



# MOOG MINIMOOG VOYAGER OLD SCHOOL

## No MIDI Or Presets = Fatter Analog Sound?

by Tom Brislin

Are you still kicking yourself for passing on that Minimoog model D you saw at a garage sale for a couple hundred bucks so many years ago? Wait, that was me. The success of Moog's fantastic Voyager series hasn't made vintage Minis any less hunted to extinction on eBay. There's something so *direct* about the original mini – the feel, the sound, the 100 percent analog-ness of it – that captures the heart of the true synth player. With the Minimoog Voyager Old School, Moog Music hopes to capture it again.

The Old School is essentially a Minimoog Voyager, but with every bit of digital guts removed. This means no MIDI, no screen, no digital scanning of the keyboard, wheels, or knobs, and no presets. In fact, the only visual indications that the O.S. is powered on are a couple of LEDs: one that pulsates the LFO frequency and another that glows when the audio input gets signal. The more like a vintage Mini it

sounds, the more ironic it'll be that the initials usually mean "operating system."

### OLD SCHOOL VS. NEW SCHOOL

I set up the O.S. in between my Model D and the Voyager Anniversary for a serious analog throwdown. The first question I set out to answer: Does the omission of the standard Voyager's digital circuitry make the O.S. sound any *fatter*? The short answer: No, but understand that the Voyager is one of the fattest-sounding synths currently made, and the O.S. is identical in tone quality. Why sacrifice the conveniences of MIDI and preset storage, then? For starters, the O.S. costs \$700 less than a standard Voyager, which is a serious plus. Tweaking sounds is more straightforward, since every modulation possibility is on the front panel (on the standard Voyager, some require going into menus). Having a dedicated knob for the

### PROS

Fantastic Minimoog sound. Improved layout and labeling of knobs. All modulation options available without menus. Excellent synth-action keyboard with velocity and aftertouch.

### CONS

No backlit panel or gooseneck lamp connector. No A440 reference tone generator. Changing pitchbend range requires opening the unit. Maximum pitch wheel positions aren't precise.

### INFO

\$2,595 list, approx. \$2,400 street, [www.moogmusic.com](http://www.moogmusic.com)

LFO waveform is also more intuitive – LFO waves are in the Modulation Busses section of a standard Voyager. In fact, thanks to spending mere minutes with the O.S., I've just now come to fully grasp the modulation workings of the Voyager Anniversary I've owned for a few years. So, while the standard Voyager is deeper, the O.S. is more user-friendly – as much as any synth



## HANDS-ON

- 1 The 44-key synth action keyboard feels superior to even a mint-condition model D, and kudos to Moog for including the Voyager's velocity and aftertouch.
- 2 Knobs and switches for every sound parameter on the O.S. No digging through menus for anything.
- 3 Gone are the standard Voyager's LCD, program buttons, touchpad, and any way to see the front panel in the dark – just like on a real model D.
- 4 Gorgeous hardwood cabinet and solid construction inspire confidence. 40 lbs.

**Ménage a Minis**

Comparing (clockwise from left) a vintage Minimoog D, the Voyager Old School, and author Tom Brislin's "standard" Voyager Anniversary Edition.

with 40 knobs and 13 switches can be.

Some synth players (analog purists, I'm looking at you) will wonder if the lack of digital knob- and keyboard-scanning in the O.S. causes a difference in keyboard feel or knob response. I didn't notice any. Keyboard and knob response were already excellent in the original Voyager, and to me, the O.S. behaves the same way.

Are any hidden features of the O.S. not apparent on the front panel? Yes. If you put a 1/4" TRS send-and-return cable in the audio input, it can pass the synth's *output* into an external effects device and send it back in. In other words, you've got a pre-filter effects loop. Also, you can change the keyboard mode from legato (the default) to single trigger (this re-triggers the gate each time you play a note) by holding the top two keys down while powering up. According to the O.S. manual, you can also change the pitchbend range by adjusting an internal jumper. The manual directs you to Moog's website for instructions, but I couldn't find them at the time of this writing. According to the manual, the default pitch range is +/- five semitones (a fourth), but the review unit did +/- seven (a fifth) and thanks to the beauty of analog, pushing the wheel up or down to the max didn't bend the pitch by exactly the same amount every time.


**OLD SCHOOL VS. THE TENACIOUS MODEL D**

Moog hails the O.S. as the true heir to the

Minimoog D. To my ears, the model D is still the king; its tone is more fierce and blistering than any comparable instrument currently made. Each D has a slightly different character from any other, and mine has more high end and slightly fuller lows than both Voyagers. That said, the O.S. and standard Voyager are as close as you can get to the sound of a vintage model D, have superior stability, are more playable thanks to the velocity- and aftertouch-sensitive keyboard and spring-loaded pitch wheel, and more flexible due to the modulation routings and control voltage I/O. Plus, there's the maintenance issue. You can find a model D in excellent condition and treat it with great care, but you'll still end up dealing with internal quirks and expensive service, and it's only a matter of time before the keys start looking like a jack o'lantern's smile. The O.S. is beautifully built and should inspire confidence in players who loved the model D but don't gravitate to the standard Voyager.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The now-vintage Minimoog D was a well-built machine for its time, but I wouldn't want to gig with one today. If I were a model D lifer, I'd tour with an Old School in a heartbeat. Do you need to recall presets or MIDI-sequence a real analog synth, and can you spend \$700 more? If so, the standard Voyager is the way to go. Need to play chords on an analog synth? In the model D's heyday, the alternative was the

Prophet-5. Today, it's Dave Smith's Prophet '08, and there's also his Evolver keyboard or module to get your feet wet for a lot less money— they do have digital stuff in the signal path, but the filter and two of the oscillators are real analog. For a lot of us, though, there's no alternative to the sound of a Minimoog. If that's you, look no further than the Voyager Old School. 

**NEED TO KNOW**

**What it is** Monophonic (one note at a time) synth with all-analog signal path and a knob or switch for every aspect of the sound.

**Keyboard feel** Better than a mint vintage D, same as a standard Voyager, with velocity and aftertouch.

**No presets? Really?** Really. Wanna change the sound? Gotta twist the knobs.

**Sound compared to a vintage Minimoog D?** As close as you can get, though a well-serviced model D is still the champ.

**Why choose this over a standard Voyager?** You prefer that every parameter has a knob or switch on the front panel. Costs hundreds less.

**What does the Old School have that the standard Voyager doesn't?** Improved layout, keyboard control voltage and gate outputs built-in so you can make a modular rig around it.