



This RL Music web-Interview took place on and around the 11th February 2010

At RL Music, we've been privileged to have interviewed some of the greats and legends of the analog synth world. People whose works were infused with analog anthems to bleeps, drones, blips and textures because they understand the power, warmth and total creative flexibility that analog synthesizers can bring. However, what about those who are on the rise, and making a name for themselves in a different, and more varied musical environment and who probably represent the majority of our customers?

Meet Shekhar Raj Dhain, the Creative Director of JUICY AUDIO PRODUCTIONS.

As a musician in his own right, he's provided work to a number of television channels such as CNN, BLOOMBERG, MTV, OXYGEN, LIFETIME, HBO and DISCOVERY. He's also collaborated on art installations, and produced others ("its like being a kind headmaster"), as well.



Shekhar has kindly agreed to share his experience and views of his world of music and, in particular, how it works with the extraordinary phenomenon we all know and love as music with analog synths.

Q – So to start Shekhar, can you tell me how you got involved with Music?

A - The usual route of doing it at school to get out of a boring afternoon or two of lessons (laughs). I studied tabla (Indian drum with a distinctive sound) for two years and recorder, then treble, along with a year or so of piano. I fuffed around for years before this but at the age of 17 my life changed, I bought my first “synth” a Yamaha PSS780! It had a basic form of vector-synthesis and a built in sequencer, which allowed you to overdub, etc. My choice was based on the obvious factor at the time; a lack of money (smiles).

Q – Do you remember when you first come across analog synthesizers?

A – Yes, that was whilst I was at secondary school. The music teacher had a Roland JX-3P, with the programmer. I was blown away by the sounds and the power inherent within this machine compared to the PSS style stuff, which was also lying around at that time. Years later I owned JX-3P myself and it was a great piece of kit, with some odd midi quirks to make things interesting. Midi on my particular one, was always on channel 1..well, that’s that decision made for you then! (smiles)

My next experience was even more mind-blowing because I spent the summer of 1991, and beyond, soaked in the sounds and use of analog synthesizers. It was the summers of rave, house & techno. You name it, all things electronic - 808, 909, 303! You’d go to a club and you’d hear these sounds everywhere. I never got tired of the music or the vibe. I bought a Juno 60 in 1992, put my knowledge of physics and maths to good use (ahem), and learned how to program. A few years later, I made some lucky finds through the old music magazines and bought an ARP 2600 and a minimoog to add to my arsenal. Since then I’ve used and bought some of the other all time great analog synths that were made such as; the Memorymoog, Jupiter 8, Prophet 5 and the Oberheim OB-8, Xpander and OB-Xa. Some of these awesome machines have come through RL music and lovingly cared for by KSR of course.

Q – Do you use analog synthesizers on a regular basis?

A – To be honest, in spite of all my digital gear, every time I fire the studio up I reach for an old analog FIRST. Why? Because there’s something in the sound which has warmth, character and slight movement due to the analog circuitry which just cannot be replicated fully with VST’S and even VA’s. It’s not just nostalgia, but an instant gratification via the turn of a knob or the flick of a switch. On a straight A/B test, I’ve found even those who’ve always had VA’s are blown away by the pure power of the analog sound and hence hanker for the gear and sounds thereafter.

I appreciate that some people will complain about the price of the vintage gear these days, or the fact that it needs a certain degree of maintenance to keep in top condition but this isn't the entire picture. I think these opinions are being propagated by people who are buying things from the wrong sort of places or are just plain unlucky.

The way I see it, you're investing in something that will potentially last you a lifetime and clearly appreciate in value year after year simply due to the limited numbers sold, small numbers remaining and most importantly, the demand. Personally I think that if you're buying through people like yourselves who are also backed up by KSR for repairs, servicing and restoration expertise, you've got the ability to bring everything bang up to date with the minimum of fuss.

Q – How did you get into the business?

A – That was down to hard graft, tenacity and luck. One of my friends was a film student and needed some music for various projects whilst he was at uni. I promised I'd help him when the time came. I remember I had an assignment to hand in at the end of that week at uni myself, and a mild hangover, but I wrote pieces specific to his works and he was happy with them. After that labour of love, another friend was providing stuff to one of the games companies before the days of PC gaming had taken off, and asked me if I had stuff I'd like to throw into the hat. Now THAT I got paid for, but for the life of me I don't know what they exactly did with the music (laughs).

After a few years of doing a 9-5 job and then discovering the internet, I just sent out mail shots to various radio and TV channels and production companies asking them if they'd be interested in my services, which also included voiceover work, to which end I took a professional voiceover course as well.

Whilst all this is going on, I was sending what I thought was more commercial or "pop" sounding electronic music to various labels, with mixed results. I also did a load of rehearsals and pub style gigs with rock bands. The memories of some of those situations make me smile to this day. It's all good, cause it shapes and refines you like only real life experiences can.

Eventually, I got good responses from the TV production and film companies, so kept an eye and ear on things via various channels, and the rest, as they say, is soldiering onwards and hopefully upwards.

Q – What would you like to do in the future?

