

Ask Mike

All levels of questions are welcome and we promise to keep your surname and email confidential. To ask Mike a question, visit mcknightsoundsinc.com.

Mike,

Are you buying vintage keyboards for a "museum" or are you actually using them in your studio? It seems like a lot of work to get these older keyboards into working condition, and then once you do, how do you actually interface them with your MIDI stuff? Do you just play the parts on each keyboard, or can you recommend a good MIDI-to-CV converter? On another subject, I bought a Fender Rhodes and am having a really hard time finding someone that will work on them where I live.

—Paul

Paul,

No, I'm not building a museum, although it does look like that around here sometimes. As I've said before, eBay is great, but sometimes I do buy stuff that seemed like a good idea at the time — and then I get the gear and wonder what I was thinking. I have sold off a few of my vintage keys that I wasn't using, and have donated a few to

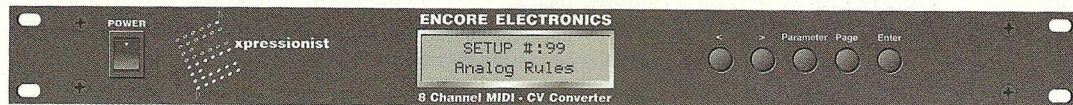
charity (if you give to a non-profit that can send you a donation letter with their tax ID on it for the IRS, it's a great deduction, and feels good, too!). I gave a Hammond A-100 organ and Leslie to a local church, and a Korg Trinity to a correctional facility in Florida; I know they're really using these keyboards for something good, not just reselling them or letting them get dusty.

I recently bought an Encore Expressionist eight-channel MIDI-to-CV converter. In its most basic application, you can have eight CV synths connected and assigned each to their own MIDI channel. Among other advantages of using the Expressionist, pitch isn't a problem — when playing older synths, their keyboards can typically be out of adjustment, making it hard to play and keep in tune, so using a MIDI keyboard will give you an immediate improvement. Other cool features include being able to

scale the pitch of your vintage synth across the range of the keyboard, which comes in handy if your synth goes sharp or flat the higher up you play. In the past, you'd have to either open up the synth or use a screwdriver to adjust the tuning, and sometimes even that wouldn't work. You can also set up splits, for example, using one synth for a bass part, and another for a solo sound.

Regarding Rhodes technicians, check out "Rhodes Resources" below. The VIs come close, but nothing sounds or feels like a properly set up Rhodes. Sometimes to take your sound to the future, it really helps to understand the past, but it's still all about making music, so don't get too hung up on the technology and forget what you're doing this for.

by Mike McKnight, music technology wizard for Mariah Carey and many other stars



The Encore Expressionist, Mike's favorite MIDI-to-CV converter.

Rhodes Resources

Fender Rhodes technicians can be hard to find, especially if you're not in big music towns like New York or Los Angeles. Here are a few suggestions:

fenderrhodes.com The definitive Rhodes fan and enthusiast resource on the web.

speakeasyvintagemusic.com Not only do they sell killer pre-amps and rotary speakers, but Pennsylvania-based Speakeasy runs a full restoration shop, and has built a sterling reputation.

vintagevibe.com Vintage Vibe is my favorite by far. They have a lot of original parts, but also manufacture their own replacements, usually improving on the original. They're a small company, but have great customer service. Their YouTube channel, "vintagevibekeyboards," has tons of great videos showing how to tune and repair Rhodes, Clavs, and Wurlies.

fenderrhodesla.com If you're in the L.A. area, check these guys out. While they don't do house calls, if you can part with your Rhodes for seven to ten days, they'll fix it up like new or upgrade it to be even better. They'll even take pictures of the work and post it online so you can see their progress. They also can replace the tolex that invariably gets dinged up over the years, and can even do a "sparkle top" in gold or silver.



The legendary Fender Rhodes.

therhodesman.com Another Rhodes technician worth mentioning is David Ell, a.k.a. the Rhodes Man. He provides repair, restoration, and custom Rhodes for sale from his workshop in Kennewick, Washington.

rhodespiano.com Looking for one of those new Rhodes pianos you've heard about? This is the Rhodes company's official site.

