

Feature

# Synthesised TLC

In the final part of the vintage synth feature, N. RAMA LOHAN has expert advice on how to maintain those old treasures in premium condition.

**A** GREAT number of us take our musical instruments for granted. We expect them to play and sound the way they always should, but there's some degree of maintenance involved if you want your instrument to stay in shape. Just start by storing them in the right place.

Where vintage synthesisers are concerned, that would certainly mean a proper flight case and away from the threat of moisture. But let Richard Lawson (RL) of RL Music and Kent Spong (KS) of Kent Spong Restorations tell you exactly what you need to know about showing TLC for your instruments and what you need to arm yourself with should you choose to buy a vintage synth.

### Are there any instruments that potential buyers should avoid? And why?

RL: This is a difficult question as many of my customers and vintage synth owners/players generally buy different makes and models, depending on their own style of music. There were some keyboards made over the years that perhaps don't represent the best or even very good value at all, but I have observed, on many occasions, someone will definitely swear by them.

Later in this interview, we mention some tips on buying, but if I had to suggest anything, then it should be to avoid privately sold synthesisers that have been modified in some way. This is not to say the mods are not complementary, but in my experience, many mods are poorly and unprofessionally implemented, so inevitably, will have damaged and/or affected the value of the instrument. This is not a rule of thumb, just a word of advice.

### Could you provide a little buying guide for potential owners of these instruments?

RL: There are a considerable number of websites on the Internet offering advice and guidance about buying synthesisers so I wouldn't want to replicate this, but my simple advice is as follows:

1. Determine what type of synth you want or need for your own particular music style i.e. mono or poly synth – you would be surprised how difficult that question is sometimes.
2. Research the particular make and model you're interested in buying – the Internet is full of sites that specialise in one make or model or another and there are many Internet forums covering particular vintage models, so grab your mouse and start surfing. One example I can give is an excellent Korg MS and PS range website: [www.korganalogue.net/korg/index.html](http://www.korganalogue.net/korg/index.html).
3. Try to get a demo on the model you want by asking friends or visiting a studio. Locate a good local dealer if possible or call/e-mail me at RL Music for advice.
4. Avoid modified or "specials" as there is a very good chance owners who think they are skilled techni-



**BAD HABIT:** Don't leave your vintage keyboard this way. Make sure that it is always lying on its playing position.



icians will have mutilated them internally. The majority of problems we see with vintage synths are where previous owners (or a good friend who wanted to have a go) have hacked about the system and basically ruined them.

5. If you can't see/demo the synth you finally find, then make sure the seller can provide detailed pictures (at least 10) from all angles so you can clearly assess the cosmetic condition. Ask for an appraisal of the operating condition and any history of the keyboard, including the serial number.

6. Determine why they are selling it because these are valuable and collectible instruments, so there must be a good reason for them wanting to let it go.

7. If buying from overseas, then ensure the synth is well packed and expect to pay a small fee to get it packed professionally. I have had a small number of instruments arrive, from Japan particularly, in several pieces because the postal services was not careful when handling the goods.

8. Also, if buying from overseas, don't forget the shipping and import tax charges etc.

9. The world is full of thieves who can defraud you out of your money quite easily, so always try to buy from a reputable dealer who will manage all of the above requirements and deliver to you a beauti-

fully restored machine in perfect order, with all costs fully disclosed and exact details of the restoration work carried out.

Your readers might want to start by visiting the following website for more detailed guidance on buying vintage synthesisers. These websites are not always vintage-specific, but the principle is the same, although generally quoted prices are never realistic: <http://altmusic.about.com/gi/dynamic/offsite.htm?site=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.code404.com%2Ffaq%2F>.

### Would you have any storage and user maintenance tips for these pieces from the past?

KS: The one thing we recommend highly is to ensure you keep your vintage synth from harm of moisture and extreme temperatures. This doesn't mean you shouldn't use it in hot, humid countries, but prolonged exposure to extremes of temperature will eventually create problems. This actually applies to pretty much any electronic device, but an already aging instrument will be more susceptible to damage and wear.

**General use (day to day) tip:** You can prolong the full working life of your keyboard by having a cover to prevent dust from getting into the sliders and pots on the front panel. Direct sunlight will over time harm the lustre of the wood cabinets, paint and decals as well as heat the internal workings to a point where dry joints can occur on the circuit boards, so avoid these situations. Also, try to ensure you switch the



**POLY PROPOSITION:** If you anticipate playing chords, then a polyphonic synthesiser like this Korg Polysix might be ideal.



**LEADING THE WAY:** The Kawai Synthesizer-100F may only allow you to play lead lines, but monophonic synths like this can have plenty in the way of modulation options.



**SAFE AND SOUND:** It would be a good idea to make a custom-fit flight case for your beloved vintage synth.

keyboard off after use, as this will greatly extend the working life of many components. Smoke or dirty environments can cause a build up of residue on keyboard contacts, which will cause intermittent key failure over time, a very common problem.

**Longer term storage tips:** Buy a flight case and store your valuable vintage synthesiser in a moisture-resistant bag within the flight case and place some silica gel in the bag. If possible, store your synth flat in the normal playing position. Remember that 20- to 30-year-old electronic instruments are like classic cars – they don't like being left unused so try to take them out for a play from time to time and always allow around 30 minutes for them to warm up.

### What are the future plans for RL Music?

RL: We plan to keep doing what we do best and that is to supply the best condition examples of vintage synthesisers in the world. There are

## News

### Bargain bonanza

IT'S all up for grabs, at ridiculous bargains, at that. Yes, you've waited for this for long enough. It's the sale of seasons and the highly sought after goodies will be coming from Yamaha Music Malaysia's stable of products. And you're still blinking, right?

Well, that means you'll be entitled to walk away with Yamaha instruments, Sabian cymbals, Ampeg, Laney and Crate amps, Pro Mark and Vic Firth sticks, Remo drum heads and percussion, D'Addario strings and Planet Waves accessories, all at great prices.

Oops! You're probably still reading this waiting for us to give you the all-important figures. All right, here goes: discounts range between ... wait for it ... 15% and 70%. The other set of numbers you're going to need to arm yourself with are – the sale will be on until Aug 30, so hurry. And the numbers to punch in, should you require more details, are the ones belonging to **Combo Mix** (☎ 03-2142 0063 / 4161). 'Nuff said.

a number of new and wonderful projects underway and details of these will emerge through the website in the coming months, so please keep visiting to keep abreast of things.

KS: KSR will be launching its own website in the next month or so and it will be presenting some extremely interesting projects from a restoration perspective of vintage synthesisers – details of this site will be announced at [www.rlmusic.co.uk](http://www.rlmusic.co.uk).

RL: I hope the information and quick insight into the world of vintage analogue synthesisers has been of interest to your readers and may I take this opportunity to thank you for asking me to contribute to your newspaper and website.

If anybody has any questions or requires more information on the subjects covered, please do not hesitate to contact me or Kent at KSR, contact details as follows: **RL Music** at [rlmusic@bopenworld.com](mailto:rlmusic@bopenworld.com) or **Kent Spong Restorations** at [kent\\_spong@hotmail.com](mailto:kent_spong@hotmail.com).