A - I would like to do more production work, as I love working with others and helping them reach their artistic vision, is a joy. It's not the easiest of processes, because anyone who's a creative soul will know how attached you can be to your work at so many levels, so the criticism has to be constructive, words should be encouraging, and the synths should be analog! (laughs)

I would also love to be involved in some of the bigger scoring projects and installations, such as the Vince Clarke and Martyn Ware project. In fact, working with some of my heroes would be the icing on the cake..getting to spend time learning and working with living legends AND all that lovely analog gear! (smiles)

Q - Whom or what inspires you?

A - I could give an anodyne answer such as "life itself", but that's only half of it (laughs). It's all the stuff I've soaked in from my heroes, such as Vince Clarke, Orbital, Kraftwerk, Human League (especially the mark 1 version with loads of system 100 all over the place), Depeche Mode, Aphex Twin/Richard D. James, Brian Eno...the list is long and it includes legendary producers such as Gareth Jones, Flood, Daniel Miller et al. Also Oasis, Noel Gallagher, Jagz Kooner, Bollywood composers, Hans Zimmer, Christophe Franke, Tangerine Dream..I'll stop there shall I, otherwise I'll end up trying to remember too much from my 900-plus c.d. collection (laughs).

All the people I've mentioned are inspirers because it's testament to their courage to buck any prevailing trend and stick to their own vision and hence make or break it each time they put something out. They have a sound and sonic imprint that is clearly their own and of course all of them have great, classic analog synths, in their collections. Especially Vince, Flood, and Daniel Miller, if you go by the interviews they've given over the years.

Vince in particular, since he has a sound that is clearly his own, yet he manages to come up with fresh and inspiring stuff after 30 years in the business. All with the use of old analog gear. That's part of why he's still around, and an inspiration to so many NEW artists to this day. The same with dépeche, which is a blend of all mostly old analog, and Martin's songwriting. These guys have a Midas touch when it comes to their craft.

Then there's the guys who wear the studio hats, such as Flood, Gareth Jones, Jagz, and Brian Eno. Eno is unique cause he started or found the concept of using synthesizers as processing or treatment tools, which can really add life to a tired and quite anodyne sounding synth, and without doubt open up many possibilities in arrangements and mixes.

Q – Can you name your all time favourite analog synth?

A - (takes a long breath) Not easy. I think all electronic musicians are a bit nerdy at heart, so asking them to pick one would leave them scratching their head for the rest of the day. How about a top 5?

Q - Sure, that's usually how I approach that tricky question.

A – In no particular order:

- 1) Roland system 100 – discreet technology, which means there's no chips in there, and a very free ranging design which allows you to set things in hertz rather than footages, plus a beautiful, rich sounding filter, patching points, and the great 104 sequencer, allow you to come up with stuff that ironically takes a bit of head scratching using software. An amazing synth which ive used a great deal, cause its so heroic and warm sounding.
- 2) Roland Jupiter 8 – It DOES live up to all the hype, and if you've got a good one, thats been serviced and calibrated properly, its ambient and electro heaven. It can be soft, warm and almost sweet, yet at the flick of a switch can end up being dirty, raucous and shredding metal. It's also Bi-timbral of course with a great arpeggiator, has memories, and really looks the business too.
- 3) ARP 2600 – These are highly sought after, and rightly so. Its all normalised, but the real fun begins when you start using the patch leads, to bypass the internal stuff and really get this beauty chugging away. A pair of built in stereo speakers and that clanky spring reverb add to the fun. It's VERY addictive, cause like the system 100, its so instant and heroic. I reckon EVERY synth enthusiast should have one.
- 4) Moog minimoog – It took a while for me to be a convert to these, cause I wasn't initially impressed by the lack of tweakability compared to the others I've listed, but of all the moog products, the mini has a sound that is funky, sexy, powerful, soft, emotional...you name it. It's THAT filter, coupled with some neat little tricks you can perform by putting the signal back into itself and thickening the sound even more and so on. It's no wonder moog remade and remodelled it for the millennium and beyond, but the original has a character of its own
- 5) Yamaha CS80 – Beautiful. No one has ever made anything like this again, which is a shame as the technology is there. Everything on this instrument screams power and finesse, which is down to the delicacy with which you can make changes in real time because of the polyphonic aftertouch, the ring mod, the ribbon..its in a class of its own. Its a good job RL Music and KSR are there, because CS80's are becoming thin on the ground and the only minters

I've seen are from you guys. Again, the reality of this machine far outstrips the myth and you have to experience it for yourself to really understand.

Q - Any last words to our analog fans out there?

A - If you own at least one vintage analog synth in your arsenal, you'll have some part of your sound that will allow you to stand out a little from the crowd. You'll also be investing in something for a rainy day. That's a win-win situation, and people like RL Music and KSR are thankfully still around to help you if you need it.

Q - Thank you for your time, Shekhar and good luck with all your projects for the future.

A - Its a pleasure Rich and thanks for the interview.

Juicy audio productions: www.juicyaudio.com

Further samples of shekhar's work can be found here:

www.yookamusic.com/ymn/juicyaudioproductions

