



FutureMusic

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## Softube Modular \$99

Softube join the modular synthesis frenzy and Bruce Aisher gets plugging to see if their software expertise can deliver some analogue-style magic

**CONTACT** WHO: Softube TEL: +44 (0)1447 765765 WEB: [www.softube.com](http://www.softube.com) **KEY FEATURES** Cross-platform modular synthesizer plug-in with authorised emulations of modular hardware. Basic system contains six Doepfer modules (A-110-1 VCO, A-108 VCF, A-132-3 Dual VCA, A-140 ADSR, A-118 Noise/Random, A-147 VCLFO) and over 20 Utility modules





## THE PROS & CONS



Good value. At about £75 it delivers a wealth of sound creation possibilities

**It sounds good. It's sonically rich, and certainly has an analogue feel**

It can output both audio and CV signals to external modular gear



**CPU load can be high on big patches and at lower latencies**

You have to pay extra for the more interesting modules

**Although it comes with a fine collection of presets, you will need to put some time and effort into creating your own**

Softube are best known for their emulation-oriented audio plug-ins aimed at capturing the sound of specific hardware units. In more recent years this has extended into hybrid-hardware (Console 1), and virtual instruments, in the shape of their Heartbeat analogue drum module. Now Softube tackle perhaps one of the trickiest of beasts to distil into software form – the modular synthesizer system.

Whether it's because of the almost unlimited connectivity possibilities or even the ease of self-justification when buying small affordable modules, the current patching madness sees no sign of abating.

This is perhaps where the modern story of sound synthesis starts, particularly with Bob Moog and Don Buchla, two of the most famous names associated with synthesis of this kind in the '60s. Moog, of course, chose to embrace synthesis as a more conventional playable instrument, while Buchla chose a

## INTELLIJEL MODULES

The first of the “many more modules from other quality hardware Eurorack vendors to be released” are from Intellijel. While Doepfer are best known for good value but perhaps less glamorous modules, Intellijel are considered somewhat boutique, and more expensive.

Intellijel Rubicon (\$49) specialises in classic frequency modulation synthesis thanks to its accurate pitch tracking. There are eight waveshape outputs, and eight CV inputs. Intellijel Korgasmatron II (\$49) is a dual channel, multimode filter taking its cue from the Korg MS range. When self-oscillating at increased resonance settings you get two additional (but limited) sine wave sources. Intellijel µFold II (\$29) is a timbral shaping tool that ‘folds’ waveforms to create more complex waveshapes with extra harmonics.



more unconventional approach to control. We now have the benefit of choosing modules from a whole host of manufacturers, with recreations of older designs as well as new ones.

Doepfer came to the game in the mid-'90s before it was fashionable, introducing an ever-expanding range of affordable modules in the A-100 series. This is where Softube pick up, with six from the range included in Modular – a VCO, VCF, Dual VCA, ADSR, Noise/Random and VCLFO.

The A-110 VCO is a simple oscillator module with four independent waveshapes. Tuning, oscillator sync and pulsewidth of the square wave can come under external CV control. Adding this to the modular rack, and plugging one of the waveform outputs to the main plug-in output will result in a constant tone of

fixed pitch. This will be obvious to any hardware modular user, but demonstrates in very straightforward terms that in any system like this you'll need to get patching for even the simplest tasks. In this case, you will need to call on the MIDI TO CV module to turn MIDI notes into a CV (routed to the VCO CV1 input) to be able to play notes in any conventional sense; and this is only the beginning.

The A-118 Noise/Random adds some dirt to the sound source selection and allows you to harness white noise as well as a separately coloured variant. The Random Output is used for much slower-moving noise-base modulation duties.

A-108 VCF is a Moog-style filter that offers 1, 2, 4 and 8-pole low-pass filter outputs as well as variable width band-pass. Multiple CV

## THE ALTERNATIVES



## Doepfer A-100 Mini System

£879

It's the real deal. A ready-rolled, MIDI controllable dual VCO modular system with patch cables.

