

[material world]

Jessica Fletcher, prog rock and Singaporean prisons



How to buy...

CLASSIC KEYS

Wub wub squeek parp whoosh! The analogue synthesiser is the best musical instrument known to man – if you can't play, you can still sound silly

the gadgeteer

This month's most peculiar new hi-tech gadget

Do you feel a vague sadness during the opening credits of 'Murder She Wrote'? Love your computer but miss the clickety-clack of old typewriters?

Well, design students in Italy have gutted an old Olivetti and transplanted modern emailing innards into it. The result looks like a typewriter but emails like a PC. You simply type out your email and, when you pull out the paper, the message is sent.

Surprisingly, no one's selling it yet, but see www.interaction-ivrea.it for more information. Details of a microwave in the shape of a stone-fired oven were unavailable as we went to press.

PHOTOGRAPHY KOBAL ILLUSTRATION HARRY MALT



1 TINKLING THE PLASTIC

Imposing ARP 2600s (the voice of R2D2) and sought-after Mini Moogs (used by everybody from Herbie Hancock to the Chemical Brothers) can set you back more than £2,000 – so be careful when you buy. eBay is a good source but for more security – and expense – try a specialist dealer; their details are in *Sound on Sound* magazine (£4.25). For more about individual synthesisers, a great source of information is www.vintagesynth.org.

2 REPAIRS ARE COSTLY

Old keyboards are just that – old – so they need a bit of TLC. Repairs are often hard work because it's tricky to find replacement components for older gear. There are specialists, such as www.synth-service.co.uk, out there to help you – but costs vary and quickly get pricey if you need rare components.

3 SYNTHETIC SYNTHESISERS

If that all sounds a bit risky, buy computer software that emulates old synths. Of course, they don't have as much character and there are no real knobs and sliders to play with, but they sound just as good. The best start at around £120 – try recreating Bowie's 'Low' on the Pro 53 from www.native-instruments.com, or pulling a Jean-Michel Jarre on the Mini Moog V from www.arturia.com. You can download free trial versions and have a go.

Unhappy Shopper

#7 No taxation without irritation, says the Shopper

Apparently, Britain's councils want a 1p tax on chewing gum to pay for the costs of cleaning it up.

You can kind of see their point. Spotless Singapore used to have an outright ban on chewing gum – and a year in prison awaited importers. It's a little on the harsh side but it gets you thinking...maybe it's time to shift the tax burden towards the most irritating companies.

First up, tax the companies bombarding us all with recorded phone messages. You've won a competition you never entered! Don't phone that 090 number – it's a scam. Tell Icstis, the premium-line regulator, instead (www.icstis.org.uk).

Second, a levy on estate agents' signs outside houses that aren't for sale. Live on a busy road? You've put your house on the market without speaking to an estate agent! Well, you know what sign to give them back – but try the Ombudsman for Estate Agents, too, to see whether they're members (01722 333306).

