

## MUSIC

### Lord of the 'board

*Robert Moogs synthesizer reshaped electronic sound and, in the process, pop music itself*

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Robert Moog, who passed away Monday at 71, did not invent the synthesizer. Forerunners of the instrument existed as far back as the 1950s, while Moog was still making and selling the-remins (think the spooky, outer-space sound in the Beach Boys' "Good Vibrations").

But Moog's pioneering work brought the synthesizer into the realm of the playable and the practical --though the earliest models cost roughly \$40,000 in today's money. Thanks to artists such as the Beatles, Wendy Carlos and even the Monkees --who beat the Fabs by two years in putting one on a record --Moog's creation transformed and transistorized modern popular music for good.

Moog (rhymes with "vogue") made the first synthesizers widely known, played and recognized by the public and media. But how to pick out a Moog in a sea of other instruments (not to mention other synthesizer brands) on pop's great recordings? Here we've assembled a Moog Top 10: songs you'll likely recall, but perhaps have never considered before in light of the keyboard instrument named for its genius creator.

**"BAROQUE HOEDOWN"** Kingsley and Perrey, "Kaleidoscopic Vibrations" (1967)

Team up German-born Gershon Kingsley with France's Jean-Jacques Perrey and a Moog synthesizer and what do you get? Music that's

perfect for a lounge party on Venus. And "Baroque Hoedown" was the space-age composition that Walt Disney himself requested for use at Disneyland's nightly Main Street Electrical Parade (it was later used at Walt Disney World as well). Most recently, the song --heard by more than 100 million theme park visitors worldwide --was remade by They Might Be Giants for a soundtrack to the 2004 documentary "Moog."

**"BRANDENBURG CONCERTO NO. 3 IN G MAJOR"** Wendy Carlos, "Switched-On Bach" (1968)

It's one of the most recognizable of Bach's works, played on what was, at the time, an alien instrument. But Wendy (who then was still Walter) Carlos, an Ivy League-trained musician, scored three Grammys for "Switched-On Bach" and propelled the Moog into the spotlight. The album was a painstaking affair to make; Moog's earliest synthesizers were difficult to keep in tune and could only play one note at a time. Carlos had to track the melody lines, one by one, that all the fingers on her hands would play. The album spawned a rush of poor imitations, including "Switched-On Nashville Country Moog" and "Switched-On Santa." Carlos, meanwhile, went on to create the equally famous soundtrack for "A Clockwork Orange."

**"HERE COMES THE SUN"** The Beatles, "Abbey Road" (1969)

George Harrison tinkered with a Moog on an extremely obscure, unlistenable 1969 solo synthesizer album, "Electronic Sound." ("Avant garde clue!" he cracked in the liner notes.) But here, the instrument lends a classy touch to a classic Harrison track, underscoring the arpeggiation and climbing in pitch as the Beatles sing, "Sun, sun, sun, here it comes."

"MINOTAUR" Dick Hyman, "Moog: The Electric Eclectics Of Dick Hyman" (1969)

Having played with jazz greats such as Benny Goodman and Teddy Wilson, Hyman is best known for his work on Woody Allen film scores. But in 1969, the pianist departed from tradition to produce an album of Moog-based ditties. "The Minotaur" was an improvised cut that, edited from its original 8-plus minutes, became a hit single. It also was, supposedly, a big influence on Keith Emerson's playing.

"LUCKY MAN" Emerson, Lake and Palmer, "Emerson, Lake and Palmer" (1971)

Just as touring rock guitarists had walls of Marshall amplifiers (many of which weren't actually plugged in), Keith Emerson tricked out his monstrous Moog rig with decoy modules to make it look more imposing. But it's all the real thing on this hit, as Emerson takes a lengthy Moog solo in the tag --leaving the song to dissolve in a swirl of synthesizer and reverb-soaked drums.

"POPCORN" Hot Butter, "Popcorn With Hot Butter" (1972)

The Moog's only bubblegum top 10 hit was actually a cover. Gershon Kingsley penned "Popcorn" in 1969. The melody took him less than two minutes to write --though it takes forever to purge from your head. Hot Butter was a pseudonym for Stan Free, a member of the First Moog Quartet. The Moog creates the telltale popping melody. (Predictably, a 1973 follow-up, "Percolator," was a flop.)

"LIVING FOR THE CITY" Stevie Wonder, "Innervisions" (1973)

"Innervisions" represented an artistic peak for Wonder, who was barely 23 when it was relea-

sed. And "Living for the City," his ode to the struggles of urban life, was an epic social and musical statement, more than 7 minutes long. Wonder played the Moog throughout "Innervisions," and it can be clearly heard here in the jazzy, wordless refrain melody that follows the chorus.

"CARS" Gary Numan, "The Pleasure Principle" (1979)

It's arguable that Numan's dependence on the Moog made this song the synth-pop hit it was, for its dreary, buzzing-bass tone follows the vocal melody note for note. And that was a blessing for the nasally Numan, who wasn't much of a singer. "Cars" marked the first and last time he cracked the U.S. charts; the song went to No. 1 in England.

"WHIP IT" Devo, "Freedom of Choice" (1980)

Devo's signature synth-rock hit --which reached No. 14 on the Billboard charts -features not one but two Moogs. The lead instrument is a Minimoog, while the bass line is performed using a custom synthesizer that Robert Moog made for Devo, known as the "Devobox." Moogs were a major component of Devo's synthesizer arsenal in the 1970s and '80s.

"BURNING DOWN THE HOUSE" Talking Heads, "Speaking in Tongues" (1983)

The members of Talking Heads were big fans of the funk band Parliament-Funkadelic, and the song's chant-along vocals were concocted after drummer Chris Frantz attended an inspiring P-Funk show. To play the Minimoog, which is especially prominent on the slippery solo, the Heads enlisted Funkadelic keyboardist and founding member Bernie Worrell.

"Burning Down the House" went on to become a top 20 hit and a big commercial breakthrough for the New York art-rock band.