matched to input while you shape the sound.
BYPASS	on/off	off	Latency-matched, click-free comparison (also wired to the host bypass).

5.1 Reading the sigil

The sigil in the centre is the gain-reduction meter: its eye and halo glow brighter as the compressors work, reaching full glow at 12 dB of reduction, with the exact figure printed underneath. Healthy behaviour is a resting state between phrases and flickers of 2–6 dB on them. If the sigil is pinned bright, back off DRIVE and WARMTH — or raise the thresholds in ADVANCED.

6. The ADVANCED Panel

The ADVANCED button extends the window and unlocks explicit compression controls. With ADVANCED **off**, the macro behaviour is exactly the classic engine, untouched. With ADVANCED **on**, the panel values take over threshold, ratio, attack and release for both stages, and a sidechain high-pass filter is added to both detectors. DRIVE still sets input push and saturation amount, and MODE still voices the engine — so ADVANCED gives you a real two-stage compressor without losing TALISMAN's color.

Control	Range	Default	Notes
GRIT THRESHOLD	−60 – 0 dB	−18 dB	Where the FET stage starts compressing.
GRIT RATIO	1 – 20 :1	4:1	FET slope. High = harder, more aggressive.
GRIT ATTACK	0.1 – 30 ms	1.2 ms	Slower lets transients punch through before clamping.
GRIT RELEASE	30 – 500 ms	110 ms	FET recovery; the program-dependent tail is preserved.
WARMTH THRESHOLD	−60 – 0 dB	−18 dB	Where the optical leveller engages.
WARMTH RATIO	1 – 10 :1	2.5:1	Opto slope. Keep low (1.5–3) for glue.
WARMTH ATTACK	1 – 100 ms	25 ms	Opto response speed.
WARMTH RELEASE	50 – 1000 ms	220 ms	Opto recovery; program-dependent tail preserved.
SC HIGH-PASS	20 – 500 Hz	80 Hz	Removes lows from BOTH detectors so bass energy does not pump the compression. Essential on full loops, drums and 808s.

A practical starting method: set both thresholds high (little compression), choose attack and release to taste on the material, then lower each threshold until the sigil shows the gain reduction you want from that stage — a few dB of GRIT for control, a few dB of WARMTH for glue.

7. Presets

Presets set the macro controls only (DRIVE, WARMTH, TONE, MIX, OUTPUT, MODE, TAME, AUTO); your ADVANCED settings are never overwritten. Pick one, then tweak.

Preset	Character
Init	Neutral starting point.
Upfront Rap	Aggressive HEX grit — pushes a rap vocal up front.
Melodic Hook	Gentle SILK glue for sung / melodic hooks.
Trap Aggressive	Hard HEX compression + tape edge for trap / drill.
Parallel Thickener	Heavy drive blended in parallel (MIX 35 %) to thicken.
Warm Glue	Subtle SILK warmth and glue — felt, not heard.
Ad-lib FX	Coloured, tape-heavy character for ad-libs.
Lead Vocal	Clean, present lead that sits up front.
Smooth R&B	Silky, warm, glued — for sung R&B / soul.
Bright Pop	Airy and present with tape sheen; esses tamed.
Backing Vox	Dark glue so doubles sit behind the lead.
Podcast / VO	Even, controlled, de-essed spoken word.
Intimate Close	Warm and thick — close, in-your-ear vocal.
Vocal Parallel	Aggressive density blended under a clean vocal.

8. Placement & Recipes

- **In the Ghostnote chain:** SIREN (pitch) → **TALISMAN** → VEIL (de-ess) → other effects → MONOLITH (master). Compress and color first, then let VEIL clean the esses the saturation sharpened.
- **Rap lead:** start from *Upfront Rap*. HEX, DRIVE 35–50, WARMTH 25–40. If the vocal loses breath and life, pull DRIVE back and add MIX-based parallel instead.
- **Parallel crush ("New York" vocal):** DRIVE 60–80 in HEX, then MIX down to 25–40 %. The dry path is latency-matched, so no comb filtering — just density under a clean top.
- **Sung hook:** *Melodic Hook* or *Smooth R&B*. SILK, WARMTH does the work (40–60), DRIVE stays low (10–25), TONE toward tube for body.
- **Drums / loops / 808-heavy material:** open ADVANCED and raise SC HIGH-PASS to 120–200 Hz first — otherwise the bass drives the compression and everything pumps. Then set GRIT for the

transient behaviour you want.

- **Podcast / voice-over:** *Podcast / VO*. SILK, TAME on, WARMTH 40–50 for evenness, DRIVE under 25. AUTO keeps loudness consistent across sessions.

9. Measured Performance

Every TALISMAN build must pass an automated measurement suite plus strict host validation before release. Shipping v1.0 results:

Test	Result
ADVANCED ratio drives real slope (–12 dBFS tone, threshold –30 dB)	Ratio 8:1 yields more than 4 dB extra gain reduction over ratio 2:1 — the panel controls the actual compression law
ADVANCED threshold placement	Raising the threshold from –30 to –6 dB removes over 6 dB of gain reduction, as it should
Sidechain high-pass (60 Hz tone in the detector)	Opening SC HPF to 500 Hz removes over 6 dB of bass-driven gain reduction — low end no longer pumps the vocal
Bypass	Latency-matched and click-free (crossfaded), wired to the host bypass
Host validation	Apple auval (strict) passed; pluginval strictness 10 passed on Apple Silicon and Intel

10. Troubleshooting

Symptom	Cause & fix
Vocal pumps or breathes	Too much GRIT or bass in the detector. Lower DRIVE, or in ADVANCED raise GRIT THRESHOLD / slow GRIT RELEASE; on bass-heavy sources raise SC HIGH-PASS.
Esses got harsh	Saturation sharpens sibilance. Switch TAME on, steer TONE away from tape, or follow TALISMAN with Ghostnote VEIL.
Sounds squashed / lifeless	The sigil is probably pinned. Back DRIVE and WARMTH off until reduction is 2–6 dB on phrases, or use MIX for parallel instead of more compression.
Louder but not better	AUTO is off, so drive is just adding level. Turn AUTO on and re-judge with BYPASS.
No obvious effect	DRIVE and WARMTH both default to 0 — TALISMAN starts neutral. Raise them, or load a preset.
ADVANCED knobs seem dead	The panel only takes over when ADVANCED is switched on; off = classic macro engine, untouched.

11. Specifications

Specification	Value
Compression	Two serial stages: FET-style peak (knee 4 dB, program-dependent ratio rise) + optical-style RMS (knee 9 dB, two-stage release)
Saturation	Continuous tube (asymmetric, even harmonics) to tape (symmetric, odd harmonics + HF roll-off 20 kHz → 5.5 kHz) morph
Oversampling	4x, linear-phase FIR (equiripple half-band)
De-esser (TAME)	High band above 5.5 kHz, 3.5:1, 1 ms attack / 50 ms release
Auto gain	RMS level match, ±12 dB window, 150 ms smoothing
Sidechain HPF	20–500 Hz (ADVANCED), applied to both detectors
Latency	~61 samples at 48 kHz (oversampling filters), reported to host
Sample rates	All standard rates (times and filters recomputed per rate)
Formats	VST3 (macOS & Windows), AU (macOS)
Plugin codes	Manufacturer Ghst · Plugin Tlsm (stable across all versions)

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