

CLASSIC KEYS

ROLAND SH-101

In today's modern computer driven world of music production, there are so many options when it comes to electronic instruments. What makes this so appealing is that most of these options are available in software format, offering cheaper, space saving alternatives to getting the great sounds of yesterday. But, unfortunately the sound of many hardware synths can never truly be emulated by a piece of software and, when all is said and done, there is nothing like getting your hands on the real thing. So, let's take a look at some of the classic keyboards and synths that some of us still own and many only dream about. This month, let's take a wander back to 1983 and have a look at the SH-101, produced by Roland.

Japanese manufacturers Roland tend to feature a lot in this column and that is down to a number of reasons. Partly because I am a big fan of their classic synthesizers and do own quite a few, but mainly because they were so instrumental in furthering the development of their instruments and constantly came out with so many new innovations. It is hard to look past them really. So, when we go back to

1983 and have a look at the SH-101, it was a big move for them then and is still a keyboard that is highly sought after today.

This little beast really stacked up the points with its 'cool' factor. It was the sort of keyboard that the eighties were just screaming out for and it got eaten up by the consumers. A small, 32 key monophonic synthesizer that was perfect for bass sounds that fell somewhere in between the heavy and clunky Juno-6 and the ill fated TB-303. It was built into a plastic shell so it was extremely lightweight and portable and took up very little space for the size of the sound it created. But best of all, it could be strapped on like a guitar and with the optional hand grip that featured a pitch bend wheel on it,

and could really add to a group's stage presence. If that wasn't enough, it came out in a grey colour to begin with, but was later released in blue and red too, for all those fashion conscience musicians of the eighties. After all, your keyboard simply had to match your eye shadow.

It was a relatively simple design with a single oscillator, LFO and ADSR controls on the VCA. There was a typically Roland sounding filter section and a 100 step sequencer and arpeggiator giving you a simple selection of patterns, being Up, Down and Up/Down. Being released right as MIDI implementation was kicking off, the unit did not feature MIDI Ins or Outs, nor did it have a patch memory. But later modifications from the usual

suspects meant that the SH-101 could take a MIDI module for greater implementation.

The SH-101 was a typical case of less is more. It was definitely the right keyboard for the time, giving the user style and looks, but keeping operation simple and functional. These days, they tend to be hoarded by techno producers who just can't get enough of the fat eighties bass sounds that Roland came out with, but they do turn up on the second hand market from time to time. Unfortunately, you tend to pay more for the 'cool' factor than you do for the synth.

By Rob Gee



WHAT'S THAT SOUND? KEYBOARD

ANALOGUE RETURN

As with so many other things in life, it seems that music gear goes around in a full circle, given enough time. The analogue synthesizers that we were all so fond of in the seventies and eighties were slowly eroded from the marketplace in the nineties with the dominance of digital based synthesizers that offered more variety, more control and a much more achievable price tag. But what this new breed of synthesizers lacked was the tonal qualities of the analogue circuitry in the keyboards of old. Sure, there were some manufacturers that continued against the trend, but lower production runs simply meant analogue synthesizers got even more expensive. Now, it seems the tides have turned and analogue synthesizers are making a proper revival, spurred on this year by a number of exciting releases at the NAMM show.

KORG

Korg got everyone excited in the last couple of years with their Monotron and later, Monotribe, ribbon based miniature analogue synthesizers that were not only compact and portable, but extremely affordable. Now, we see the release of two new products to complement these with the Monotron Delay and Monotron Duo. The first of these units being a modified Monotron with a built in delay circuit, giving the user even more sonic experiences. The second unit is also a modified variation of the original, but this time it features two oscillators, giving the synthesizer a thick and richer tone that just wasn't achievable with the original.

MOOG

Moog Music is one brand that has stayed true to the quest for analogue tone all these years and 2012 sees them releasing yet another innovative instrument to complement its already extensive range. The release of the Moog Minitaur sees the company coming out with a compact desktop synthesizer that features a knob for every function, so there is no need to scroll through menus or use

function keys to get access to the parameter you want. This is going to get a lot of people excited as it will complement many existing setups giving the user thick and rich bass sounds that just have to be heard to comprehend. It really gets down low and the filters work in overtime to make the sound all the more rich.

ARTURIA

Possibly one of the biggest releases of the year will be the Arturia MiniBrute. I have bitten my tongue with the knowledge of this instrument for some months now, but I am glad to finally be able to spill the beans on it. From what I have seen, this is going to be a huge hit with fans of classic analogue synthesizers. The company that began with software emulations of hardware synths has now gone one step further and are bringing us not



only an amazing keyboard with an incredible set of features, but one that is really going to shake the market up with its low price. I have mine pre-ordered already and am eagerly awaiting them to start shipping. This little monster looks

like it is going to live up to its name in tone and functionality.

By Rob Gee