

On the occasion of [COTK Model 15 test report](#), we take advantage of the opportunity to get to know Club Of The Knobs a little better. **Kazike** and his wife **Raj** (a rare and remarkable husband-wife team) manage the Portugal-based company that builds some of the best modular systems now (and probably ever).



**GS: Hello Kazike, we first want to congratulate you on your successful instruments. Club Of The Knobs is still to some extent an insider tip on the analog synthesizer market. Can you please tell us about your business?**

**Kazike:** Thank you for your kindness! Essentially, my aim was the further development of the classical Moog modular synthesizers. Now, after almost 10 years, I can say that we succeeded. We can finally manufacture high-end instruments to fulfill the musician's dreams. COTK is based in Lisbon/Portugal. Production of wooden cases, front panels and PCB is decentralized. But final assembly, supervision and control (the essence of the creation of new models), consulting service and order processing remain in our hands. Manufacture is hand-selected and hand-made.

**GS: What is the current range at COTK? What models are available?**

**Kazike:** We offer big cabinets from real wood as well as transportable models covered with tolex. Our program covers the "classical" Moog Systems such as the C 35 (up to C 55) cabinets, the transportable P1 – P3 and our Model 15 (also with appropriate upper cases). We also produce custom-made products. You can find all these on our [website](#).



**GS: The goal of COTK is clear, the company manufactures classic modular synthesizers. Instruments for purists, modelled after the legendary Moog Modular Systems. What advantages do you see in that legendary system?**

**Kazike:** Well, if a purist is someone looking for maximum resemblance to the original Moog system coupled with highest quality in building, then I agree completely. For me, the design of the modules always had top priority. Form AND function in symbiosis is the key to achieving the effect you're looking for. You don't even have to switch on the synthesizer in order to hear it, it's sufficient to just *look* at it ...!

The relation of the knob's size to its function, the design of the scales according to their significance, the arrangement of the elements on the front panel, the format of the modules in general – they who understand synthetic sound creation recognize that my modules fulfill a task above and beyond mere design.

Our insistence on 100% analog creation is also a purist requirement. The sound is what it is. It exists, irrespective if whether it's audible or not. A truly analog synthesizer has command of the whole sound universe. It's as simple as that. The functional principle of acoustics, nothing less. The decision whether to play Bach, make noise or create frequencies not audible for the human ear is left up to us. Just as a color palette doesn't foresee what the painting is going to be like, our analog synthesizer puts no limitation on the handling of acoustic phenomena. This is in contrast to programmed (digital) instruments.



To facilitate unlimited creative freedom for our clients, we supply them with modules that are a delight to use – ideally dimensioned, intuitively conceived logic and a pleasure to handle. The visual presence of the instrument alone opens vistas of sound opportunity and stimulates the user to create acoustic worlds of his own. And for this the Moog design remains the best – hence this purism.

**GS: Of course, you aren't satisfied with the traditional modules. There have been new advanced modules offered on your program for a few years now. Can you highlight your own developments here?**

**Kazike:** Technically speaking, the number of "traditional" modules in the Moog synthesizer was quite

limited. Apart from that, those systems weren't very stable in their tunings. So we have developed modules far exceeding Moog's repertoire in number. As much as we liked the enthusiasm generated by the large System 55, a System 15 and a 3P (with upper cases) at the Frankfurt Music Fair – some visitor couldn't stay calm when confronted with such a huge "Moog" – the fact is that the disciple has freed himself from the master. The "Moog" we presented at the fair never really existed as a Moog, except in the imagination of a select few. That vision led me to design my first "Moog" 30 years ago. Although, at that time it was white, not black ...



The range of modules available today incorporates more than 30 developments I have created to perfect the synthesizer. Among these are the Vocoding System and the Euklidian Bi-Gate Sequencer. To be honest, emphasizing the design of a particular module doesn't make sense, since they have all been subject to continuous re-evaluation and perfection over the years.

**GS: Insiders say that Nicola Santi from Padua / Italy is responsible for the manufacture of the modules. Is that true?**

**Kazike:** Yes, I met **Nicola Santi** through an eBay auction when I was buying something from him. Our shared fascination for synthesizers has led him taking over responsibility for the production of the module's metal parts. In truth, our collaboration is a friendship. And then there's **Jean-Marc Declercle**, a Frenchman living in Lisbon who makes the beautiful wooden cases. And **Ruben da Costa**, a Portuguese musician and student of media art who has taken over assembly of the PCBs. **Georg Mahr** from Germany writes the programs for the chips and Georg is a wonderful discussion partner.



Not to leave out my wife Raj, with whom I started the enterprise. It was she that discovered my passion for synthesizer manufacture 30 years ago. Basically, COTK is a classical family business!

**GS: Are you German? At least you speak German. Did you emigrate?**

**Kazike:** I was born Germany, yes. It's maybe just a coincidence, but the historical roots of the Moog synthesizer are also German: H. Bode and H. Deutsch influenced Moog a lot – and the further development of this tradition is now taking place through me, a German native in the "California of Europe", namely Portugal. Portugal and California have a lot in common, we are called the "Wild West of Europe". And the fresh air, the incredible light and the vastness of the landscape influence the development of our instruments. At least, that's the way we see it.



