

## six note 32 memory programmable poly

**O**N the other side of the net from Roland's Juno is the Korg Polysix which could already be a couple of sets up in the fight to be best budget polysynth of the year.

Once more it can play a maximum of six notes at a time, has an arpeggiator, a five octave keyboard and a bank of controls with all the obvious features. The plus, which accounts for the £500 difference in price from the Juno, is the 32 programmable memories.

The Roland and Korg are approaching their owners from different angles. The Juno is there to lead mono synth players up to the polyphonic sounds they want to produce at the lowest possible price, and it carries out the task very well.

The Korg is coming down from the pack leaders such as Prophet and Oberheim, making their facilities available in a trimmer package at a lower

phaser.

It's not the perfect solution. Ensembles emble keyboards with an overall wooshing sweep, whereas the natural chorus effect of two or more oscillators (see the Roland Dual Voice Piano) is more realistic and warming, especially for strings. Yet this sweep can be concealed by adding touches of vibrato or pulse width modulation at differing speeds and there's no doubt the chorus unit enhances the Polysix.

If we can be controlist for a moment, the Polysix offers the following: 16/8/4 footages in sawtooth and pulse width square waveforms plus the intensity and speed controls for pulse width modulation, a sub oscillator that works at one or two octaves down (not both), a modulation section with frequency, level and delay (nice), switchable to the VCO, VCA or VCF.

Incidentally the pitch bend

has on the filter. This one turns both ways and can be made to invert the envelope. The VCA can be switched so it's controlled by the ADSR or by a simple organ envelope that produces a sound as long as your finger is on the key.

Rather than provide a programmable final volume, Korg have included an attenuator with click stops (easier for the memory to cope with) so individual sounds will be at different (and presumably desired) levels. The ensemble section finishes it off via a rotary switch for selecting the effect and a speed/intensity control.

Enough of the twisty bits, how about the pushy stuff? On the final fifth of the panel are the eight program selector buttons plus four further switches for memory banks A to D—32 memories in all. All are non-latching with inclusive red LEDs. Pretty colours, too. The red button on its own puts you back to manual, the last in the row writes a sound into the programmer.

Their LEDs double as indicators for the tape dumping system, showing the information is loading or has been found on the cassette. The last two switches are tape and program enable/disable selectors—you can't run a cassette or memorise a new sound unless they're on enable. It's a safety measure but a strangely located one. Usually such facilities are on the back where you can't hit them accidentally or absentmindedly. Still, at least they exist.

Almost forgot to mention the four buttons that make up the key assign section. You can choose from polyphonic, monophonic, chord memory (an excellent feature which stores a chord shape and spits it out in a new musical key when another note is hit) and a hold that indefinitely sustains the last notes played.

Finally, the bonus. Korg are hard on Roland's heels in incorporating an arpeggiator, one of those gadgets that nips along a chord, plucking out the component notes. The Polysix's will reproduce the scale over an octave, two octaves or entire keyboard. It will run up, down or up and down and can latch, repeating an arpeggio until given something new to do.

Compared with Roland and Casio it errs in only one area—splitability. It can't be made to play arpeggios on the bottom half of the keyboard and leave the top free for overlapping.

Otherwise it works admirably and is handy in a dozen ways—bouncing back octave bass lines, adding a rhythmic punch to your playing or mimicing sequencer style trills and fills.

All this is contained in a trim, teak-ended case, sloping down at the front and finished in blue and black. The controls are simply laid out and easy to understand, the pitch wheels are smooth and the keyboard is lightly sprung; full marks all round.

Soundwise the Polysix is basic but highly satisfying. It has all the classic polysynth sounds—romantic strings, hard or muted brass, organs with percussive clicks or a high fifth from an oscillating filter—plus a few wobblers of its own including a huge, waxy space effect located in position seven on bank D.

What it loses are the cross modulation and syncing extremes of the Oberheim (it has no syncing facility) nor the subtle poly mod intricacies of the Prophet. But considering the price it's an alarmingly powerful machine. There's no lack of bite to the envelope generators and the filter, while not blessed with the musical sweetness of 24dB/octave varieties, has life and sparkle.

The Polysix does require effort. It's not one of those instruments that throws out superb sounds from the moment it's plugged in. Ensemble and pulse width fiddles have to be worked to fatten the oscillators, the filter needs tweaking to get the right amount of ring, but when it's there the Korg performs impressively.

It showed a particular talent for clanging bell and chime sounds, shifted air when called upon to produce monophonic bass lines and had an ample supply of spooky noises.

Where I felt it drooped was in heavily filtered "wangs" from high to low (the VCF wasn't gutsy enough to cut it) and in brash, penetrating Vox organ tones.

I wouldn't have expected a polyphonic portamento from a device at this price, it's a complex result to achieve, but then 18 months ago I wouldn't have dreamed of seeing a programming system of this sophistication in anything under two grand.

For the cost of a Prophet you could have a Korg and an eight track recorder and that's a deal which any musician is going to study very closely.

## KORG POLYSIX

### £1200

cost. But somewhere, the economies have to come.

The major saving is in voltage controlled oscillators. Upmarket polys have two, sometimes three for each note where the Polysix has one, resulting in a thinner tone. The answer has been to graft on a chorus/ensemble unit that doubles as a (rather weak)

wheel can be tuned by a panel control to stop at a desired interval at the end of its travel.

Moving on we have the single ADSR envelope generator, and above it resonance and cut-off controls for the 12dB filter, keyboard tracking and an intensity control to determine how strong an effect the envelope