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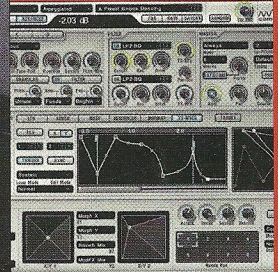
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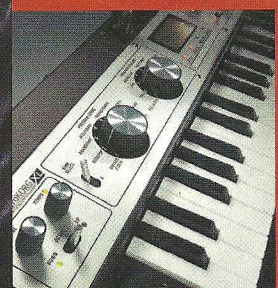
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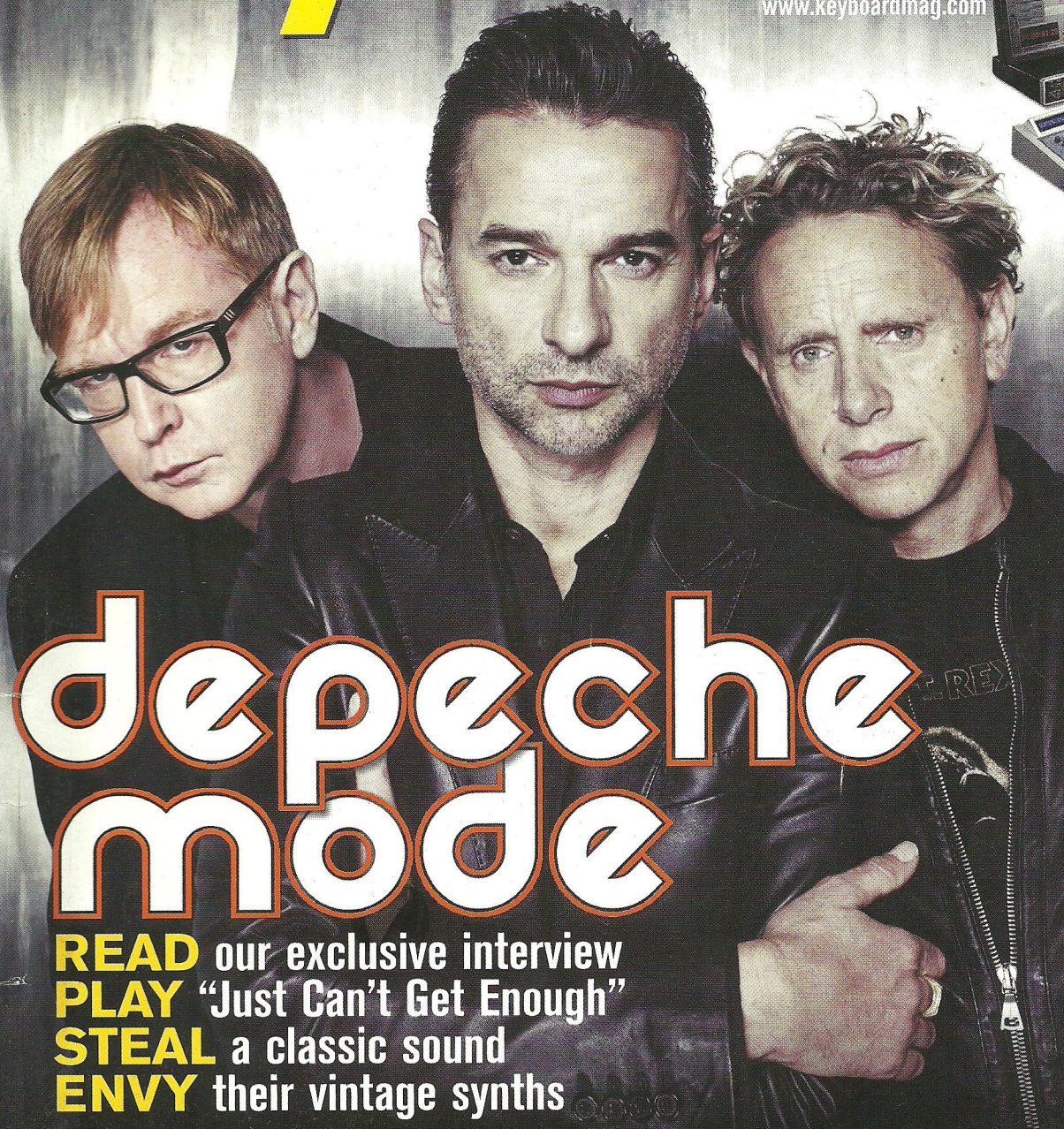
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