

Tiptop Audio – RS808

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Tiptop Audio RS808: using it for melodic components

The RS808 is not just a drum voice. Even though it's based on the TR-808 rimshot/claves circuit, the manual makes clear that Tiptop added **Pitch** and **Snap** controls specifically to expand it beyond the original machine. That means it can absolutely contribute melodic material, especially in percussive, tuned, and pseudo-tonal patches.

What the module gives you

From the manual, the RS808 provides:

- **4 sound modes** via two switches:
 - both down = **Rimshot**
 - both up = **Claves**
 - left up/right down = **nonlinear Rimshot+Claves mix**
 - left down/right up = **short click**
- **Pitch** control
- **Snap** control
- **Level** control
- **Accent** knob
- **Gate In**
- **Accent In**
- **RS/CL Out**

Why it can be melodic

The key line in the manual is that **Pitch lets you set the frequency of the sound so it can be played in harmony with other sounds**. That tells us this is more than a fixed drum transient. It has a resonant/tonal component you can tune by ear.

This makes the RS808 useful for:

- tuned percussion lines
- woodblock/clave riffs
- clicky pseudo-bass attacks
- high-register ostinatos
- layered transients for melodic voices
- accent-driven dynamic phrasing that behaves musically like articulation

Best RS808 sound types for melody

1. Claves mode

This is probably the most obviously melodic mode.

Why: - It tends to read as a pitched struck object. - The transient is short but the ear still hears pitch. - Great for repeated note patterns, polyrhythms, and Latin/minimal lines.

Use it for: - tuned ostinatos - upper-register rhythmic melodies - call-and-response with a bass voice - doubling sequencer accents with a tuned percussive note

2. Rimshot mode

Less obviously tonal, but very useful.

Why: - It has enough body to tune into a track. - It works well as a “note-shaped attack” layered with other voices.

Use it for: - dry melodic punctuation - mono percussion melodies - techno stabs when sequenced rhythmically

3. Nonlinear mix mode

This is the most interesting for sound design.

Why: - The hybrid timbre can create more complex, characterful tuned hits.
- Good when you want something between percussion and synth voice.

Use it for: - odd melodic hooks - experimental tuned percussion - metallic sequences

4. Click mode

This is the least tonal on its own, but still useful musically.

Use it for: - attack layers on melodic voices - clock-like rhythmic pitches if tuned extremely carefully - very short pointillistic sequences

Core melodic patch ideas

1. Tuned percussion melody

This is the most straightforward use.

Patch

- Sequencer trigger/gate out → **GATE IN**
- **RS/CL OUT** → mixer / VCA / effects
- Tune **PITCH** by ear to the key of the track
- Use **Claves mode** or **mixed mode**

Musical result

A short, woody melodic line. Think marimba/clave-inspired patterns rather than sustained synth notes.

Performance tips

- Write melodies as rhythmic motifs, not legato lines.
 - Pentatonic or modal note choices work especially well because the pitch is suggestive rather than perfectly quantized.
 - Use space; the RS808 shines in sparse phrases.
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2. Melodic line through manual retuning

Since the manual only mentions a **Pitch knob** and does not describe CV pitch input, pitch sequencing is likely manual rather than 1V/oct tracking.

How to use it musically

- Tune the RS808 to one important note in the track.
- Use rhythm and accent to imply melody.
- Retune between sections for verse/chorus contrast.
- Use multiple takes or multiple RS808-style voices tuned differently if recording.

Musical result

A “fixed-pitch percussion instrument” approach, similar to writing for a cowbell, claves, temple block, or tuned wood percussion.

This works especially well in: - minimal techno - electro - IDM - tribal house
- soundtrack percussion beds

3. Accent-based phrasing as melodic articulation

The manual explains that **Accent In** changes how hard the internal VCA is hit, affecting both loudness and slightly more attack. That’s very musical.

Patch

- Main trigger pattern → **GATE IN**
- A second, sparser trigger sequence → **ACCENT IN**
- Adjust **ACCENT** knob to set dynamic contrast

Musical result

Even if the pitch stays fixed, the line feels more melodic because accents create contour.

Think of it like: - stronger accented notes = melody peaks - softer notes = passing tones or ghost notes

Why this matters

In percussion melody, **dynamics often carry as much musical meaning as pitch**. The RS808 is especially strong here because accent is part of the analog voice behavior, not just a volume trim.

4. Layered melodic transient for another oscillator

The short click/rimshot/claves character can become the attack component of a more traditional melodic voice.

Patch

- Use your main VCO/VCA/EG patch for the sustained note
- Trigger the RS808 from the same gate
- Mix RS808 output with the main voice
- Tune **PITCH** so the transient sits in the same harmonic area

Musical result

Your synth line gains: - more definition - wood/strike character - sharper rhythmic identity

This is especially effective for: - plucks - mallet-like patches - acid lines needing extra bite - bass sounds needing a percussive front edge

Best modes

- **Click** for pure attack
 - **Claves** for tonal attack
 - **Rimshot** for body plus crack
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5. Fake bassline attacks and plucky hooks

At lower pitch settings, the RS808 can become less “drum machine rimshot” and more “struck resonant object.”

Patch approach

- Lower **PITCH**
- Increase **SNAP** until the sound has enough presence
- Use a repeating gate sequence
- Add reverb or short delay

Musical result

Not a true sustained bass voice, but a percussive low hook that can function like a bassline in sparse arrangements.

