

# KORG LEGACY COLLECTION ANALOG & DIGITAL EDITION 2007

Recreations of classic synths don't come any better than this.

**Text:** Brad Watts

► Korg is without doubt one of history's most famous synthesizer manufacturers. It's designed and built some real gems since the company's inception in 1963. The first Korg device was the Disc Rotary Electric Auto Rhythm machine, but the more popular and more easily pronounced name was the DoncaMatic DA-20. Over 40 years of continual innovation has resulted in some classic musical instruments that deserve reincarnation in software. The DoncaMatic is certainly not one of them, but the plug-ins I currently have in my hot little computer certainly are: the Korg Legacy Collection, both Analog and Digital variants.

The Analog Legacy Collection's initial run around the block was packaged alongside a hardware controller modelled on the MS-20. It was a 40th anniversary product for Korg that I'm sure will never achieve the cult status of the original, but it was a pretty cool little controller. Sadly it's now a discontinued product, but at the time the package included the MS-20, PolySix, Wavestation and the Legacy Cell plug-in (for combining patches from both the plugs into one instrument along with Korg's MDE-X effects). I'd imagine Korg decided they were giving too much away...

## KORG'S LEGACY

The Legacy Collection now spans two software packages: the Analog Edition 2007 and the Digital Edition. Analog includes the Polysix, MS-20, the Legacy Cell with MDE-X effects and the new Mono/Poly: an awesome synth that on its own warrants grabbing the Analog Edition 2007. The Wavestation is, of course, part of the Digital Edition, which includes a rendition of the M1: Korg's ever so successful workstation. This keyboard sold in the hundreds of thousands across the world, so as you might imagine, many of the M1 presets have become staples among various electronic genres.

Just to clarify what the MDE-X effects are: these are Korg's favourites from its various processors and instruments over the years – they're the kind of effects that match well with synthesis instruments. The Legacy Cell (part of the Analog Edition) includes these effects combined with the Legacy Cell plug-in, which allows the stacking of two synths: two Polysixes or two MS-20s. If you're feeling fancy you could also perhaps try a Polysix combined with an MS-20. Fancy indeed – but notice the Mono/Poly is left out of the equation here? But then the four VCO-equipped Mono/Poly is chubby enough not to need stacking with anything else. (Can I say that? Chubby?).

## UNDER SCRUTINY

So let's firstly have a closer look at the Analog Edition 2007, with the headturner being the recreation of the Mono/Poly. The hardware version originally appeared in 1981, finishing up in '84. It managed to avoid any factory

MIDI retrofits – it was purely a CV driven unit. On offer were four analogue oscillators, two LFOs (or modulation generators in Korg-speak of the time), a reasonably complex modulation matrix and cross-modulation and oscillator sync – they were features that made the Mono/Poly a lead and bass synth to lust after. It was designed mainly to compete with the polyphonic Sequential Circuits Prophet 5, but never quite reached those lofty heights. The reasons for that lay in the Mono/Poly's approach to polyphony – it didn't really have any. By which I mean, it wasn't a genuine polyphonic device – it spread its four VCOs across four keys for pseudo-polyphony. What's more, there weren't any memory locations – it was a case of: set it and play it.

The Analog Edition (AE) 2007 version picks up the Mono/Poly by the collar and drags it into the 21st century: there are memory locations galore, plenty of presets, MIDI integration, of course, and you no longer have the worry of upkeep. I've recently learned the folly of keeping vintage synths after having to strip down my OSCar for repairs – not a pretty sight I can assure you. Synths built 20 and 30 years ago simply don't go the distance without expensive repairs and upkeep. I'd implore all existing synth manufacturers to do exactly what Korg has done – recreate their classic designs so we can leave the hardware versions for the collectors. Where's my OEM modelled SH101 and SH09, Juno 106 and Jupiter 4 & 8, Roland? My virtual VX90 Akai? And my 'actually sounds like the real thing' OSCar plug-in (the GForce version is not a patch on the original)?

