

Still Making Waves

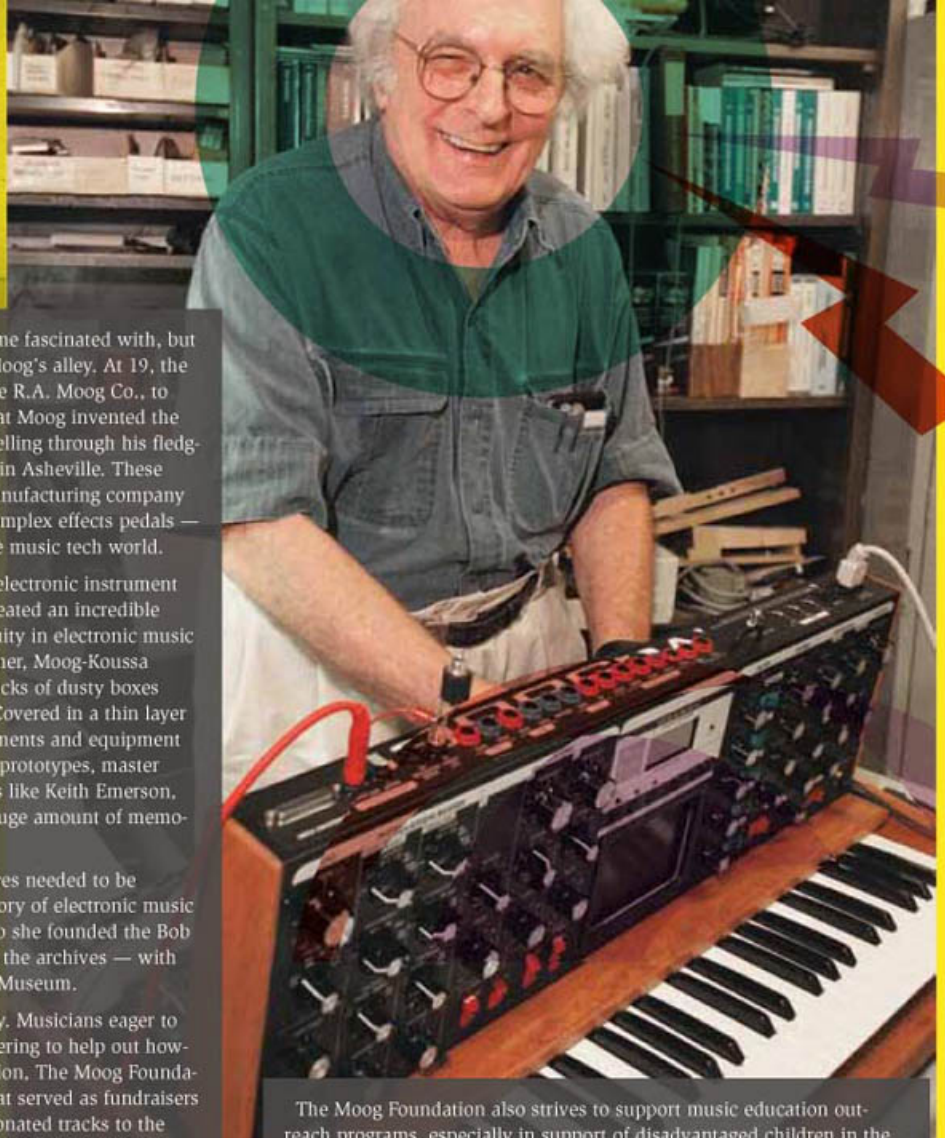
BY
ALLIE
GOOLRICK

KEEPING BOB MOOG'S LEGACY ALIVE

When Dr. Robert Moog died suddenly of a brain tumor in 2005, the world lost one of electronic music's greatest innovators. Moog was known for building ground-breaking instruments that tore down the barriers between natural musicianship and technology — pioneering the synthesizer and bringing the theremin to mainstream popularity. For many, the loss of Moog was the loss of a hero.

"Immediately following Dad's passing, thousands of people around the world paid tribute to the effect that Dad had on their lives, both through his instruments and through his warm, humble spirit," says Moog's daughter, Michelle Moog-Koussa.

Though best known for his Moog synthesizer, what originally got Bob Moog interested in making instruments was a bizarre little instrument called the theremin. Picture this: a musician stands in front of a rectangular box, waving his or her hands around in front of two antennas. The result is a sound somewhere between banshees screaming and UFOs landing.



