

## ByteNoise

### **Analog Days**

Analog Days: The Invention and Impact of the Moog Synthesiser is a nonfiction book that gives the reader a glimpse into the invention of the synthesiser, its metamorphosis from huge monstrosity to portable keyboard instrument, and the rise and fall of the company that introduced this invention to the world, Moog Music, Inc.

On the down side, I found the authors' romanticising prose a bit much at times. While the instrument was unlike any heard before, and offered countless new musical possibilities, I'm not convinced that it expanded anyone's consciousness, was comparable to space travel, or encouraged a Videodrome style symbiosis between human and machine. The popularity of this new instrument was intertwined with sixties counterculture and LSD use, which probably goes some way to explaining why its novel sounds were so hyped up at the time, but the authors perpetuate such exaggerated comparisons despite having the clarity of hindsight.

Having said that, I appreciate the fact that it's hard to use the current vocabulary to describe sounds no one had ever heard before. As the authors point out, that may have even partly been the reason that the patches which slightly resembled familiar sounds and were easier to describe became more popular than the esoteric ones, simply because musicians could easily request such a sound from the engineers who knew how

to rig up a patch.

On the plus side, the authors go into great detail about not only the technology itself but also the people who shaped it into what it is today. They include various quotes from interviews they conducted with composers, musicians, engineers and even salesmen, and talk about both the people who understood the technology's potential and used it to make radically original [music](#), and the popular rock stars of the time who wanted a new sound but didn't want to learn how to patch it together.

Most importantly, the authors show why the synthesiser evolved the way it did. Don Buchla and Bob Moog created similar [modular synthesisers](#) at roughly the same time, but Buchla surrounded himself with avant guard composers and faded into obscurity, whereas Moog listened to the musicians buying his synthesiser, refined its design to suit their needs, and helped the new instrument gain popularity.

While Buchla kept his complex modular synthesiser as it was, Moog built a keyboard for his to make it easier to play modern twelve tone equal temperament music on it. This made it less versatile but much more practical. One of his employees took the idea of a practical synthesiser a step further, hardwiring everything together to make it less intimidating, and the resulting product - the Minimoog - became the template for almost every synthesiser made since then, with its built-in keyboard and no complex wiring in sight.

In amongst this information, Analog Days contains various black and white photos of musicians, album covers and synthesisers, including several prototypes of the Minimoog. While not as important as the text, it's certainly interesting to see how the instrument evolved.

The book also has a discography to help you hunt down influential albums from Autobahn to Zero Time. Sadly, many of these are hard to find, but it's nice to have a guide listing albums worth tracking down. After all, the point of a musical instrument is to play it and listen to it, not to talk about it.

Overall, I'd recommend this book to anyone who's ever daydreamed of owning a modular synthesiser or wondered why an instrument with so much potential has turned into a little box with a keyboard and an array of preset sounds. Be warned, however, that it will probably make you crave an old modular system with infinite possibilities and no instructions.