## MONO/POLY

The AE2007 Mono/Poly offers four banks of 128 patches, with all patches being nameable and searchable via categories. Modern amenities abound and include multiple tunings, a pair of effects units built-in and of course true polyphony – up to 128 notes or 16-voice unison, should the need arise.

A nifty feature of both the Mono/Poly and the M1 (from the Digital Collection) are audition riffs. Audition riffs are a selection of pre-programmed riffs you can use for playing back patches. 92 riffs in all, covering most styles you'd play on a keyboard; a nice touch for inherently lazy (or keyboard-less) composers. You can also select from a group of 20 setups – strings, piano, unison saw, X-mod EG, mono bass, reso sweep etc. It's a gorgeous synth that's capable of that searing X-mod style of patch: superbly chunky bass and really nice sweeps. Due to the lack of patch memories, Korg has built in various buttons for switching features like pulse width modulation intensity and between X-mod modulation sources. I've not had the pleasure of the original but I imagine it was a great synth to play. Be sure to use this beast with a suitable (read: knob-endowed) controller. Honestly, the Mono/Poly is worth the price of admission alone.



The Legacy version of the '80s non-resonant legend, M1.



Mono/Poly for searing X-Mod sound, chunky basses, and nice sweeps.



The AE MS-20. Not a patch on the original? Well, actually, maybe better.



Polysix - now actually, truly, 'poly'.



Plug-in Wavestation - now actually programmable.

“the Mono/Poly is worth the price of admission alone.”

### SIXPACK & A PATCHBAY

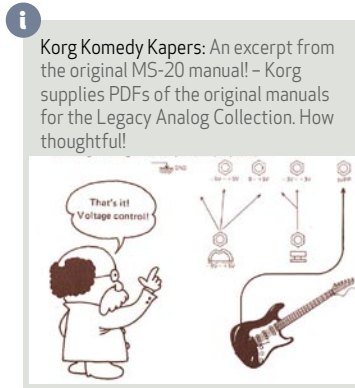
The Polysix plug-in is from the original Legacy Collection and replicates a synth that outsold the Mono/Poly by the truckload. The reason being, it was truly polyphonic. Think of it as Korg's answer to the Roland Juno 60 and the aforementioned Prophet 5. You could also store patches with the Polysix but it never made it into the MIDI club. The Polysix is a great pad machine and offers that smooth Korg-style of oscillator in abundance, and, in the plug-in's case, up to 32 notes. As you'd expect, there are all the mod-cons, like modulation from any MIDI controller source, multiple tunings and saving or loading banks of 32 patches or singularly.

The MS-20 is the granddaddy of the bunch, having been manufactured from 1978 all the way through to 1983. A dual-VCO monophonic synth, the MS-20 is famous for sounding more than chubby – okay, I'll say it – it sounds phat. It was one of the most sought-after monosynths of the '70s because of its tone and built-in patchbay. With patch cables you could not only rewire internal audio and mod sources but also allow external signals to be pumped in directly – or even via the brilliant 'external' filter section; a further filter built into the MS-20 specifically for whatever you wanted to put through it. MS-20s are a lot of fun and if you see one in the flesh you should do whatever you can to get 10 minutes alone with the beast.

Getting back to the plug-in version, all these features are in fact available in their virtual incarnation, right down to the jiggling patch cables. And yes, it sounds tremendous. I love the attention to detail in not only the sonic recreations but the GUI of these plug-ins. They look virtually identical to their forebears, but with quirky little additions. For example, modulation generator LEDs are typically red when in their original 'Hertz' mode, but when set to sync via host or MIDI clock, the LEDs change to blue – an LED colour that was never available in 1978. Like the Polysix, the MS-20 has two GUIs for programming the synth: a smaller GUI that includes a keyboard and provides a realistic impression of the original synth, then a zoomed editing page so you can actually see what you're doing. Neither the Polysix nor the MS20 have any additional effects – you can add effects via the Legacy Cell/MDE-X plug-in.