[www.doepfer.de](http://www.doepfer.de)



## Arturia MicroBrute

£209

It isn't a modular, but its Mod Matrix and back panel ports provide useful analogue interfacing capabilities, and give a glimpse into the modular universe. Very good value.

[www.arturia.com](http://www.arturia.com)



## Native Instruments Reaktor 6

£169

Described as a Modular DSP Lab, Reaktor is a monster of customisable digital sound design elements. Version 6 added Blocks functionality and CV connectivity.

[www.native-instruments.com](http://www.native-instruments.com)

inputs can be mixed together to alter cutoff, and there's independent control over feedback (an old Minimoog trick). The A-132-3 Dual VCA is a straightforward combination of two independent voltage controlled attenuator modules with manual gain and CV input.

The two core modulation sources are the A-140 ADSR and A-147 VCLFO. Usefully, the envelope has three selectable time ranges. The LFO, like the audio oscillator, provides four independently shaped outputs, and CV control over LFO rate (that runs from 0.01-50Hz).

The Doepfer selection is small, and would be relatively limited in hardware form if bolted into a small rack. However, this is far from the whole story here. You can use as many of each module as your CPU can handle, and Softube have included a host of their own modules. This extends from splitters and mixers to a bunch of simple modulators and generators, plus a lowly audio delay effect. Three CV step sequencers (16, 8 and 5-step types) are included alongside a 4-track, variable length, beat sequencer. Should you wish to provide a more streamlined way of interacting with any of your hard-won patches there are 20 Performance Panels for adding simple switches, knobs and indicators.

As mentioned, like any hardware system, you need a way to turn MIDI



**ADD MODULE** Click this to enter the Module Select View, where you choose which modules to use in the patch. Modules are grouped by manufacturer or type. Hovering over a module provides functional information, and sometimes the option to buy the original hardware.

**PATCHING** Coloured patch cables are employed, along with a cable transparency effect in order to make patch viewing as easy as possible. It's not quite the same as a bundle of real cables, but frankly it is better than a bunch of grey wires tied together.

**AUX OUTPUTS** Four stereo pairs used for further DAW processing or to route signals from Modular to a hardware system. The Block DC On Aux Out buttons allow you to use most sound cards without causing damage, though this will introduce some limitations in interfacing functionality.

messages and those from your DAW into something voltage-based (virtually speaking). There are modules converting digital inputs to CV and trigger messages in a pretty comprehensive range of ways. The most intriguing one of these is Quadraphonic MIDI to CV, which can be used to create polyphonic and paraphonic patches in the style of the Oberheim Four Voice or Korg MonoPoly.

This isn't quite the full picture, as Heartbeat owners get access to eight of its generator modules from within

Modular, while there are more flamboyant flavours available in the shape of three Intellijel modules (as paid-for extras).

Modular is certainly not the first piece of software to approach synthesis in this way – Reason is built on some similar concepts – but the fact that it includes modules from different named manufacturers is an interesting pointer of what may come. If you are interested in taking the plunge into modular synthesis then this may be an interesting bit of research; there's even a Buy Hardware button on the relevant panels.

A Doepfer A-100 Mini System will set you back nearly £900, while Softube's new baby costs about the same as one module. It may be digital, but in sonic terms it sounds great, and the Aux Outputs allow you to interface directly with hardware for an interesting hybrid system. Highly recommended, wherever you stand on the digital vs analogue debate. **FM**

## GET YOUR HEARTBEAT GOING

Heartbeat is Softube's 'classic' analogue drum synthesis module. Once you realise that if you own a copy all of Heartbeat's instruments are available from within Modular, you get a fuller picture of where Softube might be heading with their software instruments.

The Heartbeat modules include two for kick drum generation, three outwardly similar ones for rimshot, clap and hats, a general percussion module, one for cymbals and an EQ/effects channel. One significant aspect of



these drum modules being integrated into Modular is the ability to program them in-situ from the software's drum synth module.

## FM VERDICT

9.1

Excellent value, lots of fun, and sonically powerful – a must-buy, especially for those considering entering the modular hardware fray.