**GS: Portugal is on the perimeter of Europe. Is it a disadvantage that your company is set up apart from more important countries like Germany, France, Italy and England?**

**Kazike:** In the times of internet and a united Europe we feel it as an advantage to be able to profit firsthand from the "creative atmosphere" of Lisbon, as our visitors call it. It's simply a place where we feel at home and can work well. The synthesizer crowd has its own distribution channels, functioning mainly through the internet (although not all websites can be relied on). Borders are something that exist in our heads. Lisbon is not farther away for many than Hamburg – or Rome, for instance. And for someone looking for quality standards "Made In Germany", well ... please look for my place of origin. Tongue in cheek, of course.



**GS: The delivery of your instruments takes place to a large extent by post. What are your experiences with courier services? What tips would you give to customers interested in your systems? Local Pickup? Are there other alternatives?**

**Kazike:** Yes, we are distributing instruments ourselves, using mail and courier services such as UPS. For

clients not familiar with our products or wishing to see a large system before ordering it, we contact someone in his area owning a system, who is willing to demonstrate it to a potential buyer. Basically, intense and informative correspondence precedes most larger orders. We don't really want to grow, just to get better!

**GS: In the analog community there are critics who complain about long delivery times and an occasional difficult correspondence with COTK. Would you comment on this?**

**Kazike:** Long delivery is relative, of course. Delivery time depends on which modules are selected and on the complexity the system involved, as can be seen on our website. Some modules we have in stock, others may be temporarily unavailable. Some might be in the process of being redesigned. Waiting time seldom exceeds 2 - 8 weeks. If there are unexpected problems, we inform the client immediately. Old rumours floating around on the internet pertaining to problems we had in our first years can be forgotten without thought. On the other hand: impatience when waiting for a new instrument is perfectly understandable. We're all the same!



Regarding correspondence, I would like to note that in the era of emails one has become used to prompt answers to all questions. However, in our case, this is an impossible task. I alone can answer to technical questions and give professional advice, but my main task is the production of instruments.

Think of it this way: what advantage would we have in over-extended delivery times or in delayed correspondence? We manufacture by hand. Most of our customers appreciate this.

**GS: What about technical support? Let's say there are unexpected technical problems with a COTK modular system. The instrument must therefore be returned to Lisbon, right? What is the procedure?**

**Kazike:** There are various ways to get a module fixed. In many cases the problem is really a handling error. In this case communication between us and the customer solves the problem. If incorrect handling leads to damage, we ask you to send the module back to us at your expense. We in turn pick up the bill for repairs and pay for the return delivery.



In the rare case that a defective part or connection needs to be repaired, I often send instructions for repair to a technician on-site (as specially important for non-European countries because of the import tax procedure). We have really had problems with the Ensemble Generator module. But we found a solution for that.

It is important to know that we repair only those modules free of charge which are sent by the original owner. We accept no responsibility for repairs on second hand instruments.

However, many problems can be nipped in the bud through direct personal contact.



**GS: In which COTK instruments are musicians mostly interested? In smaller systems - like the Model 15 - or in huge classics, like a Model 55?**

**Kazike:** It's really a conglomeration of musicians, collectors, sound researchers, performers and fascinated people who sense that they are about to realize their old dreams for the first time. So it's actually a conglomerate of solutions that we offer: musician performing on stage need transportable systems, collectors prefer large "classical" systems, others just adding single modules to their existing systems. It has been our experience that customers become addicted to COTK products as soon as they hold a COTK module in their hands. They see it, they hear it ... and all our warnings are in vain.



**GS: You must have many clients in central Europe and overseas. Are there other, for you surprising, countries on the market for analog modular systems? We're thinking of Scandinavia, for example.**

**Kazike:** As already mentioned, for us each single module, which leaves our enterprise, is significant. It's really astonishing in how many countries we have a "representative" who can be relied on if we need him. We enjoy this thought. Japan, Iceland, Russia, Finland, Brazil, Lapland – some day there will be no country that is "COTK free". An analog synthesizer is in a way a universal product. Why should cultures or countries be a limitation?

**GS: As a manufacturer of classic modular systems you are located in a particular niche in the music industry. How would you judge general developments in the field, especially concerning analog synthesizers?**

**Kazike:** Many computer musicians are tired of digital sounds. Certainly, many younger persons have never had the chance to listen to an analog synthesizer, not to mention to *use* one. They have no way of knowing that this is an absolutely different experience in hearing. And that large instruments may not be just "retro" or "fundamentally different" but capable of undreamed musical results. However, I have never found anyone who, after listening to the sound of our instruments, didn't hear this difference immediately. We are not talking about any special gadgets on these instruments, we're talking about pure, full sound.



The development of analog synthesizers has certainly gained in importance in the last 10 years. We greet every new product on the market because we know that means a new potential client for us.

COTK has 10 years of production experience and is the perfect continuation of the original Moog tradition. If there were anything better products, I'd build them myself ...

**GS: Are you a musician, do you have a studio?**

**Kazike:** I don't call myself a musician even though I am consistently invited to various sound projects. I sometimes perform at festivals with my own sound project named "OrangoTango". And we occasionally do sound events at acoustically interesting places (churches, vast halls, empty factories). But we rarely have time for performance.



**GS: What is it like to live in Lisbon/Portugal? Please tell us something about your country.**

**Kazike:** Portugal means the South, wild ocean, very good air, delicious aromas, lots of light, interested, careful, affectionate people, authentic food, creativity and nonaggression.

Portuguese people love their country, something we all sense. So it's a very suitable place for creating fine and inspired things. That's why we are here. We hope that the political and economic situation will not endanger this small paradise. Portugal is a country which still allows you to experience the true meaning of "analog" ...

