

In Memoriam Rob Hordijk (1958–2022) Modest, Passionate Synth Luthier

Rob composed, as he called them, patches in-a-box: real-time improvisation instruments such as Blippoo Box and Benjolin, with which he gained worldwide fame, mainly via the internet. Generative instruments that completely transcend the concept of a sound machine associated with the traditional 5-black-7-white keys. Under intuitive operation, they generate a stream of real-time audio in which the traditional separation between sound and event completely disappears, with the resounding result: eruptions of expectation and amazement. Rob coined the term Bent by Design, referring to the design of his Rungler as he called it: a digitally chaotic circuit that forms the engine in Blippoo and Benjolin. Ultimately, that Rungler also ended up in his Modular, a jewel of electronic craftsmanship that houses many, at first glance, hidden gems of extra bonus functions.

If I may briefly outline Rob's development from the early 1980s when we first met: from Apple 2nd computer, Mountain hardware synthesis card and Forth software via Akai sampler to Clavia's virtual (Micro) Modulares and later the Nord Modular G2 is a timeline from digital via virtual analog to physical analog. His G2 pages (<https://rhordijk.home.xs4all.nl/G2Pages/>) are known as the unofficial G2 manual: excellent tutorials that are also a must for anyone interested in modular synthesis in general. Via prototyping with the virtual analogues of Clavia to physical Blippoo Box and Benjolin and finally to the Modular.

From the black and white digital world ruled by ones and zeros with the only expectation being whether or not, to the real world where there is still room for endless shades of gray with pleasant surprises and 'touches': the analog world of voltage control. The digital chaos, the Rungler, from the Blippoo and Benjolins eagerly makes company with the wide world of the voltage continuum in the Modular, forging a close and successful relationship between analog and digital.

Initially trained as a goldsmith, you recognized a lot of this in Rob's synth work: as a Craftsman-Luthier, he built this beautiful modular instrument with dedication, precision and an eye for detail in which the balance between familiar expectation and villainous surprise can be explored down to the finest detail. In this analog Modular, all potentiometers that run as if on ball bearings are equipped with a 50-part scale over 270 degrees with which you can set almost exact reproducibility if you wish. His Modular concept was an instrument for electronic music and sound art, not made up of a number of modules of your choice, but a functional whole in which not so much the concept of modular construction as the concept of modulation in all its facets is central. In the hall of fame of synth smiths, he was certainly the goldsmith.

The relationship with his customers also reflected that goldsmith: personal contact with genuine interest was often the beginning of friendship. Layman, amateur and professional, they were all equally sweet to Rob. He was averse to nonsense. He patiently explained difficult matters with the self-evidence that the questioner was as smart as he was. It never occurred to him that that was sometimes not the case. A commercial approach with a website, advertising, etc. was not for him. It sometimes happened that a seriously interested person did not have the money for a Modular; than If you built it yourself in his studio under his guidance, there would only be material costs. However, you couldn't build that in one day. Well, then he also had a place to stay...

Rob, thank you for four decades of friendship!

Ernst Bonis