Works well in: - dub techno - minimal - broken beat - experimental ambient percussion

6. Melodic polyrhythm voice

Because the RS808 is short and articulate, it’s ideal for melodic fragments embedded in rhythm.

Patch

- Send an irregular trigger pattern to **GATE IN**
- Tune the module to the tonic or fifth of the track
- Use accents on every few steps
- Put through delay or resonant reverb

Musical result

The dry hit creates the “note,” and the delay/reverb creates the implied melodic tail.

This is one of the best ways to make a short drum voice feel like part of the harmonic fabric.

How the controls shape melody

Pitch

Most important control for melodic use.

Use it to: - match the track key - create intervals against another voice - shift the instrument from bright high claves to lower woody thuds

Best practice: - tune by ear against a drone, bassline, or chord pad - try tonic, fifth, minor third, or suspended intervals

Snap

The manual says Snap controls the height of the internal envelope generator and changes subtly for each mode.

For melodic use: - lower Snap = softer, more muted, possibly less defined pitch impression - higher Snap = more attack and clearer pitch articulation

Try: - high Snap for melodic ostinatos that must cut through - medium Snap for supporting percussion melodies - low Snap for ghosted tonal texture

Accent

Very important musically.

Use it to create: - phrase endings - downbeat emphasis - syncopated hooks
- “question/answer” patterning within a single fixed pitch

Level

Useful for balancing it as a melodic layer rather than a dominant drum.

Since the manual notes Accent can also behave like a fine gain control when Accent In is unused, you can use: - **Level** for broad placement in the mix - **Accent** for finer output shaping

Strong “used together” patch concepts

Since only one module is shown here, “used together” really means using the RS808 together with common Eurorack companions.

RS808 + sequencer

Use a trigger sequencer to generate repeating rhythmic motifs. Even without pitch CV, changing rhythm and accent gives melodic identity.

Good for: - ostinatos - Euclidean patterns - syncopated hooks

RS808 + accent sequencer

A second trigger lane into **Accent In** makes the phrase breathe.

Good for: - implied melody - dynamic contrast - humanized percussion riffs

RS808 + delay/reverb

This is huge for melodic use.

A very short percussive hit becomes: - tuned echo phrases - shimmering repeated notes - ambient pointillism

Especially good with: - dotted eighth delays - short rooms for woodblock realism - resonant or pitched reverbs

RS808 + filter or LPG

Even though it already has its own sound shape, post-processing can make it more melodic.

Try: - low-pass filtering for lower tuned wooden tones - band-pass filtering for focused pseudo-pitched knocks - LPG for organic decays and “struck object” realism

RS808 + sampler/looper

Because the pitch is manual, one very practical melodic method is: - tune and record several hits at different Pitch settings - map them in a sampler - sequence them melodically

This turns the RS808 into a multisampled tuned percussion instrument.

Composition strategies

1. Treat it like a tuned percussion instrument

Don't expect long, exact synth-note melodies. Write like you're composing for: - claves - temple blocks - woodblocks - agogo-like percussion

Short motifs work best.

2. Let rhythm carry the melody

With percussive voices, melody often comes from: - repetition - accent placement - interaction with other pitched voices

A single tuned RS808 can feel melodic if placed carefully against bass and harmony.

3. Use interval relationships

Tune the RS808 to: - root for stability - fifth for propulsion - minor third or seventh for darker color - ninth/suspended tones for ambiguity

4. Make room in the arrangement

It speaks best when not crowded by too many other sharp transients. If using it melodically, let it occupy a defined register.

Practical starter patches

Patch A: Classic tuned clave line

- Switches both up = **Claves**
- Level: 50%
- Snap: 30–50%
- Pitch: tune to tonic or fifth
- Trigger from 8- or 16-step gate sequencer
- Add a touch of delay

Result: classic woody melodic ostinato.

Patch B: Hybrid metallic melody

- Left switch up, right switch down = **mix mode**
- Snap: 50–70%
- Pitch: tune by ear against bassline
- Accent every 3rd or 5th note
- Add reverb

Result: weird but musical tuned percussion hook.

Patch C: Attack layer for plucks

- Click mode or Rimshot mode
- Trigger from same gate as your main synth voice
- Mix quietly under the synth
- Tune Pitch near the synth note center

Result: more articulate melodic plucks.

Patch D: Minimal fixed-note melody

- Claves mode
- Tune to one note
- Program varying rhythm and accents only
- Send through stereo delay

Result: despite one pitch, it reads as a melodic phrase because of timing and dynamics.

Limitations to keep in mind

Based on the manual: - There is **no mention of CV control for pitch**, so don't expect conventional sequenced note melodies directly from the module. - This is best thought of as a **tuned percussive voice**, not a full oscillator voice. - Melodic utility comes from **tuning, rhythm, accent, layering, and effects**.

That said, in Eurorack music those "limitations" are often the whole charm.

Bottom line

The RS808 is best used melodically as a:

- **tuned percussion voice**
- **accented rhythmic melody generator**
- **transient layer for pitched synths**
- **fixed-note tonal hook source**

- **processed percussive sound for ambient/techno melodic textures**

Its strongest melodic features are the added **Pitch, Snap**, and independent **Accent** behavior. If you approach it like a struck acoustic instrument rather than a keyboard voice, it becomes very musically useful.

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