### THE DIGITAL EDITION

The Digital Edition on the surface would seem the slightly lesser package, comprised as it is of only two synths. But these two machines were monsters in their day. The M1 sold by the container load; around 200,000 in fact. In its day, it was a powerful machine that set a new standard for other manufacturers to follow. The M1 was basically a ROM playback device with 4MB of waveform data to choose from. Synthesis was a fairly simple methodology of stacking programs together into Multis: up to eight with



Korg Komeidy Kapers: An excerpt from the original MS-20 manual! – Korg supplies PDFs of the original manuals for the Legacy Analog Collection. How thoughtful!

varying keyboard and velocity zones. At the time digital resonant filters were difficult to produce so the M1 had a filter cut-off but no resonance – fortunately the plug-in does feature resonance. A stack of Korg and third-party ROM cards were produced, which increased the available library, 21 of which are included in the software along with 11 waveform discs from the latter T-series. In essence, the plug-in is better than the original M1, offering resonance, a stack of sounds and 16 times the polyphony of the 16-note original. If ‘dance’ pianos are what you’re looking for then the M1 is the first stop you should make. Equally, if you want to resurrect your old M1 sounds, the plug-in will load M1 MIDI SysEx files.

### WAVESTATION

The Wavestation was a beautiful-sounding machine and was actually designed by Dave Smith of Sequential Circuits. Sequential wasn’t doing too well by the end of the ‘80s and its founder, Dave Smith, had ended up at Korg. Sequential had been proponents of vector synthesis with the Prophet VS. He took the Wavestation a step further than simply combining four waveforms with a joystick. With the Wavestation you could sequence waveforms together while combining them, to build constantly evolving wave sequences as the basis of a waveform for further synthesis. It was vector synthesis’s finest hour and it gave Korg a lead over Yamaha’s version of vector synthesis. Anyone remember the SY series? Not all that inspiring. Korg made quite a splash with the Wavestation AD, which allowed line or mic signals to be input to the unit as part of a wave sequence – a killer feature that gave the unit semi-cult status.

Again Korg has done an exemplary job with the software model and has included resonance in this version along with the ability to import Wavestation SysEx files. So if the screen on your Wavestation AD is about to die then this could be the cheapest option for accessing those sounds again. Both the M1 and Wavestation more so, gave rise to all those rhythmic pad sounds heard in countless car advertisements throughout the early ‘90s. The pads are clean, clear and continually evolving, if required. Again, now with resonance, the software version of the Wavestation is more than the original – at a fraction of the original cost.

### SOME LEGACY

So, as you can see, I really can’t rave enough about the quality of these instruments. And I must add that I much prefer programming these units as opposed to newer softsynths that have only ever existed as software. There’s something about the care taken to build an effective operating system or working procedure that only hardware and 40-plus years of instrument design can provide. These plugs feel and sound like the machines they mimic.

Software protection now comes via the USB Syncrosoft USB key, so you can authorise these units and take them with you between computers easily, which for me makes them a far more useful proposition than instruments that are forever linked to one computer – it’s kinda like being able to take your synth with you. Compatibility extends to VST and RTAS for both Windows XP and Mac OSX 10.3.9 and Audio Units for Mac OSX. They’re also included as stand-alone applications. I have few gripes at all – apart from wishing for mouse scroll wheel editing of parameters and perhaps a string-based search function. ■



### NEED TO KNOW

#### Price

AE 2007: \$349

DE 2007: \$299

#### Contact

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#### Pros

Magnificent plug-ins.

Meticulous attention to detail.

Who else could do it better than Korg!

Cheap!

Cheap as chips.

#### Cons

Scroll wheel editing should be

standard practice these days.

Some may blanch at the USB

key copy protection.

#### Summary

These are stellar recreations that only Korg could produce so well. From staunch recreations through to new applications for old synthesis topologies, these are in many ways better than the real thing.