It may sound like a strange instrument to become fascinated with, but technology like the theremin was right up Bob Moog's alley. At 19, the budding innovator founded his first company, the R.A. Moog Co., to manufacture the instrument. It was long after that Moog invented the first synthesizer, which he patented and began selling through his fledgling company later renamed Moog Music, based in Asheville. These days, Moog Music has grown into a full-scale manufacturing company selling everything from analog synthesizers to complex effects pedals — and is one of the most recognizable names in the music tech world.

But what Moog created was more than just an electronic instrument business. In his lifetime, Dr. Robert Moog had created an incredible body of original work — but his legacy of ingenuity in electronic music was about to be lost. After the passing of her father, Moog-Koussa opened up a storage shed to find stacks upon stacks of dusty boxes and trash bags filled with her father's archives. Covered in a thin layer of mold were thousands of items: vintage instruments and equipment including the last of the Minimoog synthesizers, prototypes, master recordings from 60s and 70s electronic musicians like Keith Emerson, copious schematics, articles and photos, and a huge amount of memorabilia.

Moog-Koussa knew immediately that the archives needed to be restored. She was sitting on a goldmine — a history of electronic music production from one of its greatest supporters. So she founded the Bob Moog Foundation to fund the project to preserve the archives — with the intention of eventually opening a Bob Moog Museum.

Her plight was heard by the musical community. Musicians eager to support Moog-Koussa's effort were soon volunteering to help out however they could. In the two years since its inception, The Moog Foundation has hosted Asheville bands in showcases that served as fundraisers for the Foundation. Many of those bands even donated tracks to the *Mooged Out* compilation CD. And it wasn't just local musicians who heeded the call to perpetuate the work of Bob Moog. After the Smashing Pumpkins' nine-day run in Asheville, NC in 2007 — Billy Corgan became interested in the project, donating money and writing letters on behalf of the Foundation.

"I strongly believe many people all over the world would benefit from being able to interact with the thoughts, ideas, inventions, and life of Dr. Moog," says Corgan in a message on the Moog Foundation Web site, moogfoundation.org.

Moog-Koussa was touched by the outpouring of support for her cause.

"While we knew that Dad was well-known and highly accomplished, the family never realized how he had inspired and touched people by giving them a new way to express their creativity," says Moog-Koussa. "We founded the foundation to carry on this legacy of both technical brilliance and creative warmth."

The archives are only a fraction of what the non-profit Foundation is doing to preserve Moog's legacy. The non-profit released its CD, *Mooged Out: Asheville*, in 2007 — comprised entirely of songs that use Moog gear. The Foundation is present at numerous music festivals and events with all sort of Moog gear from theremins to the "little phatty" synthesizer for people to try. The group, which was also represented at this year's National Association of Music Merchants Show (NAMM), has held community events in the Asheville area and even anticipates a series of benefit concerts with nationally recognized musicians. Bob Moog himself has become a local icon — a cartoon version of him anyway. His characteristic white hair and oval glasses have become recognizable as the Moog Foundation t-shirt logo — his presence a reminder of a person who "made waves" in the music industry.

The Moog Foundation also strives to support music education outreach programs, especially in support of disadvantaged children in the United States. Plans are in the works to set up scholarships in Moog's name at UNC-Asheville where Dr. Moog lectured, Berklee College of Music where he received an honorary degree, and Cornell University, where Moog received his Ph.D. The Foundation is also designing outreach programs to bring electronic music into the schools "as a vehicle for children to connect science, music and creativity," says Moog-Koussa.

In August 2008, the Foundation celebrated its two-year anniversary with the launch of a Moog Foundation YouTube channel (www.youtube.com/moogfoundation.) which offers a video tribute, "Virtuality: The Moog Legacy" by musician Amin Bhatia. Moog was also paid tribute through an all-Moog composition by synth wizard Erik Norlander dubbed "The Princely Hours," which is available for download on the Foundation's MySpace page, myspace.com/moogfoundation. The Foundation also offers t-shirts and bumper stickers through its Web site.

Eventually, the Foundation plans to open a Bob Moog Museum to display and preserve his archives and memorabilia and present exhibits on other innovations in electronic music. Until then, the Foundation continues to accept donations, plan concerts and fundraisers, and make its presence known at events.

If the Foundation has any say in it, Moog's legacy will continue to inspire electronic music and creative technology for years to come.

"My father has a unique and beautiful legacy of touching people's lives through innovation, creativity and human warmth," says Moog-Koussa. "The Bob Moog Foundation aims to carry that legacy forward. As my father would say, 'What's not to like!'" +

Editor's Note: Portions of this story appeared in Blurt-Online